CRITICAL THINKING AND PEDAGOGY IN THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: HIGHLIGHTING SOCIO-CULTURAL DISSENT

Anam Shams
Department of English, College of Arts, University of Hafar Al-Batin
Al Jamiah, 39524, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
E-mail address: anam@uhb.edu.sa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1806-5286

Farhan Ahmad
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Sciences and Humanities
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University
Abdullah bin Amer, Al-Kharj, 16278, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
E-mail address: f.ahmad@psau.edu.sa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5710-7800

Sadaf Khalid
School of Social Science and Humanities, IILM University
Knowledge Park II, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201306, India
E-mail address: sadaf.khalid.anam.2013@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3467-1967

Sameena Banu
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Sciences and Humanities
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University
Abdullah Bin Amer, Al-Kharj, 16278, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
E-mail address: s.banu@psau.edu.sa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8718-5148

ABSTRACT

Thesis. The study foregrounds reaffirming the essential requirement that students acquire critical thinking skills in order to question the political action around them, com-

prehend its contradictions and complexities, identify the shortcomings of mainstream solutionism, and consider their roles within power structures and change initiatives.

Concept. This present study challenges and offers a framework for a critical-creative pedagogy that creates such avenues for exploration both inside and outside of Indian higher education. The question of what kind of education is necessary to prepare students of all ages to take on global educational concerns is also raised by efforts made in the study.

Results and conclusion. By fostering critical-creative pedagogies, Indian higher education can produce students who are not just knowledgeable but also active, engaged, and capable of effecting meaningful social change. Thus, education can transform individuals and society, offering hope and action amid uncertainty and complexity. However, considering how little state and education systems are doing to teach young minds the value of civic engagement and how to participate more actively in the Indian democracy, maybe this is not all that shocking.

Originality. Such critical teaching, mainly when it is the only focus of classroom engagement, can cause students in some disciplines, like international relations and local-level public policy, to become disillusioned about the potential for their education to drive transformative change, a goal that initially inspired them to pursue university education.

Keywords: hope, dissent, pedagogy, higher education, society

Introduction

Globally, neoliberalism continues to shape most educational practices and policies in India. The focus on testing, market pressures, and the absence of significant obstacles still lie in recognising the importance of connecting hope as an action and learning real-world concerns. There are differing opinions in the hope literature on whether psychological or pedagogical aspects should receive more attention. Additionally, it has been argued that "hope" can evoke feelings of disillusionment, irrational optimism, and optimism about change and the future. An alternative viewpoint hopes it may become a revolutionary education approach if paired with passion and enthusiasm. According to Richard S. Lazarus (1999), hope is a feeling associated with a cognitive assessment of seeking a desired outcome, even when the chances are not very good. It is possible to see this hopeful approach in conjunction with transformational learning to address what might be perceived as idealistic future scenarios. One of the foremost theorists of hope, Ernst Bloch (1986), noted that utopian thought might be anticipatory rather than messianic, mobilising rather than healing (Giroux, 2002). Education is essential in resolving this feeling of utopian aspiration. According to Henry Giroux (2002), a radical vision of hope is required to address the pervasive effects of neoliberalism in economies and societies and the fallout from the lack of a perceived

alternative to the dominance of market forces. This vision of hope needs to be based on social reality and real-world experience rather than some idealised vision. The current study takes up the issue and offers a framework for a critical-creative pedagogy that creates these kinds of opportunities in India's colleges and universities and beyond. This approach seeks to improve students' comprehension of current sustainable, social, and economic issues and their ability to envision different solutions. Students must be able to interact with the complexity and uncertainties of today's world via critical understanding and creative rethinking, which necessitates new approaches to teaching them specific information and orientations that a critical-creative pedagogy may offer. Through an interconnected and expanded execution, this pedagogy articulates critical hope, praxis, design and art methodologies, and whole-person learning (Schwittay, 2023). In order to question what is happening around them, comprehend its multiple layers and contradictions, identify the shortcomings of prevalent solutionism, and consider their roles within power structures and change initiatives, it begins by reaffirming the basic necessity for students to cultivate critical thinking skills (Kobylarek, 2017). Students may become discontented and cynical about the potential of using their higher learning to contribute to the transformative changes, particularly in politics, that frequently drew them to university in the first place if such critical instruction is the sole purpose of classroom engagement in specific disciplines, such as political science, sociology, and international governance (Johansson & Felten, 2014).

