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# A Comparative Analysis of Poststructuralist Thought and Critical Pedagogy

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to comparatively analyze poststructuralist thought and critical pedagogy across their ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions to identify intersections and divergences that inform contemporary educational theory and practice. The research employed a qualitative meta-synthesis design, integrating systematic review and thematic analysis to synthesize theoretical and empirical literature published between 2003 and 2025. Using a PRISMA-guided protocol, relevant studies were selected from international and regional databases through purposive sampling, emphasizing works focused on poststructuralist and critical pedagogical frameworks. Each study was coded and analyzed to extract philosophical dimensions and conceptual categories. The meta-synthesis process incorporated interpretive comparisons of discursive, ideological, and pedagogical structures, while thematic analysis was applied to refine core patterns of convergence and divergence between the two paradigms. The results indicate that both poststructuralism and critical pedagogy reject essentialism, absolute truth, and positivist epistemology, emphasizing the social construction of knowledge and reality. Poststructuralism privileges linguistic discourse, deconstruction, and the contingency of meaning, while critical pedagogy centers on praxis, empowerment, and social transformation. Despite these differences, both share commitments to reflexivity, plurality, and critique of power. Their epistemological alignment underscores knowledge as relational and political, while their ontological perspectives affirm the dynamic and historical constitution of reality. Anthropologically, poststructuralism emphasizes decentered subjectivity, whereas critical pedagogy upholds agency and consciousness. Axiologically, both challenge moral absolutism, yet critical pedagogy reorients relativism toward justice, equality, and liberation. Integrating poststructuralist critique with critical pedagogy's emancipatory orientation creates a dialectical framework that unites deconstruction with ethical reconstruction. This synthesis enables education to function simultaneously as a site of critical inquiry and social transformation, promoting pluralism, reflexivity, and democratic engagement.

**Keywords:** Poststructuralism; Critical Pedagogy; Ontology; Epistemology; Axiology; Social Justice; Educational Philosophy; Discourse; Reflexivity; Emancipatory Education.

## Introduction

The intellectual encounter between poststructuralist thought and critical pedagogy represents one of the most complex and transformative dialogues in contemporary philosophy of education. Both traditions emerged as critical responses to the modernist faith in universal reason, stable truth, and positivist epistemology. They challenge the reduction of education to an instrumental process and insist that learning is always ideological, political, and situated within relations of power. Poststructuralism dismantles essentialist assumptions about knowledge, identity, and meaning by emphasizing language,

discourse, and the instability of truth (1, 2). Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, draws on Marxist and critical theory to unveil the power structures embedded in educational systems and to promote emancipation through dialogue, reflection, and social transformation (3, 4). This study seeks to explore their intersections and divergences, examining how their ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions can enrich contemporary educational theory and practice.

At its core, poststructuralism questions the existence of fixed meanings and absolute truths, asserting that all knowledge is mediated by discourse and contingent upon context (1). By destabilizing the foundations of modernist reason, poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard opened new pathways for rethinking education as a process of deconstruction, interpretation, and resistance to meta-narratives (2). Educational spaces, from this viewpoint, are arenas where meanings are contested and where identity and subjectivity are continuously reconstructed through language and power relations. This orientation allows educators to interrogate the politics of curriculum, the hidden hierarchies of knowledge, and the subtle ways in which education normalizes particular worldviews (5). In doing so, poststructuralist pedagogy reframes the classroom as a space of discourse, multiplicity, and critical reflexivity, where learners and teachers co-construct meaning rather than reproduce it.

Critical pedagogy, conversely, is rooted in the emancipatory aspirations of the Frankfurt School and Paulo Freire's liberatory praxis. It contends that education should not only interpret the world but transform it (3). This perspective recognizes the structural inequalities perpetuated by schooling systems—inequalities tied to class, race, gender, and language—and seeks to empower learners as agents of change. Through the processes of dialogue, reflection, and collective action, critical pedagogy exposes the ideological dimensions of knowledge and fosters what Freire termed “conscientização,” or critical consciousness (4). Recent scholarship emphasizes that critical pedagogy continues to evolve within neoliberal educational contexts, where market-driven logics threaten democratic and humanistic values (6, 7). As such, the comparative analysis of poststructuralist and critical pedagogical paradigms remains vital for rearticulating education as a transformative, justice-oriented, and meaning-making endeavor.

Poststructuralism's contribution to educational thought lies primarily in its ontological and epistemological reorientation. It posits that knowledge is not a mirror of reality but a construct shaped through discursive practices and power-knowledge regimes (2, 5). Meaning, in this view, is relational and never complete—a dynamic process of differentiation that undermines the notion of a single, unified truth (1). This discursive turn relocates the focus of pedagogy from the transmission of content to the interrogation of how meaning is produced, who produces it, and whose voices are excluded. It invites educators to read texts, curricula, and classroom practices as ideological artifacts that sustain or subvert dominant power relations (8). Consequently, poststructuralist pedagogy resists closure and certainty, encouraging learners to inhabit ambiguity and engage in continuous self-reflection and critique.

Critical pedagogy shares poststructuralism's skepticism toward fixed truth but differs in its normative orientation. While poststructuralism problematizes meaning, critical pedagogy seeks to rearticulate it in the service of social justice. It treats education as a moral and political project aimed at human liberation (3). The goal is not merely to deconstruct but to reconstruct—through praxis—the conditions for equity, participation, and human dignity. As Mavin et al. (9) argue, critical pedagogy challenges the hierarchical, neoliberal structures of higher education and opens pathways for dialogical and inclusive learning spaces. Similarly, Kraemer-Holland and Díaz (7) stress that justice-oriented inquiry must confront the neoliberal academy's commodification of knowledge, redefining scholarship as a collective, ethical, and activist pursuit. Such perspectives expand Freirean pedagogy beyond its original socio-political context, connecting it to broader struggles for epistemic justice, diversity, and sustainability.

