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# Conceptualizing the Praxis of Critical Education Theory among Teacher Educators

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## Abstract

This article explores the praxis of critical education theory among teacher educators in Thailand’s contemporary education reform movement. Using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with fifteen teacher educators from ten institutions, the research examines how critical pedagogy is implemented in teacher preparation programs. Four key themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) reconceptualizing “teacher” and “teacherness,” 2) knowledge production and discourse formation, 3) professional development and critical reflection, and 4) contestation, negotiation, and cooperation in implementing critical approaches. Findings reveal that teacher educators are actively challenging traditional pedagogical paradigms, fostering critical consciousness among pre-service teachers, and navigating institutional constraints to promote more inclusive and socially relevant curricula. The study highlights the complex dynamics of implementing critical education theory within a system that often resists change. This research contributes to the understanding of how critical pedagogy can be operationalized in teacher education, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities of fostering a more equitable and transformative education system in Thailand. The findings have implications for teacher education policy and practice, suggesting the need for a more flexible and critically oriented approach to teacher preparation.

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## Introduction

Teacher education, as a component of global educational reform narratives, is dynamic and evolves with changing times. Each era’s reform narrative highlights the shortcomings or incompleteness of previous reforms. These narrative sets interact across different periods and often contain multiple, complementary aspects within the same era. The discourse surrounding educational problems and solutions is diverse, complex, and frequently marked by internal contradictions. Consequently, the reform narratives of each era embody their own inherent problems and imperfections, which in turn shape the characteristics of subsequent educational reforms. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Cornbleth, 2014).

In Thailand, there appears to be a prevailing notion that the fundamental aspects of teacher education - encompassing administration, policy, curriculum, pedagogy, learning processes, and evaluation - have been

definitively resolved. This perspective promotes a teacher education model that prioritizes practical school experience, aiming to produce high-quality educators who embody professional excellence, demonstrate superior teaching techniques, and possess adept classroom management skills. This model also emphasizes preparing teacher candidates to become civil servant teachers deeply instilled with a vocational spirit (Sajjawatit, 2003). Within these narrative structures, teacher education is portrayed as an idealized, fixed entity with a stable and certain essence. This view suggests that teacher education and its institutional and normative nature occupy a distinct space, seemingly detached from the broader power dynamics inherent in the society's political and cultural systems (Cornbleth, 1986; Popkewitz, 2017; Thongthew, 2014).

This research posits that teacher education is not a fixed, immutable, or uniform entity, but rather a socio-cultural construct intricately linked to power dynamics among various forces within social, cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts at any given time. The meaning of a particular form of teacher education lacks clear, fixed, or homogeneous content or essence. Instead, it evolves through interactions and negotiations with internal disciplinary changes and external contextual factors. The definition or meaning of a specific type of teacher education at a given moment reflects the state of society, revealing shifting societal emphases and developments across eras, aligning with the political ideologies of those in power (Popkewitz, 2017). This fluidity stems from teacher education's role as the body of knowledge and methodology for creating educators who will, in turn, shape students or citizens of the state. Consequently, the science of teacher education serves as a crucial tool for those in power to influence and control the social life-world of individuals (Blevins & Talbert, 2016; Hill, 2007).

Over the last 30 years, Thailand's approach to teacher education has undergone a profound transformation, particularly following the enactment of National Education Act 1999. The previous model centered on preparing educators with a strong prominence on technical skills and traditional pedagogical knowledge, often overlooking the broader philosophical, sociocultural, and historical foundations of education. In contrast, the current paradigm places greater importance on developing educators who are competent in critical reflective teaching regarding curriculum design and instructional methods (Jatuporn, 2024; Thongthew, 2014). This shift highlights the value of reflective teaching practices, which involve a dynamic interplay between practical classroom experiences and the application of educational theory to enhance teaching effectiveness (Calderhead, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). This process of critical examination and continuous improvement in teaching methods has become a cornerstone of current teacher preparation in Thailand (Vibulphol, 2015).

Despite the prevalence of conservative and authoritarian ideologies in Thailand's teaching profession, challenges to this norm exist. Academics in teacher education institutions are engaged in power struggles over knowledge politics, aiming to demonstrate that teacher education isn't inherently conservative or authoritarian. This struggle can be analyzed through the lens of deconstruction at ideological, linguistic, and discursive levels, as well as through the broader implementation of critical paradigms (Nawarat, Nasee, Jatuporn & Sapphasuk, 2022). Concurrently, critical theory has emerged in humanities and social sciences, with critical education theory and critical pedagogy gaining traction in education and teacher education fields (Jatuporn, 2024). These theoretical concepts and movements illustrate the micropolitical power struggles in education's dynamic landscape. They reveal how academics, constrained by dominant power structures, engage in cultural practices, leverage symbolic

power, and employ historical narratives to negotiate and achieve specific goals. These objectives include promoting cultural diversity, proposing progressive educational policies, fostering cultural sensitivity in social thinking, and building networks to create a society that embraces differences, promotes equality, and ensures fairness based on human rights principles.

