

## Questioning the Status of Moral Education in the Context of EFL in Kurdistan: A Critique Review

Srwa Hussein Mustafa<sup>1</sup>, Karmand Abdullah Hamad<sup>2</sup>

Department of English, faculty of Arts, Sorani University

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### Abstract

Language education has a broader goal beyond just developing linguistic competence, yet the primary aim of ELT in Kurdistan is solely to improve linguistic ability. While modern ELT stresses language use rather than language usage. Further, with the advent of a critical orientation, ELT now has a completely new role in facilitating learners' growth in their sense of identity and character, in conjunction with the development of their language skills. Many countries include the study of foreign languages in their curricula to prepare students for the demands of modern life. In this regard, scholars have advocated for the integration of moral education in English language education, to promote not only language acquisition but also the development of students' moral identities and sense of social and personal responsibility. This paper provides a critical review of the ELT education system in Kurdistan, emphasizing the need to move from mainstream ELT to critical ELT. Particularly, this paper examines the gap between English language education and the needs of Kurdish learners. It underlines the significance of moral education in today's globalized world and proposes integrating it with language skill development to achieve the joint objective of promoting social development and language learning in learners. Further, the goal is to bring attention to the topic of incorporating moral education into EFL and to call the educational policies to take a more proactive stance in promoting it. It is noteworthy that policymakers at the Ministry of Education have begun to change the English curricula concurrently.

**Keywords:** *Moral Education, ELT, Kurdish education system*

## 1. Introduction

In the modern era, learning a language is a crucial aspect of education as it empowers individuals to form their identities, engage with their local communities, and participate in the global society effectively. It is now widely acknowledged that language is a 'social product' and that its usage reflects all aspects of society. On the other side, educationalists stress the importance of language in shaping students' moral character and social identities. For example, Sternberg (2001, p. 227) states that "language can be used to better or worse ends", and educators must encourage students to "use their language for good rather than ill". As a consequence of this, the process of learning a new language has the potential to impact the growth of students' identities as well as their worldviews (Johnston & Buzzelli, 2002; Johnston, 2003).

Scholars believe that the primary aim of ELT is to assist students in becoming efficient and competent English users. According to this perspective, communicative competence is the primary objective of ELT. On the other hand, sociolinguists assert that communicative competence consists of four subcomponents which include; 'linguistic competence', 'discourse competence', 'sociolinguistic competence', and 'strategic competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980). Several studies have examined the most effective ways of developing these skills in EFL students. Nevertheless, this paper contends that emphasizing the development of students' communicative ability alone is inadequate for ELT. Instead, ELT should aim to help students become not only proficient in using the language but also should help students become proficient and wise users of English by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and social and personal development.

In the field of language teaching, moral education is just one of several pedagogical strategies that can be employed in language teaching to help students develop stronger personalities and analytical minds (Shaaban, 2005a; Widodo, 2018). Experts agree that the most effective moral education programs are those that are integrated into the overall curriculum, rather than taught as a separate subject (Arthur, 2014; Lickona, 2004; Thongrin, 2018a; Widodo, Perfecto, Buripakdi, et al., 2018; Alberta, 2005; Barrow, 2015; Lovat, 2017). For example, Karim (2017, p.3) assures that "character building should be embedded into all subject courses, including English as a second language". As a result, moral education is often incorporated into the national curriculum in the education system and taught in every subject at all levels of formal education (cited in Sulistiyo, et al., 2020 ). Given that, the calls for including moral education in school curricula have attracted the attention of many ESL/EFL educators (Feng, 2019; Widodo et al., 2018; Thongrin, 2018a; Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005a).

Fortunately, in Kurdistan Ministry of Education (MoE) mandates all teachers of all school subjects to incorporate values, and teaching English to basic schools is no exception (Vernez et al., 2016). However, there is a lack of clear guidance on how to implement moral education in EFL classrooms and which values to prioritize. In other words, it is not clear how values would be implemented in EFL classrooms in Kurdistan, and what values should be cultivated. Unfortunately, there is not even an official paper on how the school English curriculum explicitly or implicitly teaches certain values, except a few short points in the teacher's guide (in the sunrise program), which are quite ineffective. To address this issue, we tried to

question the status of moral education in EFL education. The goal is to bring attention to the topic of incorporating ME into EFL education. Particularly, to call the educational policy-makers to have a more proactive role in the issue of infusing ME in EFL pedagogy. This seems to be particularly right for the time being as the Ministry of Education has begun to change the English curricula.

In what follows, this study begins with the current objectives of English language teaching and then continues with a discussion of the major policies adopted and their consequences. In addition to discussing the reinforcement of integrating moral education, particularly in foreign language education. Then it comes to a background of ELT and its policy in Kurdistan. The rest of the paper critically analyses the missing infrastructure prerequisite to achieving this goal. Indeed, critical reflexivity is an important part of research that lets "the researcher unveil their biases and assumptions, negotiated unique socio-cultural and political contexts, and uncover various power dynamics within the research design" (Mao, Mian Akram, Chovanec, & Underwood, 2018, p.1 cited in Herrera, 2019). Finally, several recommendations and implications are provided for ELT policymakers, ELT material developers, and other interested parties.