Literature Review

The "Pedagogy of Hope", in which Paulo Freire (2021) revisits the ideas of his masterwork, the real-world situations that inspired them, and their influence in that very reality, provides genuine impetus for the present study. His rigorous intellect and unending compassion have moulded Freire's enduring commitment to social justice and higher education in developing countries, which is both relevant and inspirational to present our work. The innate vitality of generations of rejected affluence and the sometimes silent, selfless fortitude of millions worldwide who refuse to let hope die are attested to in the book *Pedagogy of Hope*. Although Freire's conceptual categories, developed by naming the reality to change it, are always instinctive, they help recognition of certain significant elements of the world that can be changed even though they cannot fully capture the universe. Freire's work, which is based on a dialectical materialist, or Marxist, philosophy of knowing, is also impacted by his Christian beliefs. Over time, a conceptual polyamory that occasionally attempted to slant Freire's work further to the left (revolutionary critical pedagogy) or the centre (progressive liberal pedagogy) has been added to the worn-out epidemics of critical pedagogy. Velda McCune et al., (2021) research supports teachers' opinions on training pupils to work with 'wicked' situations that are discussed in the study by Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber

(1973) 'Conundrums in an All-Out Theory of Planning.' These issues are complicated and ill-defined, and attempts to resolve them typically by bringing together many parties with divergent opinions have unintended repercussions. Many of the most important contemporary global issues are examples. Twenty instructors who focused on wicked issues and a comparison group of fifteen participated in semi-structured interviews in the research, which helped the present study frame a few questions. Richard Buchanan (1992) suggested a similar line of inquiry in "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking", wherein technology research, trade activity, and fragmented professions should be acknowledged as new liberal arts of technological culture in education. Focusing on the generative theories, Julie Katherine Gibson-Graham's (2008) article has outlined the work of a young field of economic geographers and other academics who are choosing to highlight hidden, marginalised, and different economic activities in order to give them greater legitimacy and legitimacy as subjects of activism and policy. The study outlines some of the fruitful lines of investigation that arise from an experimental, performative, and ethical approach to the world and demonstrates the thought practices of epistemic reframing, revisiting for difference, and fostering creativity using examples from today's reality. Describing the evolving patterns in education and encompassing the field of international development studies, Kim S. Cameron and David A. Whetten, (2013) raise concerns about students' critical thinking in light of the shifting dynamics of academic learning, both theoretical and practical. Ronald Barnett (2020) gave the study an angle of *The Creative University* that can be interpreted in various ways moving through a dynamic conceptual landscape in developing countries. Since creativity is always a networked matter, it is becoming commonplace to suggest that it should no longer be viewed as the product of heroic individuals at work. Instead, this reflection needs to be expanded to include a sense of underlying changing societal powers, with the economy playing a central role and leading to the rise of the hybrid notion of the creative economy. Using university reflective creativity as an example, this level is identified as the most important in the current study. It follows that interactions between people, institutions, and corporate agencies shape the creative mindset of students and teachers. Sarah Amsler (2014) significantly linked political activity and pedagogy within and beyond official learning institutions. This has been the focus of Amsler and the present research as well. The present study has stretched the definitions of activism and teaching to evaluate the current politics of higher education. This concerns progressive education's multiple histories and locations more broadly rather than directly addressing the discussions surrounding scholar-activism, which have already been extensively written about. According to Amsler's broader perspective, some of the knowledge types that have made universities progressive are currently being created in increasingly politicised learning contexts, and the present study has contextualised this about the Indian higher education system.

Research Question

- What would education entail if critical-creative pedagogy to develop hope and dissension were accepted as a standard component of Indian classrooms and the higher education system?
- How do educators teach in the public education system to appreciate the role that both dissent and hope play in a democracy's ability to effect social change in society?