This research aims to conceptualize the praxis of critical education theory among teacher educators within Thailand's contemporary education reform movement. Its novelty lies in its approach to the research issues, focusing on the production of perceptions rather than repression and suppression. The study examines the meaning and meaning-making of "critical pedagogy" as a contested field where various forces engage in defining and redefining concepts (Breuing, 2011; Jaramillo & McLaren, 2009). This is particularly relevant from 2018 to the present, a period marked by debates on teacher education curriculum reform and policies on competency-based education curricula and instruction (Jatuporn, 2020).

This research is significant as it illuminates the dynamics and conditional factors in creating a knowledge space for critical education by teacher educators who identify themselves as critical practitioners within teacher education institutions. It examines the interactions of confrontation, response, negotiation, and collaboration in establishing this critical education space within the Thai education system. The study reveals the relationship between the process of producing meanings of critical education and the interacting social, cultural, economic, political, and historical structures. This approach provides insight into how these structures continuously integrate and negotiate with each other in shaping critical educational praxis (Lim & Apple, 2018).

## **Objective**

This study aims to analyze and conceptualize the praxis of critical education theory among teacher educators within Thailand's contemporary education reform movement.

## **Literature Review**

### **Critical Pedagogy and Critical Education Theory**

Critical pedagogy, rooted in critical theory, emerged as a transformative educational paradigm that challenges the reproduction of social inequalities through traditional schooling systems. Developed in the 1970s, this approach draws on the seminal work of education scholars such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks. A key principle in progressive educational philosophy is the idea of fostering critical consciousness, a concept often associated with Freire's work. This approach emphasizes the importance of individuals developing a deep understanding of their societal context through a combination of thoughtful analysis and practical engagement (Giroux, 2013).

This process aims to empower learners to recognize and challenge oppressive structures in society. Key principles of critical pedagogy include as follows: problematizing education and knowledge production, emphasizing dialogue and student voice, connecting classroom learning to broader sociopolitical contexts and promoting social

justice and equity (Freire, 1998; Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000). In Thailand, critical pedagogy has influenced teacher education programs, albeit to a limited extent, through its emphasis on social justice, democratic participation, and empowerment. This approach has encouraged Thai educators to critically examine the country's hierarchical social structures and their impact on education. However, implementation faces challenges due to Thailand's traditionally conservative educational system and cultural norms that often prioritize harmony over critique (Nawarat, Nasee, Jatuporn & Sappasuk, 2022; Tan & Vickers, 2024).

Recent initiatives in Thai teacher education, however, have incorporated elements of critical pedagogy by encouraging reflective practice among pre-service teachers, promoting culturally responsive teaching methods, addressing issues of linguistic and ethnic diversity in classrooms and fostering critical thinking skills to engage with social and political issues (Jatuporn, 2024). While progress has been made, the full integration of critical pedagogy in Thai education remains an ongoing process, balancing local cultural values with the need for transformative educational approaches.

### **Teacher Educators as Agents of Change**

Teacher educators are instrumental in shaping the future of education, serving as both teacher and exemplar for teacher candidates. Their perceptions, beliefs, and practices significantly influence not only the development of future educators but also the broader education system (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). In the context of Thailand's ongoing education reform efforts, teacher educators who adopt a critical pedagogy framework act as crucial agents of change by challenging normative discourses around "teacherness" and constructing alternative narratives that promote inclusivity, equity, and social justice.

Key aspects of teacher educators' role as change agents include five aspects as follows: 1) curriculum design and implementation by integrating critical perspectives into teacher preparation programs and developing courses that address social issues and power dynamics in education, 2) modeling critical reflection by demonstrating self-reflective practices and encouraging teacher candidates to question their own assumptions and biases, 3) fostering critical consciousness by facilitating discussions on systemic inequalities in education and promoting awareness of sociopolitical contexts that impact teaching and learning, 4) research and scholarship by conducting and disseminating research on critical approaches to teacher education and engaging in collaborative action research with schools and communities, and 5) policy advocacy by participating in educational policy discussions at institutional and national levels and advocating for reforms that align with principles of social justice and equity (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1988).

In Thailand, teacher educators face unique challenges and opportunities such as the tension between traditional hierarchical structures and the more egalitarian approaches promoted by critical pedagogy, the issues of linguistic diversity and ethnic minority education in a predominantly Thai-speaking context and an emphasis on standardized testing and rote learning with more critical, student-centered approaches (Jatuporn, 2024; Wallace & Athamesara, 2004). However, it's important to state that recent initiatives in Thai teacher education programs have included introducing courses on multicultural education and inclusive practices, incorporating community-

based learning experiences to connect theory with local realities and promoting action research projects that address social issues in education (Saenghong, Endrődy, Hain, & Nguyen, 2024). By adopting a critical stance, teacher educators in Thailand can contribute to transforming the education system from within, preparing a new cohort of teachers equipped to address societal inequalities and promote democratic values. However, this transformative potential is often constrained by institutional structures, cultural norms, and policy environments that may resist change. The ongoing negotiation between these forces shapes the evolving landscape of teacher preparation in Thailand.