## 2. The Objectives of English Language Teaching

It has long been recognized that language is central to the educational enterprise, as Brumfit (2001) states that "Language is central to education; linguistics is the discipline devoted to the study of language. But the study of language within the educational process takes us far beyond linguistics alone" (cited in We, 2006 p.20). Thus, when it comes to teaching and learning a language, the emphasis needs not to be only placed on the development of linguistic competence (Johnston, 2003). Because, besides the social, political, cultural and intellectual issues, language teaching also functions as a channel to serve ethical and moral instruction and ideological discourses (Johnston, 2003; Widodo, 2018; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994).

Stern also (1992) identifies four primary content areas of language education: "The study of the target language, The study of the target culture, Communicative activities, and General language education" (cited in We, 2006, p. 20). The three first areas refer to the systematic study of language and culture, syllabus, and integrated activities involving the use of language in its social and cultural context, and generally, they focus more on specific language. General language education is considered the most neglected one among others, while it helps students generalize their second-language experience to other parts of learning. As Stern (1992) claims general language education asks "the learners to take a wider and more detached view of their involvement and reflect in a generalized way about languages, culture, and learning" (cited in We, 2006, p. 20).

As a result, recently in most Asian countries, ELT has been viewed as an act of capacity development or a tool for building learners' competencies. In addition to language proficiency, learners can acquire a range of skills and competencies through ELT, including linguistic skills, competence, competency in intercultural communication, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, socio-pragmatic competence, and moral competence (Widodo, et al., 2018).

On the other side, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, terms like "globalization," "internationalization," "localization," and "glocalization" started to emerge to refer to societal

developments. To some degree, these phenomena, and shifting sociopolitical climates have impacted the landscape of theories and practices of English language education (ELT) on a worldwide scale. Thus, the traditional view of language, which maintains that “language is a fixed body of knowledge that can be learned, memorized, and taught through drilling and repetition”, has been strongly criticized for being out of context (Widodo, 2018 p.2). This is because "the use of language is contextually dynamic and fluid depending on the context of the situation and the context of culture" (Halliday, 1978 cited in Widodo et al., 2018 p.2). Owing to this, Karim, (2017, p.7) highlights that when acquiring English as an international language, we must not turn a blind eye to the need to uphold moral principles.

More importantly, when discussing the objectives of ELT, it is difficult to ignore the issues and contention which is resulting from social and political ideologies. As Pennycook (1994) states ELT practices are the consequence of political construction because they are infused with socioeconomic ideologies. Highlighting that, in response to the current trend of teaching English, ELT now should be questioned from multiple perspectives (Akbari, 2008; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). Therefore, ELT education needs to prepare regularly more than it ever has before to effectively respond to the constantly shifting realities of society.

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, such as, given the significance of English as a widely used global language, and the recognition that language education carries inherent ideological biases, along with the understanding that the teaching of English as a foreign language is shaped by political influences, it becomes essential to adopt a proactive, self-aware and critical stance towards this phenomenon. In this regard, one effective way to achieve this is through the use of critical pedagogy. It is believed that critical pedagogy can meet the goals of the education system as well as the needs and interests of ELT. Examining the characteristics of critical pedagogy demonstrates that without a doubt, this approach would be the best option alternative (Akbari, 2008b). Besides, Thongrin (2018b, p.154) states that "ELT activities should be implemented based on some view in critical pedagogy fostering learners' authorities, identities, and desirable characteristics, where students not only learn an additional language, but also become culturally competent learners and, as decent members of their society, hold desirable characters and critical minds". In this sense, there is a pressing need to incorporate moral education into language programs. In fact, in the field of language teaching, moral education is just one of several pedagogical strategies that can help students develop character and more analytical minds (Shaaban, 2005b).

### 3. Moral Education and ELT

In the latter part of the 20th century, English Language Teaching (ELT) was perceived as a progressive and advantageous method for spreading the English language. However, the rise of critical literature in applied linguistics and ELT has prompted a re-evaluation of this perspective (Akbari, 2008b). Encountering this situation, the issue of English language education in schools became a widely discussed issue at the national and global level in countries where English is taught as EFL (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson R., 1992; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Akbari, 2008a; Crookes, 2021). Overall, the trend of ELT and the dissemination of English have been reassessed and scrutinized in light of critical literature. As a result, language education has become more comprehensive and diverse, exploring not

only linguistic but also moral, social, cultural, and political aspects of communication. This shift in perspective is significant in creating a more well-rounded approach to language education, better-equipping students to navigate the complex global landscape of the 21st century. (Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005b; Widodo, 2018; Thongrin, 2018a).

Given that, the calls for including moral education in school curricula have attracted the attention of many ESL/EFL educators. Because there is no specific content for the English language subject, learners could benefit from instructional materials and resources that are useful, fascinating, and engaging. Besides, ESL/EFL curriculum and education are seen as a form of inherent discipline through which moral education can be taught (Feng, 2019; Nucci, 2002; Widodo et al., 2018; Johnston & Buzzelli, 2002; Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005). Ultimately, teaching moral values through the English language “would be a two-way process” involving English language acquisition and values education (Anbarasu *et al.*, 2020, p. 4220).