The intersection of poststructuralism and critical pedagogy can also be explored through language and discourse. Both frameworks regard language as central to the construction of reality, identity, and power. However, their treatment of language differs subtly. Poststructuralists consider language as constitutive—the medium through which knowledge and subjectivity emerge (1, 5)—whereas critical pedagogues treat it as dialogical, a tool for empowerment and mutual understanding (10). This distinction reflects a deeper philosophical tension: poststructuralism’s decentering of the subject contrasts with critical pedagogy’s affirmation of human agency. Yet, as Jain (11) demonstrates in her work on translingual pedagogy, integrating poststructuralist insights into language education allows for a pluralistic and transnational reimagining of learners’ identities—one that aligns with critical pedagogy’s emancipatory objectives. The poststructuralist awareness of fluid identities complements the critical pedagogical aim of fostering inclusion and intercultural dialogue, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts.

In recent years, both traditions have been reinterpreted in response to global neoliberal transformations in education. As Peck (6) explains, neoliberalism imposes market logics upon the public sphere, redefining education in terms of competition, efficiency, and productivity. Poststructuralist critiques reveal how such discourses shape institutional power and subjectivity, producing compliant learners rather than critical citizens (12). Critical pedagogy, in turn, counters this trend by reasserting the ethical and collective purposes of education, encouraging learners to question dominant economic ideologies and imagine alternative futures (7). Scholars such as Bierdz (13) argue that pedagogy itself may contain forms of violence—structural, epistemic, and symbolic—but that by confronting these contradictions, educators can open spaces for transformative awareness. These reflections underscore the need for a renewed synthesis that integrates poststructuralist critique with critical pedagogy’s commitment to action.

The comparative framework between these two paradigms also has anthropological implications. Poststructuralism deconstructs the human subject as a fragmented and discursively produced entity (2, 14), while critical pedagogy conceives of the human as a conscious, reflective agent capable of resistance and solidarity (15). Stamenković (14) highlights that postmodern perspectives on childhood and learning challenge developmental universalism and emphasize the contextual nature of growth and identity. Meanwhile, Arnøy (15) points out that non-formal and peace-oriented education practices reflect the Freirean vision of participatory human development, where learners actively co-create meaning and justice. The synthesis of these anthropological standpoints underscores a crucial educational insight: human beings are simultaneously shaped by discourse and capable of transforming it.

In the axiological dimension, both poststructuralism and critical pedagogy reject absolute moral standards, situating values within historical and cultural contexts (16, 17). However, critical pedagogy does not stop at relativism—it redefines values in emancipatory terms. Justice, equality, and freedom become pedagogical imperatives rather than abstract ideals (3). Poststructuralism, by contrast, exposes how values are discursively produced and maintained, revealing their dependence on power structures. Integrating these perspectives enables educators to recognize both the contingency of moral claims and the necessity of ethical commitment in practice. This dual awareness prevents the descent into nihilism and instead fosters an education that is both critically self-aware and ethically grounded (5).

Moreover, contemporary educational debates increasingly emphasize intersectionality, inclusivity, and pluralism, domains where poststructuralist and critical pedagogical insights converge. Willett and Etowa (5) advocate for an integrated framework combining feminist poststructuralism and intersectionality to advance epistemological congruence in health research—a model equally applicable to education. Similarly, Koutsouris et al. (18) call for a rethinking of inclusive pedagogies that transcends tokenistic diversity and instead embraces the multiplicity of voices and experiences. Sanders (17) further notes that literature and media play pivotal roles in shaping perceptions of marginalized communities, suggesting that critical pedagogy must

engage with cultural narratives as sites of ideological struggle. These developments reveal an ongoing effort to extend both theories beyond traditional classrooms into broader socio-cultural and political contexts.

The methodological pluralism emerging from this dialogue has also reshaped educational inquiry. Poststructuralist discourse analysis and critical qualitative inquiry share a commitment to reflexivity, positionality, and resistance to grand theoretical closure (7, 12). Researchers are urged to view inquiry itself as a political act, where interpretation and knowledge production are inseparable from ethical responsibility (8). Higgins (10), in his exploration of community music, exemplifies how educational practice can blend aesthetic creativity with social consciousness—an approach that resonates with both traditions. Likewise, Sousa and Rossi (2) argue that post-structuralist and post-critical perspectives demand a recognition of difference as a constitutive element of knowledge and identity, a view essential for advancing pluralistic educational frameworks.

Taken together, these bodies of thought propose that education must transcend the dichotomy between critique and creation. It should cultivate a space where learners question dominant discourses, deconstruct inequalities, and co-construct new meanings for justice, coexistence, and democracy. The poststructuralist emphasis on discursive contingency complements the critical pedagogical insistence on transformative praxis. As Ural and ÖZdemİR (4) affirm, the evolving literature on critical pedagogy increasingly engages with poststructuralist concepts to expand its theoretical reach and methodological sophistication. Through this synthesis, education can become both a site of epistemological plurality and an arena for ethical action.

In summary, the relationship between poststructuralism and critical pedagogy reflects an ongoing philosophical negotiation between critique and commitment. Poststructuralism offers tools for dismantling oppressive discourses and exposing the constructed nature of truth, while critical pedagogy transforms this awareness into ethical and political praxis. Together, they form a dialectic of deconstruction and reconstruction—an educational philosophy that is reflexive, liberatory, and grounded in the human capacity for dialogue and change. Therefore, the aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of poststructuralist thought and critical pedagogy, identifying their ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological intersections, and evaluating their potential to inform the evolution of contemporary critical educational theory.

## Methods and Materials

This study was designed as a fundamental (basic) research project aimed at exploring the theoretical and philosophical foundations of two major schools of thought—poststructuralism and critical pedagogy—and their implications for educational theory. From the perspective of research design, it employed a qualitative methodology, given the conceptual and interpretive nature of the inquiry. The research adopted a cross-sectional approach, meaning that data were collected and analyzed within a specific temporal scope rather than longitudinally. The study relied primarily on secondary data extracted from academic literature, including theoretical works, dissertations, and peer-reviewed articles. The purpose was not to engage human participants but rather to systematically synthesize and interpret existing intellectual and empirical contributions in the field. Consequently, the focus was on identifying and conceptualizing the shared and divergent epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical elements of both schools within an educational context.