## **Methods**

This exploratory study used qualitative methods, primarily semi-structured interviews and classroom observations (Creswell, 2012). The aim was not to establish causal relationships in teacher educators' critical pedagogy praxis, but rather to explore how they develop practices that promote democracy, equity, and justice by incorporating their own perspectives and standpoints. The study protocol received ethical consideration from the institutional review board before the research began.

### **Participants and Study Context**

The study involved fifteen teacher educators from ten teacher education institutions across Thailand. Participants were selected based on two criteria as follows: 1) their institutions' accessibility to the researchers and 2) the institutions' academic environment conducive to exploring critical pedagogy practices. Inclusion criteria required participants to have working knowledge and experience implementing critical pedagogy in the classroom. The gender distribution of participants was 60% male ( $n = 9$ ) and 40% female ( $n = 6$ ).

To ensure a diverse and representative sample, the institutions were chosen from various regions of Thailand, including urban and rural areas. The participants represented a range of academic disciplines within teacher education, such as curriculum and instruction, educational psychology, development education and subject-specific pedagogies. All participants provided informed consent before joining the research. Their teaching expertise ranged from 5 to 25 years, with a median of 12 years. This diversity in experience levels allowed for a rich exploration of how critical pedagogy practices evolve over an educator's career.

The majority of teacher educators identified as Thai middle-class, providing understanding into the socio-economic background of participants in the study. Their professional experience in higher education ranged from early-career to highly seasoned educators: 20% ( $n = 3$ ): 5 years or less, 46.66% ( $n = 7$ ): 6–10 years, 20% ( $n = 3$ ): 11–19 years and 13.33% ( $n = 2$ ): 20 years or more. All participants held doctoral degrees in education or related fields, including development education, social foundations of education, curriculum and instruction and educational psychology. This high level of academic qualification ensured that participants had a strong theoretical background to inform their critical pedagogy practices.

In terms of their teaching responsibilities and specializations, participants taught a minimum of two courses each,

covering a diverse range of subjects such as socio-cultural foundations, curriculum and instruction, educational administration and specialized subjects including social studies education, language education and mathematics education. This variety of teaching assignments allowed participants to provide unique examples of critical pedagogy implementation across different educational domains. The diversity in specializations also offered insights into how critical pedagogy principles are adapted for various subject areas within teacher education.

Table 1 lists the participating teacher educators' information.

Table 1. Participants Information

Teacher educator	Gender	Teaching experience	Educational background	Fields of specialization and interests
A	Female	3 years	Curriculum and Instruction	Instructional Design and Development
B	Male	5 years	Social Studies Education	Critical Pedagogy and Global Citizenship Education
C	Female	5 years	Curriculum and Instruction	Curriculum Theories and Development
D	Male	6 years	Curriculum and Instruction	Literacy Education and Teaching ESL/EFL
E	Male	6 years	Higher Education	Educational Leadership
F	Male	7 years	Arts Education	Aesthetics Education
G	Female	7 years	Social Studies Education	Citizenship Education and Teaching for Democracy
H	Female	8 years	English Education	Teaching ESL/EFL and curriculum development
I	Male	9 years	Music Education	Culturally Responsive Music Education
J	Male	10 years	Development Education	Community-Based Education and Development
K	Female	13 years	Educational Psychology	Psychology for Teachers
L	Male	15 years	Science Education	Constructivism and STEM Science Teaching
M	Male	18 years	Mathematics Education	Critical Mathematics and Lesson Studies Approach
N	Male	21 years	Development Education	Development Theories and Education
O	Female	25 years	Social Foundations of Education	Local Activism and Development

To further contextualize the study, it's worth noting that participants came from both large research-based public

universities and former teacher training institutions, representing a cross-section of the Thai higher education landscape. Their involvement in curriculum development, research projects, and educational policy discussions at institutional and national levels provided additional depth to their perspectives on critical pedagogy in practice.

### **Data Collection**

The research team initiated the participant recruitment process by distributing comprehensive email invitations. These messages provided a synopsis of the research's objectives, key research inquiries, and the planned interview format. In an effort to gather a diverse range of perspectives, the researchers reached out to teacher educators at multiple teacher education institutions throughout Thailand. This approach ensured variety in terms of geographic representation, years of teaching experience, and academic focus areas (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011). Teacher educators who showed interest in contributing to the study were assigned interview slots during the initial two academic terms of 2023. The final participant pool consisted of fifteen teacher educators who voluntarily agreed to take part in the in-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

In qualitative research, interviews serve as a versatile and effective method for capturing individuals' perspectives and interpretations of their lived experiences. Within the social sciences and education, semi-structured interviews are particularly valued for their ability to elicit detailed accounts of participants' viewpoints and personal narratives. This approach strikes a balance between a predetermined framework and adaptability, allowing researchers to address specific topics while remaining open to unexpected themes that may emerge during conversations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

For this study, the research team conducted interviews via the Zoom video conferencing platform, followed by onsite follow-up interviews during classroom observations. This choice was motivated by Zoom's user-friendly interface, dependable performance, and integrated recording capabilities, which facilitated the creation of both audio and video records for subsequent transcription. The data collection process involved a series of 15 individual interviews, each spanning approximately 45 to 60 minutes. To maintain consistency across all interviews, two researchers who had received specialized training in qualitative interviewing techniques were designated to conduct all sessions (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011).