These scholars Shaaban, Johnston, Widodo, Buzzelli, Thongrin, et. al. have proposed new approaches to ELT educational policy and curriculum guidelines, identified a set of high-priority research questions, and created some model lessons for incorporating moral education into ESL/EFL education. The researchers have discussed the role TESOL professionals and practitioners play in moral education, and have come up with several proposals about their involvement and their potential contribution to a moral community. It has been suggested that the interconnected subjects of moral/peace/citizen education and global issues can be conveyed to students through the mediums of language arts, literature, ESL/EFL, and social studies. As a result of this integrated program, second language learners’ linguistic and cognitive development will be effectively promoted, which simultaneously fosters their character (Shaaban, 2005).

The integration of moral education into ESL/EFL curricula is grounded in the belief that it aids students in achieving the goals of the modern ESL/EFL pedagogy, which tries to help students with their linguistic and cognitive skills, critical thinking, as well as their social awareness and tolerance of others (Shaaban, 2005a). In other words, integrating core values into language teaching is based on the idea that teaching and learning English should lead to students being able to communicate effectively in English with the rest of the world. And yet, it is not only the environment around them, but also their interpersonal, intelligence and their ability to interact with themselves, as well as with others and the surrounding context. In other words, because of the role of English as a lingua franca nowadays, English is no longer the language that children need for communicating with a native English speaker exclusively as it was in the past 'as there are more non-native speakers than native speakers. So, children need to understand that through English they can access the world and everything (Akbari, 2008b; Thongrin, 2018b).

Currently, the English language is intensely recognized as a vehicle for moral education, especially, in countries where English is a second or foreign language (Shaaban, 2005; Widodo et al., 2018). Moral education has long been a part of the EFL curriculum in most countries, including Japan, China, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, and some Arab countries (like UAE).

Moral education also called character education, is a strategy which “includes the development of fundamental values, principles, and attitudes; continuous character growth

that allows learners to become concerned, informed, and involved citizens; and laying down the foundations of a critical approach to controversial issues.” (Shaaban, 2005, p.201). The goal of moral education is to help all young people become morally independent adults by providing them with the abilities necessary to decide for themselves what is morally correct (Tantawy, 2020). Drawing upon Thongrin's (2018, p. 159) understanding "Morality is what we use to control the conduct of our life and reasons for doing so". Thus, morality in education seeks to teach students to appreciate other people's diversity and democratic principles. This value is referred to all the terms like moral education, character education, and ethic education. Moral education to English language education aims to equip language users with more critical and contextualized manifestations of the discourses of English "as a global lingua franca". This, however, has been recently imparted in EFL/ESL education (Widodo, et al., 2018).

Besides, EFL teachers are always juggling between the local and target cultures, and they frequently grapple with the issue of morality. Because of this, in addition to teaching English, we as English educators also educate students on the moral and cultural principles that go hand in hand with the language. By doing so, we as instructors of the English language are assisting individuals in living more empathetically and intellectually by providing them with skills for examining what is ethically good and wrong in every aspect of life (Johnston & Buzzelli, 2002).

Thus, through the idea of inclusion of moral values in an English language program, students will learn to appreciate diversity, they can set up activities that allow them to compare and contrast how the world lives and develops further in the convulsing time that we are living. This helps them understand and fully believe that English is no longer just a boring set of irregular verbs to learn or memorize, instead, students come to realize that with English, they can build bridges of communication and begin to develop a global perspective that is not limited to Anglophone nations. Since this global village has no boundaries for communication, English and values must go together to communicate with the globe, as English by itself will not do the trick. Therefore, it is essential to teach English and values simultaneously so that students can learn to utilize English effectively for global communication (Karim, 2017). Regardless, the essential components of developing responsible citizens either now or in the future, are teaching values, social norms, and a certain kind of manners. Focusing on being a good citizen is a big part of moral development in all disciplines including English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which have broader roles in education.

#### **4. The Rationale of Incorporating Moral Education into ELT**

Many arguments have been made for the significance of including moral education in EFL/ESL classrooms. First, the spread of English across the globe and into a variety of academic and professional fields, particularly, technology, engineering, medicine, and business administration, has encouraged efforts to instil professional ethics in English-language classrooms. Although the majority of these subject areas provide specialized professional ethics courses, English language classrooms can convey the same information more interestingly. The incorporation of professional ethics into the English classroom is a

commendable practice, as it has the potential to assist people in leading lives that are more complete (Shaaban, 2005b).

Second, English language classrooms are considered a natural setting for delivering moral education, since they lend themselves extremely well to the dynamics of moral concepts (Feng, 2019). Because students in EFL/ESL classrooms attempt to learn about a new language and its culture, this setting is considerable for the development of a well-balanced individual who is receptive to new ideas, beliefs, and ways of thinking. Given this, the ESL/EFL tradition as a part of the humanities puts a lot of emphasis on cross-cultural communication and interaction and creates an environment that is good for developing good 'character traits, intercultural appreciation and empathy', as well as an understanding of the values of others, all of which are important parts of moral education (Widodo, at. el., 2018). Shaaban (2005) also believes that English classes are the finest place for students to learn about and evaluate the beliefs and values of other cultures as well as their own through English-language media. Shaaban (2005, p.207) goes on and recommend an emphasis on some moral themes in ESL/EFL classrooms including "basic rights and wrongs, societal duties and responsibilities, respect for self and others, cultural awareness and appreciation, recognition and avoidance of prejudice, basic social values and attitudes, respect for the environment, societal and global peace, concern for the planet, and intracultural and intercultural communication".