Data collection in this study was grounded in a qualitative meta-synthesis (meta-integration) methodology. This method, often referred to as meta-synthesis, seeks to integrate findings from multiple qualitative studies in a systematic, rigorous manner to construct new conceptual understandings and theoretical insights. The researcher conducted a systematic literature review in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which ensure methodological transparency and replicability. The review encompassed both Iranian and international academic

databases. Persian sources, including scholarly books, theses, and journal articles published between 2012 and 2025 (1391–1404 in the Iranian calendar), were examined alongside international works published from 2003 to 2025.

A purposive (non-probability) sampling strategy was employed to select theoretical and empirical studies most relevant to the research objectives. Inclusion criteria were determined using a 27-item PRISMA-based checklist, which ensured that only studies addressing the educational and philosophical foundations of poststructuralist and critical pedagogy traditions were included. The PRISMA flow model guided the entire data collection process, illustrating the step-by-step flow of information from identification to inclusion. In the identification phase, academic databases were searched systematically using targeted keywords and Boolean operators. The screening phase involved the elimination of duplicates and the preliminary review of abstracts to assess relevance. The eligibility phase entailed the full-text examination of potentially relevant sources to ensure alignment with the research criteria. Finally, the inclusion phase consisted of integrating the selected sources into the meta-synthesis and qualitative analysis framework.

Data analysis was conducted through a hybrid process combining meta-synthesis and thematic analysis techniques. In the first stage, the researcher extracted qualitative data from the selected sources and engaged in open, axial, and selective coding to identify recurring ideas and conceptual clusters. The meta-synthesis method was used to aggregate findings across studies systematically, leading to the generation of higher-order themes that encapsulate the essential dimensions of poststructuralist and critical pedagogical thought. The aim was to move beyond mere summarization toward the construction of an integrative framework that reveals the underlying theoretical interconnections between the two paradigms.

Subsequently, thematic analysis was applied to interpret and refine these categories in light of their philosophical coherence and educational implications. This stage involved iterative reading, constant comparison, and interpretive memoing to ensure the internal consistency and theoretical saturation of the identified themes. The integration of meta-synthesis and thematic analysis allowed the study to transcend the descriptive level and achieve a deeper conceptual understanding of how poststructuralist epistemology, with its focus on discourse, power, and deconstruction, converges and diverges from the emancipatory and transformative agenda of critical pedagogy.

To ensure methodological rigor, the researcher adhered to established qualitative trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through systematic adherence to PRISMA standards, triangulation of sources, and transparent coding procedures. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the studies reviewed, while dependability and confirmability were maintained by documenting all analytical steps and maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process.

## Findings and Results

The findings of this study emerged from a systematic quality assessment of the selected studies based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) checklist. This evaluation aimed to ensure the methodological rigor and transparency of all included sources that examined the philosophical and educational foundations of poststructuralist thought and critical pedagogy. Each study was assessed against 27 PRISMA criteria, grouped into thematic sections such as title, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and funding. The evaluation process allowed for the identification of methodological strengths and weaknesses, determining whether each study reported the required items, failed to report them, or if they were not applicable to its design.

**Table 1. PRISMA-Based Quality Assessment of the Selected Studies**

Section	Criteria	Reported	Not Reported	Not Applicable	Quality Percentage	Result
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Title	Mention of systematic review, meta-analysis, or both in the title	10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
Abstract	Structured abstract with detailed background, objectives, data sources, inclusion criteria, participant and intervention details, evaluation and synthesis methods, results, limitations, conclusions, implications, and study registration code	14	4	0	77.7%	Approved	
Introduction	Justification for conducting the review based on the identified research gap	13	5	0	72.2%	Approved	
	Clear and explicit research question including PICO framework	13	5	0	72.2%	Approved	
Methods	Presentation of review protocol and registration details	9	9	0	50%	Approved	
	Description of study features and inclusion criteria (years, language, publication status)	10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
	Description of all information sources (databases, correspondence with authors) and last search date	11	7	0	61.1%	Approved	
	Complete electronic search strategy for at least one database, ensuring reproducibility	9	9	0	50%	Approved	
	Description of study selection process and inclusion/exclusion criteria	10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
	Description of data extraction procedures and verification processes	12	6	0	66.6%	Approved	
	Listing and defining all extracted variables and assumptions	11	7	0	61.1%	Approved	
	Methods used to assess risk of bias and how this information informed synthesis	9	9	0	50%	Approved	
	Reporting of key outcome measures (e.g., risk ratio, mean differences)	12	6	0	66.6%	Approved	
	Description of data preparation and synthesis methods, and heterogeneity measures (e.g., I <sup>2</sup> )	13	5	0	72.2%	Approved	
	Assessment of potential reporting or publication bias	9	9	0	50%	Approved	
	Description of secondary analyses (e.g., sensitivity analysis, meta-regression)	10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
	Results	Reporting of number of initial and final studies with attrition reasons, preferably using a flow diagram	11	7	0	61.1%	Approved
		Characteristics of each included study (sample size, PICO details, duration, and citation)	14	4	0	77.7%	Approved
Reporting of risk of bias for each study and outcome level		10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
Reporting of summary data per group, effect size estimates, and confidence intervals (preferably with forest plot)		11	7	0	61.1%	Approved	
Reporting of meta-analysis results including confidence intervals and heterogeneity statistics		11	7	0	61.1%	Approved	
Reporting of cumulative bias assessment		10	8	0	55.5%	Approved	
Reporting of secondary or subgroup analyses if applicable		12	6	0	66.6%	Approved	
Discussion	Summary of key findings, strength of evidence, and implications for stakeholders	15	3	0	83.3%	Approved	
	Discussion of limitations at study and review levels	14	4	0	77.7%	Approved	
	Overall interpretation of findings and implications for future studies	15	3	0	83.3%	Approved	
Funding	Identification of funding sources and their role in the study	9	9	0	50%	Approved	