The research instrument, a semi-structured interview guideline, was crafted through an extensive review of relevant literature and underwent a preliminary assessment with a small group of three teacher educators who were excluded from the main study cohort. This iterative process facilitated the enhancement of question quality, ensuring both comprehensibility and pertinence to the research aims (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The final protocol incorporated inquiries such as: "What does critical pedagogy mean to you in your professional context?", "To what extent do you feel your instructional methods align with critical pedagogy principles, and why?", "Could you share specific instances where you've integrated critical pedagogy into your teaching practice?", and "What obstacles have you faced when attempting to apply critical pedagogy concepts in your classroom?"

With participants' agreement, audio recordings were made of all interviews. A specialized transcription company



converted these recordings into written form, capturing every word exactly. The research team then carefully checked each transcript to verify its precision. To protect privacy, any details that could identify individuals were eliminated from the written records, and fictitious names were assigned to each participant. For security purposes, both the written transcripts and audio files were kept in an encrypted online storage system, secured with a password and accessible exclusively to those involved in the research project.

Classroom observations were conducted during the second semester, from November 2023 to February 2024. The purpose was to document any changes, stagnation, or regression in participants' critical pedagogy practices and perspectives in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). Prior to observations, participants reflected on their standpoints and positionality regarding critical pedagogy. To deepen findings from classroom observations, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2012). All interview results and classroom observation notes were transcribed verbatim. To ensure data accuracy and interpretive validity, member checking was conducted with all fifteen interviewed participants, allowing them to review and confirm the researchers' understanding of their responses and observed behaviors.

### **Data Analysis**

A structured coding approach was employed to conduct thematic analysis on the qualitative information gathered from interviews and classroom observations. Excerpts from interview documentation and observation field notes were initially coded to identify recurring patterns. These initial codes were then refined and consolidated into a smaller set of codes that captured deeper patterns and themes. The emerging themes were clustered and assigned concise titles that encapsulated their latent meanings. To enhance reliability, the researchers collaborated to validate and legitimate the coded themes (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

To ensure the validity of the analyzed data, a third researcher, who was not involved in the initial coding process, independently reviewed the data. This researcher provided input on coding decisions, particularly when discrepancies arose between the two primary coders. Based on this input, the primary coders engaged in discussions to resolve any disagreements, continuing until full consensus was reached on all coded themes. This triangulation approach strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Through rigorous coding and interpretation, four key themes emerged from the data.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Reconceptualizing “Teacher” and “Teacherness”**

The reconceptualization of “teacher” and “teacherness” in Thailand represents a paradigm shift in teacher education, as educators strive to challenge ossified notions of pedagogical identity. This transformation is evident in the narratives of teacher educators across the country. During an in-depth interview, an experienced teacher educator with over 20 years in higher education, articulated:

*“We're moving beyond the simplistic view of teachers as mere transmitters of knowledge towards a more*

*nuanced understanding of their multifaceted roles in society. Our goal is to cultivate educators who are not just content experts, but also critical thinkers, social advocates, and cultural mediators.”*

(Teacher educator O, in-depth interview, 2023)

This sentiment aligns with critical pedagogy’s emphasis on teaching as a dynamic, reflective, and socially engaged practice. Further corroborating this shift, one participant who is a curriculum development specialist, shared:

*“In our teacher education programs, we’ve consciously moved away from the traditional banking model of education. Instead, we’re fostering an environment where future teachers learn to question, critique, and reimagine their roles. It’s about preparing them to be agents of change, not just in classrooms, but in society at large.”*

(Teacher educator J, in-depth interview, 2023)

The impact of this reconceptualization is also reflected in the exposures of initial teacher educator A, a recent PhD graduate now teaching in a teacher education institution in the northeastern province of Thailand, observed:

*“During my teacher training, I was constantly encouraged to reflect on my identity as a teacher. It wasn’t just about mastering subject matter or pedagogical techniques. We were challenged to consider our broader responsibilities - to our students, to the community, and to society. This has profoundly shaped how I approach my role in the classroom and beyond.”*

(Teacher educator A, in-depth interview, 2023)

These testimonies underscore a growing recognition among Thai teacher educators of the need to redefine teacherness in response to evolving societal demands and educational philosophies (Jatuporn, 2024). This shift not only challenges traditional pedagogical paradigms but also promises to reshape the landscape of Thai education in the coming years.