Eventually, applied linguists and English language educators have expanded the moral implications of language education (Johnston, 2003; Shaaban, 2005a; Thongrin, 2018; Widodo, 2018; Thongrin, 2018; Feng, 2019; Johnston & Buzzelli, 2002). Since, ELT is "profoundly a moral undertaking" (Johnston, 2003, p.18), and EFL classrooms are seen as natural places to teach moral education, plus the field of English language education fits well with the dynamics of moral values. Given this, a better world and a better education may be achieved via ELT's moral dimension. Above all, with the growing focus on globalization, international communication, and cross-cultural understanding everywhere in the globe, there is a need to infuse moral education into language training (Shaaban, 2005).

## 5. ELT in Kurdistan: Policy and Aims

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the philosophy and policy of EFL education in Kurdistan, it is essential first to look at the historical context of language education in this region. This will allow us to determine the general and specific objectives of English language education.

The historical background of the Kurdistan Region government educational system has gone through several challenging phases. Evidently, in the previous century, the KRG's education was exposed to an educational system that was established by the Baath regime. This was the case before the establishment of the Baath government in which, plans and initiatives for the educational system were required and mandated to represent the regime's philosophy. And the educational policy in Iraqi-Kurdistan was comparable to that of Iraq (Jukil, 2017). After the Kurdish uprising and the establishment of de-facto self-government in Kurdistan, the educational system started to undergo minor changes. Curriculum and programs were modified, although slowly, due to the economic and political circumstances of the period (Jukil, 2018; Saeed, 2015; Vernez *et al.*, 2016a). Since its founding in 1992, the KRG has

worked to improve the educational system and make it more accessible. However, in the last few decades, both the government and the general public have paid more attention than ever before to issues of educational reform. Particularly after 2003, the problem of an unsuitable, ineffective, and unresponsive educational system at the K-12 and higher education levels in KR became a popular concern. In other words, people started to worry because the systems were not good enough, did not work well enough, and didn't respond to students' needs (Wahab, 2018).

After 2003, the Kurdistan Region's educational system underwent significant reform as a result of the 2007 educational conference held here. The Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated significant changes in the educational system in 2008, which ultimately resulted in advancements in educational quality. Reforms were made to the education system, school curriculum, teacher training, building new schools, and other things. Finally, the philosophical ideas of the educational system changed after all the historical changes that happened in KRG. The curricula "the books & textbooks" that are selected for students to read and learn from are an essential part of the educational process, and they serve as the basis for their education. This indicates that the program is one of the three fundamental components of the educational process. If one of them is unavailable, it is impossible to obtain meaningful education. To reach this goal, the program and books are written by well-intentioned people with the aid of the government (Saeed, 2015).

The Ministry of Education in Kurdistan regulates teaching and education, it prepares study strategies, curricula, and course books. The MoE chooses the study materials, their contents, goals, and purposes, and the number of hours each topic is studied. The MoE is responsible for all aspects of education. The implementation of this particular educational system is now taking place in Kurdistan, and the ultimate goals that are being pursued are as follows (Vernez et al., 2016a).

1. Creating a personality and developing mental, physical, and spiritual elements. Ability to provide someone with a healthy body and clear mind to improve society.
2. Embodying patriotism and human rights.
3. Creating a society that is equal, healthy, and able to assimilate the effects of globalization without discrimination against people based on their gender, religion, ability, social rank, or political opinions.
4. Having a personal love for work, including applying suitable strategies for job continuation and learning all work utilities. Thus, this system seeks a prosperous and moral community.
5. Establishing a democratic, trustworthy generation that honours the nation and country and the spread of democratic ideas in society (Vernez et al., 2016a).

Regarding the ELT in Kurdistan, the English language is a compulsory and essential subject in the education system. In KRI's educational system, the English language is taught in the first-grade side by side with the Kurdish language in K-12. This provides Kurdish children with a significant advantage in acquiring English more naturally. In other words, approximately 693 instructional hours are allocated for the sunrise program in public schools (Vernez et al., 2016b).

After realizing the importance of communicative language teaching (CLT), ELT education has been rebuilt from scratch. In 2007 MoE launched the Sunrise program. Sunrise program which is locally designed by Macmillan in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, is a complete English course for Kurdish primary and secondary school students that includes a teacher's book, a student's book, an activity book, and CDs. Macmillan claims that Sunrise integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing with a distinct emphasis on grammatical structures, and it is based on CLT (Vernez et al., 2016a). Even though all English materials incorporate some values, it is hard or rare to find ELT resources that explain how these values are situated. While educational materials such as textbooks are an important part of a system, and values are always interwoven and incorporated in textbooks cannot be ignored (Widodo et al., 2018).

The major goal of the Sunrise program is to improve the communicative skills of Kurdish pupils to the point where they are accurate and fluent in their use of the language 'in social contexts'. (Vernez et al., 2016a). The textbook introductions state their aims to foster "communicative competence," "strategic competence," "self-efficacy," "learner autonomy," "problem-solving," and "meaning creating". The textbooks are thematically organized, with each lesson emphasizing a key concept or purpose. The course helps students improve their English skills in a fun way by using interesting units based on topics, adventure stories that introduce a new language, and different activities like role-playing and guided writing tasks. It also includes a comprehensive set of training guides for each level of the Sunrise textbook, methodology manual, study skills, and how to test Sunrise. There are no discrete sections for grammar or vocabulary in the textbooks, as an inductive approach was used to teach these language components.