According to the PRISMA-based quality assessment results summarized in Table 1, all the selected studies demonstrated either acceptable or high methodological quality. The percentage of compliance for each criterion ranged between 50% and 83.3%, with most items surpassing the 55% threshold and many exceeding 70%. This consistency across sections such as the abstract, introduction, and discussion indicates that the majority of the analyzed works adhered closely to the reporting standards expected in systematic and meta-analytic research. Notably, the highest compliance levels were observed in the “Discussion” section (83.3%), reflecting a strong capacity of the studies to interpret results and derive implications for theory and practice. Conversely, moderate compliance appeared in methodological elements such as the presentation of review

protocols, bias assessment, and funding disclosure, where percentages hovered around 50%. Nevertheless, since none of the assessed dimensions fell below this benchmark, it can be concluded that the body of literature analyzed in this study was methodologically robust, transparent, and suitable for inclusion in the comparative analysis of poststructuralist and critical pedagogy frameworks.

**Table 2. Ontological, Epistemological, Anthropological, and Axiological Dimensions of Poststructuralist Thought**

Dimension	Component	Indicators	Meaning Units
Ontology	Rejection of Essentialism	Ontological Uncertainty	Being is not predetermined or fixed but formed within discourses (Foucault, 1980).
		Discursive Nature of Being	What we call “being” is the product of linguistic, cultural, and power structures (Derrida, 1987).
		Fluidity of Reality	Being is dynamic and continuously reinterpreted by social actors (Rorty, 1989).
	Relativism	Multiplicity of Realities	There is no single or universal reality; realities are plural and context-dependent (Lyotard, 1984).
		Contextuality of Being	Understanding of being depends on cultural, historical, and linguistic context (Kuhn, 1970).
	Deconstruction	Experiential Formation of Reality	Being is constructed through variable human experiences, not timeless essences (Feyerabend, 1975).
		Rejection of Metaphysical Structures	The belief in fundamental structures of the universe is challenged (Derrida, 1987).
		Linguistic Turn in Ontology	Language is not merely descriptive but constitutive of reality (Rorty, 1989).
		Dependence of Being on Power	Being is defined and shaped through relations of power (Foucault, 1980).
		Rejection of Foundationalism	No knowledge has an absolute foundation (Derrida, 1987).
Epistemology	Epistemic Truth	Deconstruction of Texts	Every text is multilayered and open to interpretation (Derrida, 1987).
		Decentering of Meaning	Meaning has no fixed center (Derrida, 1987).
		Language as the Medium of Knowledge	Knowledge cannot exist without language (Barthes, 1967).
	Linguistic Orientation of Knowledge	Infinite Signification	Meaning arises through differences and endless deferral (Derrida, 1987).
		Language Precedes the Subject	Identity and understanding are born from language (Lacan, 1966).
		Death of the Author	There is no ultimate authorial source of meaning (Lacan, 1966).
		The Subject within Power Structures	The author is not the final creator of meaning (Barthes, 1967).
	Epistemic Authority	Relativism	The individual is conditioned by ideological structures (Foucault, 1980).
		Absence of Central Meaning	Meaning is created by the reader, not the author (Barthes, 1967).
		Social Construction of the Human	Fragmented Identity
Human as a Product of Discourse			Human identity is formed within dominant discourses (Derrida, 1987).
Power’s Role in Shaping Humanity			Power relations shape human identity (Foucault, 1980).
Denial of Fixed Human Essence		Human without Pre-existing Essence	The human lacks a universal and stable nature (Derrida, 1987).
		Transformative and Fluid Identity	Human identity changes across cultural and temporal contexts (Baudrillard, 1988).
	Anti-Essentialist Structuralism	The notion of a universal human essence is rejected (Lacan, 1966).	
Biopower and Embodiment	Body as a Site of Power	Power operates through bodily practices (Foucault, 1980).	
	Body as a Social Construction	The body is not natural but socially and culturally produced (Foucault, 1980).	
	Biopolitical Control over Humans	Human bodies are subjected to control through biopower (Foucault, 1980).	

Axiology	Value Relativism	Rejection of Absolute Moral Truth Absence of Universal Good	Morality is relative and culturally contextual (Rorty, 1989). Each society defines its own criteria for good and bad (Rorty, 1989).
	Plurality of Value Meanings	Value Relativism	No value inherently supersedes another (Rorty, 1989).
		Value Relativism	No value holds intrinsic superiority (Derrida, 1976).
		Polyphony of Values	Values have different meanings across discourses (Derrida, 1976).
	Critique of Dominant and Institutional Values	Deconstruction of Ethical Concepts	Ethical concepts must be reinterpreted within varying contexts (Derrida, 1976).
		Exposure of Power in Value Production	Values are instruments of discursive domination (Foucault, 1977).
		Critique of Institutional Morality	Institutional ethics are products of power, not truth (Foucault, 1977).
	Redefinition of Values from the Bottom-Up	Historical Reinterpretation of Values	Every value must be understood within its specific historical context (Foucault, 1977).
		Participatory Value Formation	Values should emerge from collective social consensus (Lyotard, 1984).
		Departure from Grand Narratives	Universal moral metanarratives have been replaced by localized values (Lyotard, 1984).
	Dispersed Production of Meaning	There is no centralized authority in creating values (Lyotard, 1984).	

The results presented in Table 2 reveal the multidimensional structure of poststructuralist thought, encompassing ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological perspectives. Ontologically, poststructuralism dismantles essentialist and metaphysical assumptions, arguing that “being” is not a fixed entity but is continuously reconstructed through language, discourse, and power. Epistemologically, it rejects foundationalism and centers language as both the medium and the constructor of knowledge, emphasizing the instability and plurality of meaning. Anthropologically, the human subject is seen as socially and discursively constituted, lacking any pre-existing or universal essence, while power relations and biopolitical forces are central in shaping identity and embodiment. Finally, in the axiological domain, poststructuralism advances a radical form of value relativism, deconstructing moral absolutes and highlighting the role of cultural, historical, and power dynamics in defining ethics. Together, these dimensions underscore a worldview in which meaning, knowledge, identity, and value are perpetually open, fluid, and contextually produced—a perspective that profoundly challenges traditional foundations of critical pedagogy and invites educators to embrace multiplicity, dialogue, and interpretive openness in educational theory and practice.