Classroom observations conducted across various teacher education programs in Thailand revealed the tangible impact of this paradigm shift. As a researcher, I also documented in my observation log:

*“The traditional hierarchical classroom dynamics were noticeably disrupted, replaced by a more collaborative and critically engaged learning environment. In one session, I observed pre-service teachers engaging in a heated debate about education’s roles in addressing social inequalities. The instructor skillfully facilitated the discussion, encouraging diverse perspectives without imposing her own views.”*

(Jatuporn, Observation Log, 2023)

This reconceptualization has given rise to alternative dimensions of teacherness, each carrying profound implications for educational praxis. Further classroom observations provided concrete examples of these emerging dimensions. For example, in a teaching methodology class of teacher educator C, I noted: “The instructor, rather

than lecturing, posed critical questions about the sociopolitical implications of different teaching methods. Students were encouraged to challenge existing practices and propose alternative approaches rooted in democratic principles” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator C, 2023). In the classroom of teacher educator L, a practicum preparation session revealed: “pre-service teachers were tasked with developing lesson plans that integrated local science cultural knowledge with standard-based curriculum content. The emphasis was on positioning teachers as cultural mediators, capable of bridging diverse knowledge systems” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator L, 2023). Additionally, a seminar at a teacher education institution in Chiang Mai demonstrated the “Teacher as public intellectual” dimension: “students presented action research proposals addressing real community issues. The instructor stressed the importance of teachers engaging in public discourse and using their expertise to influence policy decisions” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator G, 2023).

These observations highlight how the reconceptualization of teacherness is being operationalized in teacher education classrooms. The empirical evidence gleaned from in-depth interviews and classroom observations underscores the profound ways in which the reconceptualization of teacherness is reshaping teacher education in Thailand, fostering educators who are prepared to engage critically with their professional identity and societal role. This transformation is not merely superficial but represents a fundamental shift in the epistemological and ontological foundations of teacher education in the country. This aligns with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) conception of knowledge of practice focusing on the importance of teachers as knowledge generators rather than mere consumers. Furthermore, this reconceptualization echoes Kelchtermans’ (2009) notion of self-understanding in teacher identity formation, highlighting the dynamic and contextual nature of professional identity development.

It should be noted that the Thai context adds a unique dimension to this global discourse on teacher education reform. It reflects what Paine, Aydarova & Syahril (2017) describe as the glocalization of teacher education, where global trends are adapted to local cultural and educational contexts. This localized approach to reconceptualizing teacherness demonstrates Thailand’s commitment to developing a culturally responsive yet globally aware teaching force.

### **Knowledge Production and Discourse Formation**

The praxis of critical education theory involves the production of knowledge that challenges mainstream narratives in education. Teacher educators have engaged in creating alternative discourses on education and teacher development, emphasizing non-mainstream approaches. For instance, teacher educator M stated in an interview:

*“We’re moving beyond the traditional sage on the stage model. Our goal is to cultivate critical thinkers who question societal norms and power structures in education.”*

(Teacher educator M, in-depth interview, 2023)

This approach was evident in his classroom, where teacher education students were observed engaging in heated

debates about the hidden curriculum and its impact on marginalized communities. Another teacher educator, teacher educator N demonstrated this praxis during a lecture on pedagogy: “It's not enough to simply teach content. We must equip our new generation teachers with the instruments to dismantle systemic inequalities in their school and classrooms.” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator N, 2023). In a follow-up interview, he elaborated: “Critical education theory isn't just theoretical for us - it's a lived practice. We're constantly challenging our student-teachers to re-imagine what education can be.” (Teacher educator N, in-depth interview, 2023) Empirical data gathered from in-depth interviews and classroom observations of highly experienced teacher educators reveals that critical education practices in teacher education manifest through diverse approaches. The details were illustrated as follows:

First, critical reflection encourages teachers to examine their beliefs, practices, and the broader societal context through a critical lens. Teacher educator D explained in an interview: “We push our students to interrogate their own biases and assumptions. It's not always comfortable, but it's necessary.” (Teacher educator D, in-depth interview, 2023). In one observed seminar, student-teachers engaged in a “privilege walk” exercise. Afterwards, a participant reflected: “I never realized how much my background influenced my teaching philosophy. It's made me rethink how I approach diversity in my classroom.” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator D, 2023).

Second, participatory action research (PAR) engages teachers and students in collaborative investigations addressing community issues. Teacher educator J described a project in his instructional methods course: “We partnered with a local secondary school to investigate food insecurity in the neighborhood. Our student-teachers worked alongside secondary school students to collect data and propose solutions.” (Teacher educator J, in-depth interview, 2023). In this light, one student-teacher, Tawan shared: “This project showed me the power of connecting curriculum to real-world issues. The secondary school students were so engaged because it directly affected their lives.” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator J, 2023).

Third, interdisciplinary collaboration fosters cross-disciplinary work to develop holistic, socio-culturally relevant curricula. During an observed team-teaching session led by arts and social studies methods instructors, student-teachers explored the intersection between artistic portrayals of climate change impacts and environmental justice issues. Teacher educator B, the social studies methods instructor, noted: “By breaking down subject silos, we're preparing teachers to address complex societal issues in their classrooms.” (Teacher educator B, in-depth interview, 2023). A student-teacher in arts education, Chainut commented: “This collaborative approach has completely changed how I view my position as an educator. I now see myself as a facilitator of holistic learning rather than just a subject expert.” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator B, 2023).