Methodology of the Study

The present study analyses over 50 newspaper headlines, including those from India Today, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, and international print media such as The New York Times, to explore the themes of hope, dissent, and activism among students in India's higher education system. It employs a rigorous secondary research methodology to theoretically examine and qualitatively shape the themes of hope, dissent, and design culture, all about critical thinking within higher education in India. The study mainly focuses on critical thinking as a pedagogical approach, emphasising holistic learning and revisiting various studies conducted by researchers with a specific focus on the global South. One key observation from the study is that a pedagogy of hope should be situated within the context of contemporary social issues in India. However, it was challenging to categorise these issues into distinct themes due to their abundance and complexity. This challenge stemmed from difficulty identifying and aligning the societal and political issues. The study argues that such a pedagogy should provide alternative viewpoints to those currently dominant in the educational system and suggests that social change and hope are possible and attainable in the future.

Role of Generative Theorising (GT) in Creative Pedagogies

The present study agrees with Gibson-Graham (2006) that educational fields may become "world-makers with a fundamental role in the world itself" and that generative theory is a crucial component of critical-creative learning. Generative theorising develops incomplete, cautious, and limited solutions after determining the underlying causes, expressions, and effects of today's complex problems like caste, identity, religion, and society in India. GT looks for fixes, adjustments, and workarounds rather than accurate diagnoses and comprehensive answers. Generative theory adopts an experimental and open position that considers multiplicities and ambiguities to acknowledge its methodology's shortcomings, impurity, and incompleteness. It looks for relationships and teamwork, tries to think rather than pass judgment, welcomes the unexpected,

and enjoys surprises. Combined with critical-creative pedagogy, it ensures that its critical component does not overpower its creative brother, placing them on an equal and mutually supporting footing (Cameron & Whetten, 2013). It is engaged in building rather than (just) dismantling. For example, look at the possibility of hundreds and thousands of students protesting yearly in global South Asian countries. Mass student-led movements always have a broader scope of discussion and dissent, often neglected and dismissed by politicians with the help of police administration.

UNDERSTANDING OF A CRITICAL-CREATIVE PEDAGOGY IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) CONTEXT

Reviewing the literature, the current findings highlight the whole-person learning that several researchers have addressed. The first pillar is whole-person learning, focusing on students' identities intellects, emotions, physical beings, and senses. Students' experiences and their relationships with the world around them build their identities (Barnett, 2020). Whole-person learning blends the practical, phenomenology, and praxis components of experiential learning because it incorporates emotive elements that encourage students to bring more of themselves to the classroom (Roberts, 2008). Learning occurs with the knowledge that information has moral implications that encourage (and frequently require) social action. It is reflective because, via critical thinking on their circumstances, students may use their experiences in the past and now as valuable information sources to guide their own and their peers' learning. Additionally, its focus on participatory learning and group knowledge development makes it relational. Furthermore, while whole-person learning incorporates phenomenological concepts of sensory embodiment, it shifts its emphasis from individual to intersubjective perceptions of the environment (Cowden & Singh, 2013).

THEMES OF HOPE AND DISSENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

Dissent and hope can be marked observing the 2019 December night when reports surfaced of suspected police brutality against students at Jamia Millia Islamia who were demonstrating nearby against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). They inspired the ladies of Shaheen Bagh, about a kilometre away from Jamia, to possibly take a creative action of sit-in protest. Opposition to the CAA has to be persistent and nonviolent. The creative expression of this incident has been so strong that marginalised elderly Muslim women of Shaheen Bagh, who were in their 70s and 80s and had never left their houses, surprised everyone by taking the lead in the demonstrations. However, they demonstrated their equality as citizens of the country by

carrying copies of the Quran on one hand and the Indian Constitution on the other. The Shaheen Bagh demonstration quickly became a movement that attracted national and worldwide attention (Alam et al., 2021). Certain aspects of generative theorising in higher education, such as prioritising performativity over humble cooperation, abstraction over execution, a person knowing over group instruction, and monological solution given over conversational inquiry, may need to be unlearned in order to rethink the meaning of the higher educator in the system (Amsler, 2014). By openly reflecting on our educational practices and engaging in prefigurative didactic politics, where we start to implement our revolutionary future goals in the present, we might reimagine what it takes to be an academic educator or a HE student. This emotional process is linked to our identities as teachers and forces us to face our preconceptions, goals, and fears (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2019). It results in teaching without assurances, based on unlearning teaching methods, acknowledging our incomplete positions and expertise, and being persistent and modest. We might look at the example of Jamia Milia Islamia educators/professors on the streets during the same protests, gathering people with their students and singing songs like 'Hum Dekhengey', a poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. The current critical-creative pedagogy, which spreads criticism and hope for a change in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) document and the situation of minorities in the nation (Khalid, 2023), was seen by many educators in public institutions as a lesson for the entire globe. The protest turned out to be the most creative one, with libraries serving two purposes: First, to raise awareness of the crisis among the broader public, and second, to provide kids a place. Initially, the mothers of Shaheen Bagh had demanded the reading area so that their kids could do something constructive while they attended the demonstration. After a few days, the library naturally developed into a place where the kids at the protest site could play, study, and create art. Some of these children attended nearby (free) government schools, but many worked as child labourers on tea booths and construction projects.