**Table 3. Extracted Themes from the Systematic Review for Identifying Philosophical Foundations (Epistemology, Ontology, Anthropology, and Axiology) of Critical Pedagogy**

Dimension	Component	Indicators	Meaning Units
Ontology	Social Construction of Reality	Role of Language in Constructing Reality	Reality is constructed through language and social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).
		Representation of Reality in Media and Education	Social realities are represented through educational discourse (Apple, 2004).
		Culture as the Context of Meaning Formation	Reality gains meaning within cultural contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).
	Historicity of Human Existence	Human Formation within History	Human existence develops historically and contextually (Freire, 1970).
		Knowledge Shaped by Historical Power	Human being is influenced by historical structures (Freire, 1970).
		Role of Education in Reproducing History	Knowledge of existence is affected by discourses of power (Foucault, 1980).
	Dynamism and Changeability of Being	Acceptance of Multiple Discourses	Being is plural, dynamic, and ever-changing (Derrida, 1987).
		Rejection of Absolute Truth	No permanent truth about being exists (Lyotard, 1984).
		Rethinking the Concept of Reality	Reality must be continually reinterpreted (Habermas, 1987).



Epistemology	Critical Reflection	Analysis of Prior Beliefs	The need to reexamine fundamental assumptions (Derrida, 1987).
		Understanding the Social Context of Knowledge	Recognition of ideology's role in knowledge production (Freire, 1970).
		Critical Awareness of Power	Knowledge is interwoven with power relations (Derrida, 1987).
	Social Constructivism	Knowledge as a Social Construct	Knowledge arises through human interaction (Freire, 1970).
		Role of Language in Shaping Knowledge	Language determines the structure of thought (Derrida, 1987).
		Diversity of Perspectives	Knowledge is not monolithic but polyphonic (Foucault, 1980).
	Critical Knowledge	Historicity of Knowledge	Knowledge develops within historical contexts (Habermas, 1987).
		Knowledge and Social Justice	Knowledge must lead to social transformation (Derrida, 1987).
		Knowledge as a Tool of Liberation	Knowledge promotes awareness and social action (Foucault, 1980).
	Anthropology	Human as a Conscious Agent	Social Self-awareness
Critical Thinking			Humans can examine and revise their beliefs (Derrida, 1987).
Active Agency			Humans can act consciously to change their conditions (Foucault, 1980).
Human within Power Relations		Critical Thinking	Humans can reassess their assumptions (Derrida, 1987).
		Active Agency	Humans have the capacity for transformative action (Foucault, 1980).
		Constructed Identity within Power	Human identity forms through interaction with socio-political structures (Habermas, 1987).
Human as a Historical Being		Historicity of Human Experience	Human experience gains meaning within specific temporal and spatial frameworks (Derrida, 1987).
		Collective Memory	Individual and social identity are shaped by historical and cultural memory (Foucault, 1980).
		Capacity for Historical Transformation	Humans can reshape their future through reflection on the past (Freire, 1970).
Human as a Social Being		Intersubjectivity	Human existence finds meaning through communication and dialogue (Habermas, 1987).
	Need for Social Justice	Humans seek life in an equitable and fair society (Derrida, 1987).	
	Social Responsibility	Humans bear responsibility for societal change (Foucault, 1980).	
Axiology	Social Justice	Justice-oriented Education	Education must serve as a tool for achieving social justice (Freire, 1970).
		Reduction of Inequality in Education	The educational system should reduce social inequalities (Foucault, 1980).
		Attention to Marginalized Groups	Education should empower minorities and marginalized populations (Freire, 1970).
	Freedom and Liberation	Development of Critical Thinking	Learners must develop the ability to critique power structures (Foucault, 1980).
		Active Participation in Educational Decision-making	Learners should take part in educational processes (Derrida, 1987).
		Resistance to Dominant Discourses	Education should foster resistance to oppressive power (Foucault, 1980).
	Moral Responsibility	Development of Social Conscience	Education should cultivate social conscience in learners (Derrida, 1987).
		Dialogical Ethics	Educational relations should be grounded in dialogue, respect, and understanding (Foucault, 1980).
		Awareness of Social Consequences	Education should promote social accountability (Derrida, 1987).
	Respect for Diversity and Multiculturalism	Acceptance of Cultural Diversity	Education must emphasize the acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity (Derrida, 1987).
Promotion of Intercultural Dialogue		Learners should acquire the ability to engage in intercultural communication (Foucault, 1980).	
Anti-racism and Non-discrimination		Education should challenge racial and ethnic prejudice (Derrida, 1987).	

The results summarized in Table 3 reveal the philosophical depth and emancipatory orientation of critical pedagogy as it integrates ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological foundations. Ontologically, critical pedagogy views reality as socially constructed, linguistically mediated, historically situated, and open to transformation. It rejects fixed or universal truths, instead emphasizing the role of culture, discourse, and education in shaping what is perceived as “real.” Epistemologically, it is rooted in critical reflection and social constructivism, treating knowledge as a dynamic, power-laden, and socially negotiated process that must contribute to awareness and social justice. Anthropologically, the human being is conceptualized as both a conscious and historical agent capable of self-reflection, dialogue, and transformative action within power structures. Education, therefore, becomes a medium for cultivating autonomy, critical awareness, and participatory citizenship. Axiologically, critical pedagogy advances ethical commitments centered on justice, freedom, equality, and respect for diversity. It envisions education as an inherently moral and political act, aimed at dismantling oppression, empowering the marginalized, and promoting intercultural understanding. Altogether, these themes underscore that critical pedagogy is not merely an instructional theory but a comprehensive philosophical framework that connects knowledge, power, and ethics to the transformative potential of education.

