

Summary of Chapter 1: "Critical Issues: An Introduction" by Salah Troudi (pp. 1–8)

Background and Context

The chapter introduces the book *Critical Issues in Teaching English and Language Education*, which emerged from a doctoral course taught by Salah Troudi at the University of Exeter over two decades. The course aims to engage PhD students in critical discussions about themes and issues related to language education, particularly focusing on English-language teaching (ELT). The book celebrates the contributions of former students who have conducted research addressing inequities and challenges in classrooms and educational systems globally.

The studies presented in this volume span diverse regions, including the Gulf countries, Lebanon, Chile, China, and others, offering an international perspective on critical issues such as voice, equity, discourse, language policy, curriculum design, classroom pedagogy, and teacher education. These studies challenge mainstream practices and ideologies, advocating for transformative change through critical theory and applied linguistics.

Critical Theory and Applied Linguistics

All the studies in this book are grounded in the principles of critical theory, critical education, and critical applied linguistics (CALx). This framework encourages researchers to question established definitions, policies, and practices in ELT that may perpetuate inequality or marginalization. Key influences include:

- **Jürgen Habermas:** Emphasizes the role of communication and emancipation.
- **Paulo Freire:** Advocates for critical pedagogy, emphasizing learner agency and challenging oppressive structures.
- **Henry Giroux:** Critiques neoliberalism and its impact on education.
- **Alistair Pennycook and Robert Phillipson:** Highlight linguistic imperialism and the socio-political dimensions of ELT.

By adopting these perspectives, the authors aim to uncover hidden ideologies and suggest alternative approaches to improve educational outcomes for both teachers and learners.

Themes of the Book

The book is organized into four parts, each addressing specific critical issues:

Part I: Language Policies

This section critiques the adoption of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in the Gulf region and beyond. While EMI is often justified by economic development, global communication, and access to world markets, the chapters reveal its negative consequences:

- **In Oman:** Sawsan Al-Bakri and Salah Troudi show how EMI negatively impacts university students' writing abilities, leading to plagiarism due to insufficient English proficiency.

- **In Kuwait:** Abdullah Alazemi highlights concerns among students about the declining status of Arabic as a language of science and academia under EMI.
- **In the UAE:** Taghreed Masri explores how EMI affects students' cultural and linguistic identity, revealing a loss of faith in Arabic as an academic language despite valuing it personally.

These studies emphasize the need for stronger English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs or bilingual policies to address the challenges posed by EMI.

Part II: Critical Pedagogy and Classroom Practices

This part examines classroom pedagogy, student voice, and textbook discourses within ELT contexts:

- **Reine Azzi's Study (Lebanon)** : Uses dialogue and reflexivity to engage Lebanese university students in questioning the hegemony of English and its effects on Arabic. Students become more aware of their assumptions and biases.
- **Alina Rebecca Chirciu's Study (Oman)** : Implements critical pedagogy to promote global citizenship skills, encouraging students to develop multiple perspectives on global issues.
- **Antonia Paterson's Study (China)** : Challenges Western-centric views of "voice" in language classrooms, advocating for recognizing non-verbal participation and respecting local cultural practices.
- **Mubina Rauf's Study (Saudi Arabia)** : Conducts a critical discourse analysis of EAP textbooks, revealing how they propagate neoliberal ideologies like globalization, individualism, and free-market values. She calls for context-specific materials and training for teachers to analyze ideological content.

Part III: Teacher Education and Professional Development

This section focuses on empowering teachers and enhancing their professional growth:

- **Assia Slimani-Rolls' Study (UK)** : Demonstrates the effectiveness of exploratory practice, a model that allows novice teachers to reflect on and refine their teaching practices collaboratively with learners.
 - **Paulina Sepúlveda-Escobar's Study (Chile)** : Challenges top-down professional development models, suggesting that teachers should be actively involved in designing their own learning pathways.
 - **Thuraya Al Riyami and Salah Troudi's Study (Oman)** : Introduces critical pedagogy to EFL teachers at tertiary institutions, eliciting mixed reactions ranging from full acceptance to hesitation or resistance. The study underscores the importance of preparing teachers to embrace critical approaches.
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Part IV: Voicelessness Among English Language Professionals

The final section addresses the marginalization of English language professionals in neoliberal educational systems:

- **Federica Castro's Study (Dominican Republic)** : Argues that excluding teachers from curriculum decision-making undermines their sense of agency and professionalism.
 - **Kholoud Al Manee's Study (Saudi Arabia)** : Examines the impact of performance management systems on female EFL teachers, showing how such mechanisms reduce creativity and autonomy.
 - **Amal Treki's Study (Gulf Region)** : Investigates discrimination against non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs) despite their competence, identifying recruitment discourses that reinforce stereotypes and marginalization.
 - **Randa Alsabahi's Study (Saudi Arabia)** : Problematizes student evaluations of teaching (SET), arguing that their misuse can lead to unfair judgments and harm teacher dignity.
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Critical Research Agenda

Troudi outlines the critical agenda guiding the book:

- **Questioning Assumptions** : Each study questions taken-for-granted practices and ideologies in ELT.
- **Promoting Equity** : Aims to create fairer opportunities for learners and teachers, challenging systemic inequalities.
- **Empowering Participants** : Encourages bottom-up approaches where teachers and students collaborate to shape educational practices.
- **Counter-Hegemonic Discourses** : Engages with theories and methods to dismantle dominant narratives and advocate for alternative futures.

Each chapter includes:

1. **Critical Research Agenda** : Explains the theoretical framework and philosophy behind the study.
 2. **Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions** : Discusses implications for improving teaching and learning.
 3. **Further Reading** : Provides resources for deeper exploration of the topic.
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Key Findings and Implications

The studies collectively highlight dissatisfaction with hegemonic practices in ELT, such as performativity, outcome-based evaluation, and teacher marginalization. They argue that these practices prioritize financial interests and standardized measures at the expense of social mobility, critical thinking, and cultural relevance.

- **Equity and Access** : There is a pressing need to ensure equitable access to quality education without compromising learners' identities or linguistic backgrounds.
 - **Professional Empowerment** : Teachers must be included in decision-making processes and provided with meaningful professional development opportunities.
 - **Alternative Approaches** : CALx, critical pedagogy, and action research offer promising alternatives to mainstream ELT paradigms.
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Conclusion

Troudi concludes that the book serves as a continuation of efforts to conduct critical research in TESOL and language education. By employing diverse methodologies—such as action research, critical discourse analysis, and ethnography—the authors provide rich insights into the complexities of ELT contexts worldwide. The ultimate goal is to inspire readers to engage critically with their own educational environments and work toward transformative change.

This chapter sets the stage for subsequent chapters, framing them within the broader aims of critical research: questioning, challenging, and suggesting better futures for all stakeholders in language education.