In the formal education system of Kurdistan, the arrival of a new series of English textbooks that are completely different in content and structure from the previous ones has been seen as a transformation. Hence, English textbooks based on traditional methods and outdated assumptions, such as 'grammar-translation', 'rote memorization', 'mechanical drills', and repetition, were completely altered. Reviewing and evaluating the new textbooks indicated that in addition to major structural modifications, there has also been a change in how the content is chosen. Since this important change has not been documented and analyzed well enough in the growing body of research on the subject, the goal of this paper is to look more closely at this issue of general language education, to critically (analyse) the statutes of moral education in EFL education in Kurdistan.

## 6. Critical Reflection

In the contemporary context, EFL education has evolved to encompass a broader role beyond solely teaching English language proficiency. Its new role focuses on empowering learners to become proficient global communicators, promoting intercultural understanding, digital literacy, critical thinking, and fostering responsible citizenship in an interconnected world. Thus, learning a language in particular, is a process that assists individuals in the formation of identities in society, both locally and worldwide, to become a part of the world and their surroundings (Warwick et al., 2010). To rephrase, learning a new language is a multifaceted process that goes beyond communication. It can shape an individual's identity and worldview, fostering an appreciation for diversity and improving cognitive skills. Overall, language

learning is an essential process that can contribute to personal and professional growth, as well as a deeper understanding of the world.

Given the points mentioned above, we must adopt a proactive, critical, and self-aware stance towards the evolving role of English to educate and equip Kurdish learners for the changing landscape. This paper seeks to shed light on the new function of ELT and compare it to the current status of ELT in Kurdistan, to identify and examine the deficiencies of EFL education in light of these new developments. By doing so, we can better understand the shifting nature of English and its implications for ELT education, and take steps to address any shortcomings that may arise. When discussing the ELT education system in Kurdistan, it is required to discuss several relevant topics, such as the government's educational objectives, authorities' philosophy toward ELT education, and the establishment and implementation of the study program.

### 6.1 The Philosophy and Objectives of ELT

Regarding educational objectives and philosophy, over time, philosophies and educational policies are subject to change, which gives all subject areas a new point of view. Based on what has happened in developed countries, there are constant efforts to improve and organize a carefully designed educational system. But every country's educational system is based on a philosophy, whether that philosophy is acknowledged or unacknowledged (Saeed, 2015). Ali *et al.* (2021) state that educational philosophy is realized and practised through the reconstruction of educational objectives and the establishment and implementation of the study program or curriculum. Philosophy and education are two sides of the same coin; that cannot be separated.

In the last two decades, many changes, reforms, and attempts have been made in the education sector in Kurdistan. At least, there is a new curriculum and educational policy issued in 2004-2005. However, according to the literature, it looks like these new policies and the old ones do not replace each other too much. Instead, they have been mixed into the practices that have already been in place (Saeed, 2015; Wahab, 2018; Ali *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, Saeed (2015, p. 128) also assured that there is "no precise educational philosophy that can be found in the new educational system of Kurdistan". Because, if we go back to the history of education in Iraqi-Kurdistan, we can see that the educational philosophy has not achieved the goals that it set for itself at any time (Saeed, 2015; Wahab, 2018). Building on the arguments, the problem with the educational system is that, the programs are not clear toward the true objectives, and the educational philosophy does not come through in the programs. In other words, it seems we have circled the issues within the education sector. All system failures may be boiled down to one point, it needs a solid intellectual, social, and political foundation that looks at all parts of life based on real and scientific research (Saeed, 2015; Wahab, 2018).

In Kurdistan, school reform education suffers an even greater lack of attention. For example, reforms included the replacement of outdated textbooks with more contemporary and advanced textbooks. While the majority of the goals in the educational philosophy are not only reflected in the curriculum (Arthur, 2014), certainly, these examples demonstrate that the educational philosophy in Kurdistan cannot achieve its goals just through the curriculum. Inadequate programs and a lack of reflection in educational philosophy are problems for new

educational systems. No educational reform or program modification can be made without a clear government viewpoint and ideology towards all impacted parties or a good idea of how to treat all the people who will be affected (Arthur, 2014).

Educational policies, in most circumstances, affect the production of curriculum, materials, and textbooks. As silent partners, textbooks shape how a teacher, student, and other teaching tools interact and work together (Johnston, 2003; Widodo, 2018). In addition to this, the primary purpose of any educational program should be the attainment of its stated objectives. Therefore, programmers should keep in mind that society is constantly evolving and adapt their strategies accordingly. Those objectives from twenty years ago are no longer relevant because the goals of the programs twenty years ago were to achieve some objectives that do not fit today. Therefore, before a program is established, its objectives must be stated, and what we want the program to accomplish should be worked on. Certainly, programs should be modified in response to changing social conditions. The Kurdistan EFL program, called "Sunrise," was made by Macmillan Publishers and the Ministry of Education in 2004 (Vernez et al., 2014). Although, Sunrise has been viewed as an appropriate program for teaching a foreign language in terms of level of knowledge and language skills (Hassan & Ghafar, 2014), now ELT materials writers should do their jobs beyond the language knowledge and skills of their students. Language learners are expected to do more than just study the language in addition to their orthodox one (Thongrin, 2018a).