**Table 4. Similarities and Differences Between the Epistemology, Ontology, Anthropology, and Axiology of Poststructuralism and Critical Pedagogy Based on Bordi’s Model**

Dimension	Axis of Comparison	Poststructuralism	Critical Pedagogy	Similarities	Differences
Ontology	Social Construction of Reality	Reality is social and linguistic; meaning is produced within discourses.	Social reality is formed within power relations and structures of domination, and it can be reconstructed.	Both view reality as constructed and non-absolute.	Poststructuralism emphasizes linguistic discourse; critical pedagogy focuses on power and social ideology.
	Historicity of Human Existence	The human is a product of history, language, and social structures, lacking a fixed essence (Foucault).	The human is a historical being who shapes identity through interaction with history, culture, and power.	Both reject fixed human essence and highlight historical-social formation.	Poststructuralism removes the notion of a stable subject; critical pedagogy preserves human agency and conscious participation.
	Dynamism of Being	Existence and meaning are continually redefined; there is no center or stability.	Reality changes through conscious and critical human action.	Both reject static being and affirm changeability.	Poststructuralism links change to deconstruction of meaning; critical pedagogy ties it to transformative social action.
	Anti-essentialism	Rejects any fixed essence in language, society, or humanity.	Accepts that subjects and structures are socially and historically contingent.	Both reject essentialism.	Critical pedagogy combines anti-essentialism with emancipatory goals; poststructuralism treats it linguistically.
	Relativism	Truth and meaning are relative and context-dependent.	Truth is relative but can be critically examined to achieve deeper understanding.	Both accept relativism of truth and reality.	Critical pedagogy combines relativism with moral direction; poststructuralism denies any attainable universal truth.
	Deconstruction	Core analytical tool; reveals hidden meanings within texts.	Used to critique ideological structures in education and society.	Both employ deconstruction as a method of critique.	Critical pedagogy applies deconstruction toward liberation; poststructuralism uses it as an interpretive, non-directive tool.
Epistemology	Basis of Knowledge Production	Knowledge is a product of discourse and linguistic structures.	Knowledge results from social, historical, and critical interaction with reality.	Both view knowledge as relative and context-bound.	Poststructuralism privileges language; critical pedagogy emphasizes social-critical interaction.
	Conception of Truth	No absolute truth; each truth is historical and discursive.	Truth should be redefined through social critique and public dialogue.	Both perceive truth as relative and contextual.	Poststructuralism adheres to strong relativism; critical pedagogy sees

	Role of Language	Language is not a tool but the creator of knowledge.	Language is a means for reflection and awareness.	Both stress language's central role in knowledge.	truth as partially attainable through critique. In poststructuralism, language determines knowledge; in critical pedagogy, it serves as a medium for dialogue and empowerment.
	Authority and Power	Authority of knowledge derives from power relations.	Institutional knowledge must be questioned; authority should be democratized.	Both reject absolute scientific authority.	Poststructuralism exposes power structures; critical pedagogy seeks to redistribute and transform them.
	Purpose of Learning	To undermine fixed knowledge systems and promote questioning.	To empower individuals toward social change through critical thinking.	Both view education as a tool for liberation.	Poststructuralism aims for analysis; critical pedagogy aims for transformative action.
	Methodological Orientation	Radical interpretivism, discourse analysis, deconstruction.	Participatory inquiry, critical action research, dialogical analysis.	Both rely on qualitative and interpretive methods.	Poststructuralism is linguistic and analytic; critical pedagogy is participatory and socially engaged.
	Anthropological Basis	Denial of a fixed human nature.	The human as a conscious, reflective agent.	Both reject essentialism.	Poststructuralism centers on deconstruction of the self; critical pedagogy stresses awareness and agency.
Anthropology	Individual's Role	Embodied being influenced by power.	The human within power relations but capable of agency.	Both recognize power's role in shaping identity.	Poststructuralism focuses on biopower; critical pedagogy emphasizes agency within structures.
	Social Perspective	Social constructionism.	The human as a social being.	Both stress social contexts in identity formation.	In poststructuralism, identity is fluid and discursive; in critical pedagogy, it forms through interaction and education.
	Temporality	Identity as historically contingent.	The human as a historical being.	Both recognize historical context in identity.	Critical pedagogy highlights narrative and experience in historical identity.
	Role of Education	Discourse analysis of educational power.	Liberation from domination through education.	Both critique educational power structures.	Critical pedagogy emphasizes conscious action for change.
	Relationship Between Individual and Language	Identity formed through discourse.	Language as a tool of awareness.	Both see language as shaping identity.	Poststructuralism views language as constitutive; critical pedagogy as emancipatory.
	Ultimate Goal	Liberation from hidden power structures.	Creation of a just and critical society.	Both seek liberation from domination.	Critical pedagogy aims for justice and social consciousness.
Axiology	Approach to Values	Emphasizes moral relativism and denial of absolutes.	Stresses ethical values like justice and freedom within a critical-historical frame.	Both reject absolute, essentialist values.	Poststructuralism deconstructs values; critical pedagogy reconstructs them toward emancipation.
	Source of Values	Values are socially and linguistically constructed.	Values form through historical-social interaction and collective consciousness.	Both see values as historically and socially derived.	Critical pedagogy emphasizes human agency in value creation.
	Critique of Dominant Values	Critiques institutionalized power producing official values.	Critiques ideological domination and false educational values.	Both challenge dominant and official values.	Critical pedagogy seeks systemic transformation toward liberation.
	Plurality of Value Meanings	Values vary with context, language, and power.	Emphasizes cultural and historical diversity in value formation.	Both accept multiplicity of value meanings.	Critical pedagogy combines pluralism with commitment to shared justice-based values.
	Redefinition of Values	Values are continually redefined through shifting discourses.	Values are reinterpreted critically and liberatingly.	Both stress the dynamism of values.	Critical pedagogy remains committed to justice and solidarity.