The Concept of Art and Design

Using creative techniques from the arts, literature, and design is the second strand of critical-creative teaching. Because they are especially good at stimulating students' imaginations, academics like Augusto Boal and Maxine Greene (Emert Jr, 2003) have argued vehemently for including diverse artistic activities in transformational education. Furthermore, design ideas and practices help students feel at ease with the intricacies and unpredictabilities of global issues and the ambiguities of solutions. Another thing the study stated in the above example about Shaheen Bagh was the variety of protests that have emerged in India, often to express disapproval. The present study finds it amazing to see how many media of expression have merged and how education and art have developed into powerful platforms for express-

ing dissatisfaction. If we look at the remaking of locations, be it the bus stops or Wikipedia articles now placed on the bridge, these displays express an urgent assertion of political opposition in democracies (Medhi, 2024). Commissioning procedures for public art sometimes concentrate on ornamental projects as a component of the urban poor. The current study argues that this scenario challenges normal cultural planning paradigms by situating graffiti (Alam et al., 2022) as a significant social and spatial practice comparing the conditions in India. A different approach to cultural development by and for young people, who are typically left out of the conventional practice of culture-led economic development, is provided by Dlala Indima, a hip-hop-led graffiti worker in a rural township in South Africa. Rike Sitas (2020) concluded that the purpose of such creative praxis is to challenge the dominant creative cities and culture-led discourses by challenging the normative regeneration processes. Such projects ground participatory practices. Since elite-centric economic development plans frequently precede Charles Landry's concept of "civic creativity", imaginative city and culture-led growth discourses have come under increased criticism (Schwittay, 2021). A broad definition of the vast and contentious area of design is an integrative discipline that links knowledge from the arts and sciences and applies it to current issues with an eye towards the future (Buchanan, 1992). Its multifaceted nature includes ontological, political, cultural, epistemological, and material facets. The socially engaged design acknowledges itself as a radically ethical and political endeavour, in juxtaposition with commercial design, which frequently supports unsustainable production and consumption (Fry, 2018). The present research cites an example of the state government that has continued to advance plans to harness the state of Arunachal Pradesh's hydroelectric potential; the voices of activists opposing these plans have gradually diminished. Recent events, however, have given those voices fresh vitality. Lawyer Ebo Mili and artist Nilim Mahanta, located in Assam, were detained by Arunachal Pradesh police in March 2022 for their involvement in vandalising government property. The two were taken into custody for putting a protest fist and the words "No more dams" on the state civil secretariat's perimeter wall in the capital city, Itanagar. The mural wall, known as the "Wall of Harmony," was created by a variety of artists from both outside the state and from indigenous tribal groups. The artwork of a dam on the wall surprised some people who had seen it. They saw it as representing the government's persistent support for hydroelectric projects that harm the environment. The wall was intended to inform and remind people of the state's history, from the image of Daying Ering, a state parliamentarian before the state was formally established, to the representation of tribal life and significant occasions from the previous fifty years (Dodum, 2022). Rather, it caused disagreements. By integrating such critical perspectives on future creation, scenario building presents design as the art of the possible. Because it goes beyond the boundaries of deconstructive and analytical thinking by exploring the useful idea of how the world may be and be understood otherwise, the design lends itself