Besides, one of the significant obstacles to the effectiveness of the reform is its top-down implementation in a system characterized by a hierarchical power structure (Wahab, 2018; Saeed, 2015). ELT practices in Kurdistan are constrained to two systems of language education that are both administered and controlled by MoE. The first system consists of the language curriculum, which is implemented in every public school throughout Kurdistan. Second, MoE is in charge of creating all English textbooks and additional materials, as well as distributing them to schools, which are required to make use of them in their instructional methods.

Nevertheless, several studies have identified the language skills and language competency of ESL/EFL instruction. Some studies have shown that the new textbooks are a big improvement over the old ones for English language teaching in Kurdistan. Considering that the new textbooks are more interesting because they were made based on current ELT theories. While others have raised doubts about its reliability. It is stated that the English language program's results have been unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Ibrahim and Kavlu, 2020; Muhammad, Omer and Jukil, 2019). According to the studies, the program is not well organized or they did not adhere to any particular educational philosophy, except for linguistic purposes. Even now, the implementation of ELT in public schools is only to satisfy grammatical requirements, without semantic analysis (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Muhammad, Omer and Jukil, 2019; Ibrahim and Kavlu, 2020; Ghafar and Amin, 2022). Eventually, at this point, it becomes evident that the educational goals of the EFL program in Kurdistan are not achieved, and when a program's goals are unclear, it cannot be successful.

## **6.2.The establishment and implementation of the Sunrise program**

The establishment and implementation of the EFL program in public schools in Kurdistan is entirely under the control of the Ministry of Education, and the program is based on preset

teaching materials, textbooks, and instructional activities. The MoE in Kurdistan mandates all EFL teachers to implement all that has been set for them before. In this way, the teacher's role is reduced to that of a conduit that transmits information from experts to students without modification (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In this respect, Giroux (1988) asserts that teachers implement the aims and mandates of experts who are disconnected from the realities of language classroom life. This process is also known as 'the proletarianization of teachers' work', in which teachers manage and implement curriculum programs rather than evaluate and create curriculum to meet pedagogical requirements (Giroux, 1988). In Kumaravadivelu's (2003) transmission or technician view, in the educational circle, instructors rely on professional specialists as makers and providers of knowledge bases or curriculum packages. To rephrase, when teachers go through the process of proletarianization, they lose their independence or professional agency and become obedient technicians.

Reviewing and evaluating the new ELT program alongside the studies that have been conducted, reveals that some notable structural, functional, and observable shifts have occurred in the selection of content. Yet, this fundamental reform has not been adequately documented or studied in the expanding body of research on the subject, particularly about general language education. General language education, as one of the main content areas of language education has been neglected. Some researchers have raised concerns about the English-language education program in terms of the methods and aims of teaching English that have not changed significantly, instead, teachers have continued to emphasize reading, grammar, and vocabulary. As a result, implementing the textbooks has tended to repeat itself as it had before. (Ibrahim & Kavlu, 2020; Sofi-karim, 2015). It looks like the English curriculum changed after 2003-2004, but the rest of the agenda stayed the same.

Perhaps the gap between planning and practice stems from the ambiguity of highly centralized policymaking in the Ministry of Education, where all decisions are determined, the curriculum is centrally administered mainly top-down, teachers are not involved, and student needs are not assessed. Not only is the curriculum centralized, but also the content of the textbooks, lesson plans, and tests are centrally directed, and stakeholders do not have much flexibility to make any changes. Thus, the curriculum shift is founded on the paradigm of coercive power, which states that teachers can be forced to do what they are taught by authority and sanctions. As a result, teachers' input was not sought, they were not included in the reform's planning, and they felt their agency was not appreciated. Because of this, they were unable to embrace the change as their own. They probably became disinterested in the innovation and returned to using their traditional teaching methods. Thus, the new ideas that the reform brought did not work out as well as hoped.

As mentioned before, the ELT program (Sunrise program) in basic schools is based on a communicative approach, which was a good strategy at the time since it recognized the value of communication in the classroom. The goal of the program is to help Kurdish students improve their communication skills so that they can use the language accurately and fluently (Rashed, 2009). However, after twelve years of studying English in schools, the majority of language learners in Kurdistan cannot use the language properly (Ghafar & Amin, 2022). According to the studies, in practising the sunrise program, EFL teachers placed a much greater focus on grammatical rules and forms than they did on communication (Ghafar & Amin, 2022; Muhammad et al., 2019; Murad, 2017; Sofi-Karim, 2015). As a result, learners

are unable to communicate effectively when it comes to real-world situations because authentic activities have been overlooked. The proponents of the communicative approach "viewed that classroom as an isolated group of individuals whose broader social and political context was irrelevant to the processes of language learning" (Johnston, 2003, p. 41).