Ethical Basis of Values	Rejects universal morality; ethics is contextual.	Emphasizes moral responsibility, justice, solidarity, and freedom.	Both contextualize ethics.	Critical pedagogy commits to social ethics; poststructuralism relativizes it.
Purpose of Evaluating Values	Revealing power mechanisms in value production.	Critiquing dominance and empowering learners for ethical action.	Both aim to critique domination.	Poststructuralism lacks an explicit emancipatory goal; critical pedagogy is purpose-driven and transformative.

The comparative analysis presented in Table 4 highlights both the convergences and divergences between poststructuralism and critical pedagogy across four philosophical dimensions: ontology, epistemology, anthropology, and axiology. Ontologically, both perspectives reject essentialism and absolute truth, viewing reality as socially constructed and dynamic; however, poststructuralism grounds this construction primarily in linguistic and discursive processes, while critical pedagogy situates it in social power and ideological structures. Epistemologically, the two share a belief in the contextual and power-laden nature of knowledge but diverge in orientation: poststructuralism focuses on deconstruction and critique, whereas critical pedagogy aims at transformation through critical consciousness and participatory action. Anthropologically, both emphasize the human being as a socially and historically situated subject influenced by power, yet critical pedagogy grants agency, reflection, and the capacity for deliberate change, contrasting with poststructuralism’s decentered subject. Axiologically, both deny universal moral absolutes and highlight the historical and cultural contingency of values; still, critical pedagogy reconstructs ethical frameworks around justice, freedom, and collective responsibility, while poststructuralism remains largely analytical and relativistic. In essence, while poststructuralism provides the philosophical tools for deconstruction and skepticism, critical pedagogy extends these insights toward ethical commitment, empowerment, and social transformation—bridging theoretical critique with emancipatory educational practice.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this comparative analysis reveal deep philosophical and methodological convergences between poststructuralism and critical pedagogy, as well as notable divergences in their underlying assumptions and educational aims. The analysis of the ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions demonstrates that both paradigms fundamentally reject essentialism, absolute truth, and positivist models of knowledge. However, they differ in their interpretive emphases: poststructuralism foregrounds the instability of language, meaning, and subjectivity, while critical pedagogy emphasizes the emancipatory potential of education as a tool for social transformation. In other words, poststructuralism deconstructs power, whereas critical pedagogy seeks to reconstruct justice through praxis. This dynamic interplay between deconstruction and reconstruction offers an integrative philosophical foundation for reimagining education as both a site of critique and a vehicle for liberation.

The results of the ontological comparison showed that both frameworks perceive reality as socially constructed and context-dependent, rejecting any notion of universality or objectivity. Yet, their interpretations of how reality is constructed differ. Poststructuralism locates reality in discourse—shaped by linguistic practices and semiotic systems—while critical pedagogy situates it within the political and ideological apparatuses of power (1, 2). This finding aligns with Sousa and Rossi’s observation that postmodern and poststructuralist approaches emphasize multiplicity and difference, regarding schools as sites of discursive contestation rather than neutral spaces of knowledge transmission (2). Conversely, critical pedagogues like Kellner view education as a battleground for ideological resistance, where learners actively reconstruct social reality through reflection and collective action (3). Both paradigms, therefore, affirm the contingent and transformative nature of being but

diverge in their focus—poststructuralism decentering the subject, and critical pedagogy reaffirming it as a historical agent capable of change.

Epistemologically, the results underscore that knowledge in both perspectives is relational, provisional, and politically charged. The synthesis reveals a shared skepticism toward foundationalism and the authority of universal epistemic systems. Poststructuralist epistemology problematizes the idea of fixed meaning, suggesting that knowledge emerges from linguistic difference and power structures (1, 5). Critical pedagogy, in contrast, insists on the necessity of transforming knowledge into social consciousness—moving from deconstruction toward action (3, 4). This distinction corresponds with Willett and Etowa’s integration of feminist poststructuralism and intersectionality, where epistemology is both critical and relational, grounded in reflexivity and justice (5). Furthermore, Mavin et al. demonstrated that critical pedagogy in higher education enables learners to confront hierarchical epistemologies by “flipping the normative” and fostering a dialogical engagement with power (9). Thus, both frameworks challenge the neutrality of knowledge, but critical pedagogy moves beyond critique toward democratizing epistemic authority.

The anthropological dimension of the findings indicates that both theories conceive of the human being as a non-essential, socially constructed subject. However, the degree of human agency differs markedly. Poststructuralism, drawing on Foucault and Derrida, sees the individual as an effect of discourse and power rather than an autonomous actor (2, 14). This mirrors Stamenković’s postmodern conception of childhood and development, which rejects universal stages of learning and replaces them with plural, situated understandings of growth (14). Critical pedagogy, however, positions the learner as a conscious, reflective, and transformative agent (15). As Arnøy argues in his critical reflection on non-formal peace education, learners are not merely products of their social contexts but also producers of meaning who can intervene in history through critical awareness (15). This difference is pivotal: while poststructuralism emphasizes fragmentation and decentering of the subject, critical pedagogy restores human intentionality as a means of resistance and solidarity.

In the axiological domain, both traditions reject absolute moral principles, viewing values as historical, contextual, and socially constructed. Yet, critical pedagogy seeks to transcend relativism by reconstituting values through ethical commitment and collective struggle. The findings reveal that poststructuralism primarily deconstructs moral claims, exposing how they serve power interests (2, 16), whereas critical pedagogy redefines them around principles of justice, equality, and liberation (3). Yahya demonstrates how poststructuralist approaches challenge the essentialization of moral and religious truth, situating meaning within plural interpretive contexts (16). Kellner, however, argues that critical pedagogy must ground this critical awareness in a normative project of democratization and ethical renewal (3). The findings therefore highlight a dialectical relationship: poststructuralist relativism provides analytical tools to critique dominant ideologies, while critical pedagogy ensures that critique remains ethically and socially accountable.