to critical-creative education in conjunction with arts-based instruction that stimulates students' imaginations (McCune et al., 2021). The support of art and design's wide-ranging and progressive approach to learning makes individuals learn how to create spaces for introspection, dialogue, and action, as well as how to be at ease with the fact that there are no (simple) answers and that there are several alternative paths ahead (Tinning, 2002). These are all crucial orientations for students dealing with a complicated world. Students sometimes may embrace scenarios of ambiguity and indeterminacy, which frequently cause discomfort and anxiety due to no clarity of understanding of such art. Students can be encouraged to adopt an experimental approach to instruction, where failings are reframed as chances for growth that invite reworking rather than leaving, to challenge them with "what-if questions" that challenge taken-for-granted comprehension. This encourages students to use their imagination and helps them avoid ideological thinking, where the responses are known before the concerns are even asked. Combined, these perspectives highlight the emerging characteristics of things and processes (Staley, 2019).

DISCUSSION

In actuality, the works of critical educators are frequently translated and utilised as a defence against fascism in nations worldwide. Although some people may believe that critical pedagogy has no direct bearing on policy decisions made at the local, regional, or national levels of education, it has had an organic impact on the field by acting as a systematic and habitual moral compass for how we treat one another in the classroom and by influencing the logical, axiological, and philosophical positions we adopt when producing knowledge and how we place our actions within the more significant natural systems that support us (Alam & Hameed, 2023). It was challenging to understand through the present study why people participate in the very activities that produce those harmful truths while posing as objective and open-minded, as well as why they stay imprisoned within their received ideological formations despite being exposed to undesirable truths. At this point, someone could intemperately ask: Should Indian educators use an educational philosophy that has evolved into a pedagogical movement to counteract the rise of fascism in India and globally unquestionably? You might not be cut out for teaching if you feel obligated to ask this question. The knowledge that Indian students and professors jointly produce via critical confrontations with freedom is intended to create social justice initiatives that structurally alter an oppressive society. However, what is political practice in support of long-term human liberation? Realising that the basis of reality is never final, even though it is frequently reified to give the impression that it is, it is necessary to understand that this is never the case.

Conclusion

By revisiting key educational theories and incorporating contemporary social and political movements, particularly in the context of student activism and societal challenges, the research outlines how pedagogical practices can be reimagined to prepare students for the complexities of the modern world. The study establishes that critical thinking, while essential for questioning dominant power structures and engaging with real-world issues, often leaves students disillusioned. The present research analyses how the over-emphasis on critique without offering spaces for hope and constructive alternatives can lead to student apathy and cynicism in disciplines like political science, sociology, and international relations. With its rigorous literature review, the research advocates for a pedagogy that encourages critical inquiry and empowers students to imagine and pursue alternative futures. This pedagogy of hope is not about idealising the future but rather about equipping students with the tools to see the potential for change, even in the face of overwhelming adversity (Kobylarek et al., 2021). One of the key contributions of this study is its recognition that hope when integrated with activism and dissent, can serve as a powerful educational tool. The creative expressions observed in many movements – from murals to music to community libraries – demonstrate that activism is not just about opposition but also about offering an alternative vision of society. This creative approach to dissent gives students an active role in shaping the world around them rather than passively accepting the status quo. The role of GT in the study's framework further emphasises the importance of creativity in pedagogy. Generative theory advocates for a flexible, experimental approach to solving complex societal issues, acknowledging the imperfections and uncertainties of any proposed solution. This aligns well with the critical-creative pedagogy the study advocates, encouraging students to think beyond traditional problem-solving paradigms and engage in collaborative, imaginative approaches to social change.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of whole-person learning, which integrates intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of education. The study strongly affirms that teaching is not purely intellectual but deeply connected to students' identities, experiences, and values (Surikova & Sidorova, 2024). A critical-creative pedagogy fosters this holistic development, encouraging students to bring their whole selves into the learning process and to engage more meaningfully with the world around them. Ultimately, the study calls for a rethinking and a discussion of the role of educators in India's higher education system. It challenges educators to move beyond focusing on critique alone and design pedagogical practices that inspire students to act, dissent, and imagine new possibilities. By integrating hope, dissent, and creativity into the fabric of higher education, educators can foster a generation of students who are not only equipped with critical thinking skills but are also empowered to use these skills to create a more just and equitable society. In conclusion, the present study highlights the urgent need for a pedagogy that can simultaneously address the critical challenges

of today's world while nurturing the hope and creativity needed to envision and create better futures.

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