These examples elucidate how teacher education programs are operationalizing critical education theory to cultivate educators who embody reflective practice, community engagement, and the integration of diverse perspectives into their pedagogical approaches. This paradigm shift represents a fundamental reimagining of educators' roles both in society and the classroom, aligning with Freire's (1998) concept of “conscientization” and Giroux's (1988) notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals. The implementation of critical education theory in teacher preparation programs also echoes Ladson-Billings' (1995) call for culturally relevant pedagogy,

fostering educators who can critically examine societal power structures and their impact on education. This approach is further reinforced by Gay's (2015) work on culturally responsive pedagogy, emphasizing the significance of leveraging learners' cultural knowledge and experiences in the learning process.

Moreover, this shift reflects Zeichner's (2012) advocacy for a more democratic and socially just approach to teacher preparation, one that bridges the divide between academic knowledge and the wisdom of practice. It also aligns with the conceptualization of teaching as a political and ethical activity, preparing educators to navigate the complex intersections of pedagogy, policy, and justice (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009)

### **Professional Development and Critical Reflection**

The Thailand's National Qualification Framework of Bachelor's Degree in Education and the Teachers Council regulations have emphasized standards and ethics in teaching. However, critical pedagogy advocates for a deeper form of professional development that incorporates critical reflection. Teacher educator O, a veteran teacher educator, explained in an interview: "While standards are important, we need to go beyond checklists and rigid indicators. We're cultivating teachers who question the status quo and their own assumptions." (Teacher educator O, in-depth interview, 2023). In an observed seminar on professional ethics and teaching profession, student-teachers engaged in role-playing exercises addressing complex ethical dilemmas. One participant, Nattapong, reflected: "This activity made me realize that teaching ethics and values aren't just about following rules. It's about critically exploring the consequences of our actions on students and societal norms." (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator O, 2023).

Teacher educators who adopt this approach encourage teacher candidates to critically investigate their positionality and biases. Teacher educator H shared her classroom strategy: "I ask my students to write 'positionality statements' at the beginning and end of each semester. It's remarkable to see how their understanding of their own biases evolves." (Teacher educator H, in-depth interview, 2023). In a follow-up interview, a student-teacher, Siripa, noted: "Writing these statements was uncomfortable at first, but it's made me much more aware of how my background influences my teaching decisions." (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator H, 2023).

Classroom observations of teacher educator F revealed a series of nuanced exercises designed to help student-teachers critically reflect on power dynamics in the classroom. In one activity, F distributed the class into small groups and assigned each a scenario depicting a subtle power imbalance in a school setting. Students then engaged in role-play, followed by a facilitated discussion where they unpacked the underlying power structures at play. F was observed prompting deeper analysis with questions like, "Who has the power to speak in this situation?" and "How might cultural backgrounds influence these interactions?" This approach effectively encouraged student-teachers to examine and challenge their preconceptions about authority, voice, and equity in educational spaces. In one session, students analyzed video recordings of their practice teaching, focusing on teacher-student interactions. A participant, Apinun, shared: "Watching myself teach was eye-opening. I noticed how often I

inadvertently silenced certain students. It's changed how I think about classroom management." (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator F, 2023).

This approach aims to develop a critical consciousness that informs teaching practice. Teacher educator I explained: "We're not just training music teachers; we're developing critical thinkers who understand education's role in society." He also reflected in a follow up interview: "My education background and culturally responsive training taught me to constantly question: Whose knowledge am I privileging? Whose voices am I amplifying or silencing? It's made me a more thoughtful and inclusive teacher." (Teacher educator E, in-depth interview, 2023)

This form of professional development aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy and fosters a reflective, socially engaged teaching workforce. As observed in a final project presentation, student-teachers demonstrated their growth by proposing innovative curricula that addressed local social issues. One student, Jakkrit, presented a unit on environmental justice, stating: "This project helped me see how I can use my role as a teacher to foster social change." (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator E, 2023).

These examples illustrate how critical pedagogy is being integrated into teacher education programs, pushing beyond standard frameworks to develop educators who are critically reflective and socially conscious practitioners. Empirical evidence suggests that this professional development approach leads to more engaged and socially conscious educators. A longitudinal study by Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan (2009) identified that teachers who engaged in critical reflection during their pre-service training were more likely to implement culturally responsive teaching practices and advocate for educational equity throughout their careers.

### **Contestation, Negotiation, and Cooperation**

The movement for contemporary education reform in Thailand has created a contested space where various ideologies, interests, and practices intersect. Teacher educators who identify as critical educators often find themselves negotiating between institutional mandates and their convictions. The findings reveal three key dynamics.