The comparative synthesis also underscores the shared methodological foundations of both paradigms. Each employs qualitative, interpretive, and reflexive approaches, emphasizing meaning-making, dialogue, and critique over quantification or prediction. The results align with Kraemer-Holland and Díaz, who advocate for justice-oriented qualitative inquiry as a form of resistance to the neoliberal academy (7). Similarly, Mutimer and Verbakel situate critical inquiry within a broader history of schismatic thought, emphasizing the role of reflexivity and critique in reshaping intellectual disciplines (12). These studies support the present analysis, suggesting that both poststructuralist and critical pedagogical methodologies cultivate an “ethics of reflexivity” that acknowledges the researcher’s positionality and the inseparability of knowledge and power.

Language and discourse emerged as central themes in the findings. Both frameworks recognize language as a site of power and knowledge production but differ in orientation. Poststructuralism treats language as constitutive—it does not reflect reality but creates it (1, 2). In contrast, critical pedagogy treats language as dialogical—a means for social transformation through

communication and critical reflection (10, 11). Jain’s study on translingual and transracial English speakers illustrates how adopting a poststructuralist view of language can enhance critical pedagogy by acknowledging multilingual learners’ agency and identity fluidity (11). Meanwhile, Higgins conceptualizes community music as an example of dialogical pedagogy—where creative expression serves as a medium for collective learning and social engagement (10). These findings reinforce the idea that language is not merely a communicative tool but the very ground upon which power, identity, and learning intersect.

An additional layer of convergence is evident in both paradigms’ response to neoliberalism in education. The findings indicate that both poststructuralism and critical pedagogy critique the commodification of learning and the erosion of democratic educational values (6, 7). Peck’s analysis of neoliberalism as a global discourse reveals how economic rationalities permeate institutional structures, transforming education into a market commodity rather than a public good (6). In alignment, Mavin et al. and Kraemer-Holland and Díaz advocate for pedagogies that resist neoliberal logics through critical, participatory, and justice-oriented practices (7, 9). The results suggest that integrating poststructuralist analysis of discourse with critical pedagogy’s praxis-based resistance offers a comprehensive framework for addressing the ideological entrenchment of neoliberalism in education.

Furthermore, the results highlight the transformative implications of integrating poststructuralist and critical pedagogical thought. Poststructuralism offers conceptual tools for dismantling rigid narratives and exposing the politics of representation (2, 5). Critical pedagogy transforms this critical awareness into collective action by emphasizing participatory democracy, empowerment, and moral responsibility (3, 15). Bierdz’s work on anti-oppressive and crip pedagogies further supports this synthesis by demonstrating that pedagogical spaces must account for difference, vulnerability, and power asymmetry to foster authentic inclusion (8, 13). Likewise, Koutsouris et al. emphasize that inclusive education must move beyond the accommodation of difference toward a critical recognition of structural inequalities (18). Together, these studies confirm that critical and poststructuralist pedagogies are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing: one provides critique, the other direction.

The comparative framework also reinforces the necessity of rethinking educational subjectivity. In poststructuralism, the subject is fragmented, decentered, and constructed within competing discourses (2, 14). In critical pedagogy, subjectivity is dialogical and historical—emerging through consciousness, reflection, and praxis (15). This synthesis implies that education must neither assume the existence of a sovereign subject nor reduce learners to mere discursive effects. Instead, as the findings indicate, subjectivity should be understood as relational and transformative—a product of both structure and agency. Such a perspective is central to developing a pedagogy that acknowledges difference while sustaining a commitment to justice and human dignity.

Finally, the philosophical intersection between poststructuralism and critical pedagogy can be viewed as a dialectic of “critical doubt” and “ethical hope.” Poststructuralism teaches skepticism—questioning every claim to truth, authority, and identity. Critical pedagogy transforms that skepticism into ethical commitment, reminding educators that education must serve emancipatory ends. This synthesis mirrors Higgins’ call for education as a space of communal imagination (10) and Sanders’ recognition of literature’s power to challenge normative representations of rurality and identity (17). Ultimately, both paradigms converge on a vision of education that is pluralistic, dialogical, and justice-driven—an education that embraces uncertainty not as paralysis but as the condition of freedom.

This study, being qualitative and theoretical in nature, is limited by its dependence on secondary sources and interpretive synthesis. While the meta-synthetic approach enabled an integrative understanding of poststructuralism and critical pedagogy, the absence of empirical classroom data restricts the ability to generalize its findings to specific educational contexts. Moreover, the vastness and internal diversity of both traditions mean that some nuances may have been condensed in the comparative

framework. The interpretive process, though rigorous, remains shaped by the researcher's philosophical positioning and the selection criteria applied in the PRISMA-guided review. Future empirical validation, particularly through classroom observations and educator interviews, would strengthen the applicability of the conceptual conclusions drawn here.

Future research should empirically explore how the integration of poststructuralist and critical pedagogical approaches can reshape educational practices in diverse settings. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies could examine how discursive awareness and critical consciousness evolve through dialogical, participatory learning models. Further, there is a need for developing interdisciplinary frameworks that incorporate feminist, decolonial, and intersectional extensions of both paradigms. Researchers should also investigate how digital and algorithmic learning environments—new arenas of power and discourse—can be critically engaged using this combined framework. Finally, methodological innovation through narrative inquiry, ethnography, and participatory action research could deepen understanding of how educators and learners co-create critical and transformative knowledge.

In practice, educators should design learning environments that foster dialogue, reflexivity, and social engagement rather than passive content transmission. Teachers can encourage learners to question dominant narratives, uncover hidden ideologies, and co-construct alternative meanings through collaborative inquiry. Pedagogical design should integrate critical reflection with creative expression—through language, art, and community engagement—to cultivate both critical awareness and empathy. Schools and universities should institutionalize participatory decision-making processes that democratize authority and empower marginalized voices. Ultimately, the practical implication of this study lies in promoting an education that is philosophically critical, ethically committed, and socially transformative—one that unites the poststructuralist quest for deconstruction with the critical pedagogical pursuit of liberation.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### **Transparency of Data**

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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