

Revisiting an Anti-Machiavellian model for teacher education: A critical perspective

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Jaber Kamali 

School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

This study examines a borrowed concept from politics, that is, Machiavellian, in second language teacher education (SLTE), develops an anti-model to it, and explores teacher educators' viewpoints about the developed model with an eye on critical aspects of teacher education, that is, Anti-Machiavellian. To do so, the literature on Machiavellian thoughts was studied thoroughly based on which a model was proposed and interview questions were constructed. Then, five Iranian expert teacher educators were selected based on non-random convenient sampling to attend individual extensive semi-structured interviews in which they discussed their opinions about the principles of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE. Adopting a thematic analysis, the data revealed that Anti-Machiavellian SLTE associates closely with critical teacher education where teacher education is context-specific, responsive to learners, dialogically engaging, reflective, and practical. The results of the in-depth interviews also indicated that Anti-Machiavellian SLTE is compatible with critical teacher education which, albeit widely advertised, is hard to practice.

Keywords

Critical pedagogy, critical teacher education, Anti-Machiavellian second language teacher education

Corresponding author:

Jaber Kamali, School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University, Ordu Cad, F-05 Blok No 3, Istanbul 34480, Turkey.

Email: jaber.kamali@ihu.edu.tr



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Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

Introduction

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) can be named as one of the most influential politicians whose doctrine that posits *the end justifies the means* has been practiced by various politicians. His treatise “the prince” (1513/2009) has been treated as a bible of political lessons for years and his laws have long informed politicians’ actions. Nonetheless, it is not only the field of politics that has deeply been influenced by his school of thought but also other fields such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology, to name a few.

His ideas are also applied to education covertly by the advent of neoliberal movements where power guides educational settings and a top-down approach to teacher education is practiced (Bartolome, 2007; Douglass and Nganga, 2017). Growing concerns about agency, social justice, democracy, and the like along with the presence of the concepts such as post-colonialism and post-modernism urged new concepts into teacher education, for example, critical teacher education (CTE), from which a new concept called Anti-Machiavellian (Kamali, 2022) has sprung.

The studies on CTE are abundant (e.g., Beyer, 2001; Carter Andrews et al., 2018; Hauerwas et al., 2023); however, how its offspring’s (Anti-Machiavellian SLTE) theory and practice interact to shape teacher educators’ (henceforth TE) perception of this new concept has not been extensively explored. More importantly, how and whether TEs could practice it in neoliberal-oriented educational contexts requires more attention as recent studies indicated some potential for CTE in different contexts (e.g., Cinaglia and De Costa, 2022; Sanjakdar and Premier, 2023).

In trying to advocate this type of teacher education and development and in a quest for a more critical approach to it, this study tries to explore TEs’ perception of the theory and practice of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE in teacher education and professional development. Therefore, the present study aims to fill the gap between this theory as the offspring of critical pedagogy in general and CTE in particular and its applicability and practicality in the neoliberal world which encourages low public expenditure, privatization, decentralization, and deregulation (Hill, 2007).

Literature review

The concept of CTE is made of two components, that is, critical and teacher education. While there is almost a consensus on the meaning of teacher education, the first part of this term, that is, critical, has long been disputed. A collage of terms was used for this concept “including critical theory, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, critical applied linguistics, critical language awareness, critical discourse analysis, and critical reflection” (Hawkins and Norton, 2009: 31). Notwithstanding, in the words of Hawkins and Norton (2009), there are even more complicated terms used “interchangeably e.g., liberatory education, social justice education, education for equity, transformative practice, empowerment, and praxis” (p. 31). Having its roots in Freire’s concept of liberating education, critical pedagogy attempts to enable people to encounter and change oppressive conditions in their lives (Freire, 1979). Groenke and Hatch (2009) hold the view that neoliberal teacher education impedes critical views in teacher education changing teachers to technicians (Giroux, 2009) as they are de-valued from intellectualists to technicians whose purpose is to find a job and fit into a global job market. However, CTE focuses on liberating teachers from what power imposes and provides for them by employing critical thinking skills. Considering the fact that teachers are at the core of social change, criticality offers added value in the context of teacher education. There are different concepts CTE aims to raise among which we can call discrimination, democracy, justice, and morality.

To practice these concepts, one of the first attempts was made by [Christie and Geis \(1970\)](#) who discussed Machiavellian ideas, as a critical concept, in social psychology. Not long ago, [Miller et al. \(2017\)](#) stated that Machiavellian individuals are mostly viewed as “ambitious, strategic, capable of delaying gratification, manipulative, and amoral” (p. 439). Machiavellianism along with narcissism and psychopathy form a concept in social psychology called the “dark triad” which is assumed by many researchers a prominent predecessor of transgressive and norm-violating behavior ([Muris et al., 2017](#)). Machiavellian orders, also, contain a number of benevolent ones, for example, “a ruler must avoid any behavior that will lead to his being hated or held in contempt” ([Machiavelli and Parks, 2009](#): 72). Analogous to its underlying concept, Machiavellianism as a social psychological trait is believed to contain aspects such as “a long-term, strategic focus, the ability to delay gratification, and average to good impulse control” ([Machiavelli and Parks, 2009](#): 72) which are not among the psychopathic features.