One should note that, even though the ministry's language program was changed, and communicatively-based textbooks were brought into schools, teaching is still based on the "banking model" of education, in which students are quiet and passive and are used to listening to their teachers (Kakamad and Rion, 2021). Additionally, students have been playing a very secondary role in the language-learning process, while the program promotes the idea of student-centred learning (Muhammad et al., 2019; Sofi-Karim, 2015). In other words, even though the Sunrise program puts a lot of emphasis on autonomy in learning and is 'student-centred', students are still unable to socially construct their knowledge. This indicates that language acquisition is still centred on the "banking concept", in a way that, the teacher provides knowledge and the student is a "container", learners are not allowed to think critically within the current educational system. For written exams, students should practice rote learning, random memorizing, coping, and pasting (Kakamad and Rion, 2021; Sofi-Karim, 2015; Wahab, 2018). Consequently, current methods only encourage surface levels of learning.

Successful communication will likely become difficult if the principles of social theory are not applied correctly. As Vygotsky (1987) argues, to improve language skills, classroom activities should reflect the social aspects of interaction and collaboration. The CLT approach, which was developed by the constructive learning theory, is required for the sunrise program to be successful (cited in Muhammad, Omer and Jukil, 2019). ELT activities, however, should be carried out by a critical pedagogy perspective that supports students' authority, identities, and desirable traits. In this respect, students not only learn a second language but also develop into culturally competent learners who are decent members of their society with desirable personalities and critical minds. This suggests that the ultimate objective of education about the English language needs to go beyond only linguistic and communicative ability. Besides being able to speak and write or being fluent in the English language, students should also be able to pose and solve problems rationally, have compassion for others and be able to handle conflict and contradictions and resolve disagreements in a morally acceptable way. Achieving such goals does not depend on specific teaching methods, but on how learners observe and interpret knowledge, power, and social values (Widodo et al., 2018).

Encountering the current situation in EFL education in public schools in Kurdistan, there is a pressing need to incorporate critical pedagogy into language programs. Examining the characteristics of critical pedagogy demonstrates that without a doubt, this approach would be the best alternative for this type of community (if it meets the criteria of CP). Critical pedagogy can meet the goals of the KRG education system as well as the needs and interests of Kurdish EFL learners. In this regard, approaching this trend critically requires, first questioning the underlying assumptions of the mainstream ELT and gaining a larger sociopolitical and cultural perspective on English and ELT.

Education might not be enough to meet the learners' needs if it does not encourage them to consider what is good and wrong in their daily lives. As Vygotsky (1977, p. 345) asserts

“Education is just as meaningless outside the real world as is a fire without oxygen, or as is breathing in a vacuum. The teacher’s educational work, therefore, must inevitably be connected with his creative, social and life work”. From a Vygotskian perspective on morality, moral education is emphasized as a crucial component of practices that are culture-oriented. Increased intercultural awareness ought to be the natural consequence of increased knowledge and comprehension of the target community’s sociocultural distinctions (Europe., 2001). Therefore, ELT resources developed for non-native learners should aid them in communicating effectively with English speakers all over the world. As a result, we should begin the development of learning materials with a critical pedagogy that suggests the incorporation of moral concerns.

From the standpoint of critical pedagogy, the goal of education, in general, and not only language learning, is to thrust education to provide students with the tools they need to become engaged members of their communities. The critical pedagogy view is directly tied to what and how teachers teach any subject area to students. Their primary goal is to assist students in developing "conscientization", and to encourage them to think critically about their education (Freire, 1970). Since critical pedagogy aimed to transfer society from an informed praxis 'from theory to practice or thinking to do', teachers would have the 'intellectual transformative' role. In other words, teachers are expected to possess the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that question, understand, and act for change regarding school inequities, all of which are referred to as intellectually transformative.

Although critical pedagogy has existed in the field of English language teaching for more than two decades (Canagarajah 2005), it has not been integrated into the creation of ELT materials. Critical language pedagogy (CLP) is rarely or never been implemented within the context of Kurdistan’s schools. Some teachers may not be familiar enough with the different learning theories to determine which one works best for what they are teaching. As a result, if the educational system does not promote CLP, the knowledge may be wasted, as most of the students have experienced before.

On the other side, learning materials are also should be considered if they are to cultivate critical, active learners. Textbooks that include both English-speaking and non-English cultures are very helpful for classroom activities in a larger spectrum of language instruction (Thongrin, 2018a). Fortunately, the textbooks used in the public schools of Kurdistan are embracing ‘the target culture, the learner’s culture and international target cultures. Textbooks with content that depicts the combination of cultures, in which students simultaneously learn about their own and other cultures, should provide more benefits. Textbooks with content that demonstrates a blend of cultures, in which students simultaneously learn about their own and other cultures, should provide more benefits. This is especially important in the context of ELT, where we must consider students’ representations of global realities and cultures. This is because the content of the materials should reflect the sociocultural reality of the students and their global community as a whole (Thongrin, 2018a).

In this case, since there is a wide range of morality issues for each cultural environment, ELT materials can cover moral education issues. Students who are allowed to learn about issues from both a local and a global viewpoint have a better chance of becoming more knowledgeable about the wider world and this improves their ability to think critically as a

result. Additionally, these will help them figure out how to solve problems, especially if they run into problems while learning, living, or working. Accessing both layers of these cultural elements allows the learners to appreciate not only the beauty of their cultural history but also others in larger communities. They eventually become more aware of cultural differences as they learn in school and serve in their potential careers. As a result, incorporating both local and global cultures into ELT materials provides larger cultural resources for morality content, which should provide beneficial solutions to students learning in a globalized society.