First, teacher educators actively demonstrate contestation toward the dominant discourse that prioritizes standardized testing and market-driven education, employing various strategies to challenge these prevailing norms. Teacher educator B articulated this resistance in an interview: "We're pushing back against the notion that education's primary purpose is to produce workers for the economy. Our role is to cultivate critical thinkers and engaged citizens." (Teacher educator B, in-depth interview, 2023). Classroom observations revealed concrete examples of this contestation in practice. In curriculum design and development course led by teacher educator B, student-teachers were tasked with creating assessment plans that went beyond standardized testing. One participant, Ramida, reflected: "This exercise opened my eyes to how limiting standardized tests can be. I now see the value of more holistic, culturally responsive assessment methods." (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator B, 2023).

The contestation also manifests in research and advocacy efforts. A recent study by Jatuporn (2023) documented how a network of teacher educators across four universities in Thailand are working to reframe the national dialogue on education. His findings show that these educators are actively promoting alternative models of schooling that prioritize social justice and community engagement over market-driven metrics. This multi-faceted contestation by teacher educators represents a significant counterforce to the dominant market-oriented educational discourse, aiming to recenter humanistic and critical perspectives in teacher preparation programs. Second, teacher educators engage in a complex process of negotiation, skillfully navigating institutional constraints while persistently advocating for more inclusive and socially relevant curricula. This delicate balancing act was evident in a series of in-depth interviews.

Teacher educator L described her approach: “I work within the prescribed curriculum framework, but I constantly look for opportunities to infuse critical perspectives and local context. For instance, when teaching about environmental science, I incorporate case studies on local pollution issues and their social impacts.” (Teacher educator L, in-depth interview, 2023). Classroom observations of teacher educator L methods course confirmed this strategy, revealing how she seamlessly integrated discussions on environmental justice and community activism into lessons on standard science teaching methods (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator L, 2023).

The negotiation process often involves creative interpretation of institutional policies. Teacher educator M shared: “We’re required to cover certain competencies, but how we achieve that is open to interpretation. I’ve reframed classroom management to include discussions on power dynamics and student voice.” (Teacher educator M, in-depth interview, 2023). In his classroom, student-teachers were observed developing lesson plans that incorporated student-led decision-making processes, demonstrating how institutional requirements can be met while promoting more democratic classroom practices (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator M, 2023).

Some teacher educators reported leveraging institutional goals to support their advocacy for socio-culturally and inclusive curricula. Teacher educator O explained: “When the university emphasized “global citizenship” in its strategic plan, I used that as an opportunity to introduce more diverse perspectives and critical global issues into our teacher preparation courses.” (Teacher educator O, in-depth interview, 2023). This resulted in a new course on “Global Education and Social Issues,” which has become a popular elective in the teacher education program.

The negotiation process also extends to assessment practices. Teacher educator M described his efforts: “While we can’t eliminate standardized assessments entirely, I’ve worked with colleagues to introduce portfolio-based evaluations and community-engaged projects as significant components of student assessment.” (Teacher educator M, in-depth interview, 2023). This initiative has gained traction, with several departments now incorporating these alternative assessment methods into their programs.

These examples illustrate how teacher educators adeptly navigate the tension between institutional mandates and their commitment to fostering inclusive, socially relevant teacher education. As teacher educator G summarized: “It’s a constant process of negotiation. We’re not always able to make radical changes, but we’re steadily pushing the boundaries, making our curricula more responsive to societal needs and student diversity.” (Teacher educator

G, in-depth interview, 2023). Third, cooperation among teacher educators, characterized by robust collaboration with like-minded educators and activists, has proven instrumental in building a supportive network that effectively promotes and sustains critical pedagogy.

Teacher educator M described the power of this cooperation: “We’ve formed a nationwide network of critical educators. This allows us to share resources, strategies, and moral support.” (Teacher educator M, in-depth interview, 2023). The critical educators’ network, comprising over 30 members from various institutions, maintains an active online community where educators discuss challenges and share success stories in implementing critical pedagogy. Classroom observations revealed the tangible impact of this cooperation. In a social studies methods course led by teacher educator B, student-teachers participated in a video conference with educators from three different provinces, discussing region-specific approaches to culturally responsive teaching in social studies. One participant, Nutda, reflected: “This collaboration opened my eyes to the diversity within our own country and how critical pedagogy can be adapted to different contexts.” (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator B, 2023).

The cooperative network extends beyond academia. Teacher educator K shared: “We’ve partnered with local NGOs and community organizations to create real-world classrooms for our student-teachers.” (Teacher educator K, in-depth interview, 2023). In a notable field experience, student-teachers collaborated with youth activists to develop a curriculum addressing psychological issues rooted in social trauma and collective suffering. This innovative approach exemplifies the synergy between educational psychology and critical pedagogy, demonstrating how theory-practice integration can be achieved through community engagement (Classroom Observation, Teacher educator K, 2023). These examples illustrate how cooperation and collaboration among teacher educators have created a powerful support system for promoting critical pedagogy. In this light, Nawarat, Nasee, Jatuporn & Sapphasuk (2022) summarized that this network gives them strength in numbers. Together, they’re reshaping teacher education in Thailand, fostering a new generation of critically conscious educators who are prepared to address social inequities through their teaching.