In the field of language teaching, moral education is just one of several pedagogical strategies that can help students develop stronger personalities and more analytical minds. It has been suggested that critical pedagogy and moral education do not stand in opposition to one another. In contrast, critical pedagogy needs to be taken into account when analyzing moral principles since moral education calls for “critical distance on tradition, exposure to alternatives, informed and reflective deliberation about how to think and live” (Nord & Haynes, 2000, cited in Feng, 2019, p .2). This is totally by the aim of critical pedagogy, which aims to empower educators and students with the ability to become social transformers by increasing their awareness of the cultural and moral values and ideologies that are implicit in the educational context and society as a whole (Freire, 1970).

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, contemporary language learning and teaching encompass objectives that go beyond mere linguistic competence. The focus now extends to cultivating critical thinking, cultural awareness, social competency, and effective communication skills, recognizing the importance of holistic education in today's interconnected world. While the goal of English language teaching (ELT) in Kurdistan is exclusively oriented towards improving students' linguistic ability. This suggests that the ELT curriculum in Kurdistan may prioritize instruction on English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, with little attention devoted to other crucial skills required for effective communication and intercultural competence, potentially overlooking other necessary skills for effective communication. The statement emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to language education that considers broader language learning goals.

Encountering this situation, ELT in Kurdistan requires a new approach and direction to improve the situation. Critical language pedagogy is suggested as a potential solution that can revamp ELT in Kurdistan by prioritizing critical thinking, cultural awareness, and effective communication, in addition to linguistic competence. This approach has the potential to broaden the goals of ELT and create a more comprehensive curriculum that prepares students for effective communication and intercultural understanding. This new paradigm has the potential to turn all English language stakeholders into professional pedagogues. Critical pedagogy is proposed as a way to contextualize English language education within social, political, and cultural contexts, to help students develop a Kurdish identity. By adopting a critical pedagogical approach, students can develop multiple intelligences and become better communicators and critical thinkers. In other words, the goal of this educational program is to help students become better communicators and more critical thinkers, as well as to empower younger citizens to engage actively and responsibly in society.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to incorporate moral education into English language education in Kurdistan. Integrating moral education programs with language education can help prepare the next generation of students in Kurdistan to be intelligent and responsible citizens. The implementation of moral education programs through language education will assist our country in preparing the next generation to be both intelligent and good citizens. It can be noted that many countries that teach English as a foreign language have already integrated moral education into their language education programs. By doing so, these countries are helping their students develop not only linguistic competence but also the personal and social competencies needed to thrive in society.

The implications of this paper are compelling us to develop a new model of language education, for incorporating moral education into English language teaching. In addition, an empirical inquiry must be done to assess its pedagogical influence on students. The study's implications also propose that both teachers and students should be equipped with critical thinking and moral education, as well as critical language awareness analysis. As a value agent, teachers and students should be able to engage critically with EFL textbooks. Last not the least, we anticipate that the current paper will help comprehend various aspects of this issue in the context of KRG, as well as in opening up additional space for future research on the role of moral education, character education, and civic education in the development of social skills, particularly in ELT. Eventually, the findings of this study inspired us to consider developing models for incorporating values education into English classrooms and piloting them in various Kurdish schools. In addition, an empirical investigation is necessary to evaluate the didactic influence it has on students.

### Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness and holistic development of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, the following proposals are suggested:

1. Establish a Clear Educational Philosophy: It is recommended that ELT curriculum development be rooted in a clear and well-defined educational philosophy. This guiding framework will ensure that language learning objectives and methodologies align with the chosen philosophy, providing a coherent and purposeful direction to the curriculum.
2. Facilitate Coordination among Stakeholders: It is proposed that, during the establishment of the language curriculum, there should be full coordination between the program committee, subject matter experts, and psychosocial counsellors. This collaborative effort will enable the integration of social and moral values that cater to the specific needs and aspirations of language learners.
3. Prioritize Positive Social Values: The program setting committee should give greater attention to prioritizing the establishment of positive social values. These values should be aligned with the priorities of the educational stage and the individual needs of learners. By harmonizing this process with the broader goals of curriculum development, the curriculum will foster students' overall development and growth.
4. Emphasize Civilized Social Values: To create a nurturing and ethical learning environment, it is suggested that language program setting committees pay more attention to incorporating civilized social values into the ELT curriculum. By

emphasizing values such as fairness, honesty, respect for others, and principles of responsible citizenship, language learners will develop as socially conscious individuals.

5. Contextualize ELT Materials: ELT materials should be thoughtfully contextualized, considering the diverse components of learners, teachers, classrooms, and institutions in each situation. This contextual approach will effectively address value dimensions in language teaching, particularly within the English classroom. Given that EFL classrooms are natural environments for teaching moral education and the field of English language education aligns well with the dynamics of moral values, it is recommended to seize this opportunity to instil essential values that contribute to the development of well-balanced individuals who are open to diverse concepts, beliefs, and attitudes. Moral education, with its focus on essential values like fairness, honesty, and respect for others, can play a pivotal role in nurturing a sense of society and personal responsibility among students.

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