Additionally, empirical evidences from the research projects by Cooper & White (2007) and Servage (2008) respectively suggested that teacher educators who formed professional learning communities centered on critical pedagogy reported feeling more empowered and resilient in the face of institutional challenges. These dynamics highlight the complexities of implementing critical education theory in a system that often resists change. As observed in a longitudinal study by D’Andrea Martínez, Peoples & Martin (2023), critical educators engage in a constant dance of resistance and adaptation, finding spaces within the system to enact transformative practices. This echoes Giroux’s (2013) assertion that the struggle for critical pedagogy is not just about educational practices, but about the normative essence of democracy and social justice.

The findings revealed varying levels of sociopolitical consciousness among teacher educators, which influenced their understanding and implementation of critical pedagogy in their practice. Through analysis of interview data and classroom observations, three distinct typologies emerged in how teacher educators conceptualized and enacted critical approaches: critically blind, critically emerging, and critically conscious. These typologies reflect



different stages of development in educators’ critical consciousness and their ability to recognize, question, and address power dynamics within educational contexts. Table 2 thus presents a framework for understanding these different levels of sociopolitical consciousness, detailing how each type manifests in both theoretical understanding and practical implementation within teacher education programs. This typology helps illuminate the complex process of developing critical consciousness among teacher educators and the varied ways they navigate institutional constraints while working to implement transformative pedagogical practices.

Table 2. Teacher Educators’ Sociopolitical Consciousness

Typology	Critically blind	Critically emerging	Critically conscious
Working definition	Views teaching as politically neutral and focuses primarily on technical skills and content delivery. Accepts traditional hierarchical structures and standard practices without questioning underlying power dynamics.	Beginning to recognize social and political dimensions of education but may struggle to consistently integrate critical perspectives into practice. Shows growing awareness of systemic inequities but may be uncertain about addressing them.	Demonstrates deep understanding of education’s sociopolitical nature and actively works to address systemic inequities. Consistently integrates critical perspectives into teaching and actively challenges oppressive structures.
Pedagogical decisions and instructional practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes standardized teaching methods and assessment</li> <li>• Focuses on classroom management and technical skills</li> <li>• Follows prescribed curriculum without questioning</li> <li>• Avoids controversial topics and discussions about power</li> <li>• Views student diversity as a challenge to be managed</li> <li>• Prioritizes content coverage over critical engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiments with student-centered approaches</li> <li>• Occasionally incorporates discussions of social issues</li> <li>• Questions some traditional practices while maintaining others</li> <li>• Shows interest in culturally responsive teaching but may lack confidence</li> <li>• Attempts to include diverse perspectives but may do so superficially</li> <li>• Balances critical approaches with institutional requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently implements democratic and dialogic teaching methods</li> <li>• Actively incorporates social justice issues into curriculum</li> <li>• Encourages critical analysis of power structures</li> <li>• Develops culturally responsive pedagogies and conceptualizes them to a more nuanced form of culturally sustaining pedagogies</li> <li>• Centers student voice and community knowledge</li> <li>• Challenges institutional constraints while working within them</li> <li>• Engages in continuous critical reflection on practice</li> </ul>

**Note:** Based on analysis of interview data and classroom observations from 15 teacher educators in Thailand’s teacher education programs. The typology represents a spectrum rather than fixed categories, with educators potentially demonstrating different levels of consciousness across various aspects of their practice.

## **Conclusion**

The praxis of critical education theory among teacher educators in Thailand presents a compelling framework for understanding and advancing contemporary education reform. This approach aligns with Freire's (1998) conception of conscientization, which emphasizes the enhancement of critical consciousness through education. By reconceptualizing teacherness - a term that echoes Giroux's (1988) notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals - engaging in knowledge production, and fostering critical reflection, teacher educators can contribute to the construction of an inclusive, socially engaged education system. This aligns with Apple's (2013) call for democratic education that challenges hegemonic structures.

The normative model presented in this research provides a roadmap for implementing critical pedagogy in teacher education, emphasizing the importance of contestation, negotiation, and cooperation. This model resonates with hooks' (1994) concept of engaged pedagogy, which advocates for holistic approaches to teaching and learning. As Thailand continues to grapple with education reform, critical pedagogy offers a vision of education that prioritizes human development, social justice, and transformative learning - key principles articulated by McLaren (2010) in his work on revolutionary critical pedagogy.

Teacher educators, as agents of change, have a unique opportunity to shape this vision and advocate for an education system that empowers learners and challenges oppressive conditions. This role aligns with the conception of social justice teacher education, which emphasizes the socio-cultural, political and moral dimensions of teaching. By adopting these critical approaches, Thai teacher educators can enhance to a more equitable and transformative educational system, one that reflects Noddings' (2013) ethic of care and responds to the unique socio-cultural, political and historical context of Thailand.

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