Apparently, the implication of Machiavellianism in education has been limited to the exploration of the impact of Machiavellian personality traits on different aspects of education so far, for example, academic achievement ([Eker, 2020](#)), school management issues such as bullying ([Yuan et al., 2020](#)), students’ misbehavior ([Bekiari and Spanou, 2017](#)), and intellectualism ([Triki et al., 2017](#)). However, this study tries to employ the concept of Machiavellian advice—not the Machiavellian personality trait ([Christie and Geis, 1970](#))—and apply it to teacher education. Therefore, this study attempts to explore an anti-model to Machiavellian called Anti-Machiavellian and aims to explore TEs’ viewpoints on its suitability and applicability in SLTE.

Conceptual framework

Although there are different definitions of CTE and it has covered different aspects, the framework underpinning this study is the one proposed by [Hawkins and Norton \(2009\)](#). This framework consists of five categories including “the situation nature of programs and practices, responsiveness to learners, dialogic engagement, reflexivity, and praxis” (p. 36).

The first category (the situation nature of programs and practices) deals with the cultural and historical knowledge of the context which informs teachers’ actions ([Byrd et al., 2011](#)). The second principle (responsiveness to learners) draws on the learners’ background to refer to when preparing their classes. The third one which is dialogic engagement emphasizes the role of teachers’ voices in the training contexts to teach them how to apply it to their teaching contexts. The fourth principle puts reflection into the spotlight dealing with three forms of it: reflection for, in, and on action ([Farrell, 2018](#)). Finally, praxis reiterates the relationship between theory and practice where theory can inform practice and vice versa.

Considering the principles of CTE, the present study evaluates, extends, and explores [Kamali’s \(2022\)](#) adopted Anti-Machiavellian approach to SLTE as an ethical, moral, and critical form of teacher education. It is a movement against Machiavellian education in general and teacher education in particular which postulates that in order to achieve your goal, you are allowed to cheat, lie, and violate any ethical rule ([Kashy and DePaulo, 1996](#)). Against this background, this study aims to explore this approach in teacher education and evaluate it from TEs’ viewpoints based on the CTE perspective as a framework for two purposes. It, first, aims to extend the Anti-Machiavellian framework by reviewing the literature regarding it and then probe TEs’ viewpoints about it with an eye on CTE. Therefore, the research questions are proposed as follows:

1. What are the new principles of the extended Anti-Machiavellian SLTE model?

2. How much does Anti-Machiavellian SLTE lend itself to critical teacher education from teacher educators' perspective?

Method

Context and participants

The participating TEs were all working in the Iranian context of SLTE which consists of state and private sectors. While the state sectors working under the supervision of the Ministry of Education must follow the ideological and institutional demands and restrictions of the government, the private sector can practice a relatively higher degree of freedom (Gholami et al., 2016). The participants were working in both contexts at the time of the study which definitely could influence their positionality and their choices in answering the questions of the interviews.

The study was conducted with five Iranian expert TEs (4 males and 1 female) attending individual extensive semi-structured interviews. To select expert TEs two criteria were adopted, namely, years of teaching experience and certifications (Tsui, 2010). All the participants' experience ranged from 5 to 15 years, four of them were Ph.D. holders in applied linguistics and one of them was a Ph.D. candidate in it. They were all between 32 and 49 years old (Table 1). Each interview took between 50 and 90 min which formed almost 6 h of interviews in total.

Data analysis

To analyze the data, the first step was conducting a thematic analysis on the literature related to Machiavellian thoughts. To do so, two major books were read, namely, "the prince" (1513/2009) and "discourses" (Machiavelli, 1532/2020); however, the emerged themes were extracted mostly from "the prince" since it contains everything "discourses" discusses. To seek the implication of Machiavellian thoughts on other disciplines, eight references were reviewed to expand Kamali's Anti-Machiavellian SLTE (2022) (Christie and Geis, 1970; Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Kamali, 2022, 2023a; Miller et al., 2017; Muris et al., 2017; Triki et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2020). "Inductive thematic analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83) was employed to analyze the data. This was used since the data were coded without an attempt to be fitted into "a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p. 83). It is also noteworthy to point out that researcher positionality unintentionally influences the analysis and "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (p. 84) considering that the researcher has worked in both contexts (state and private sectors). After coding, the codes were collated to form themes and a thematic map was generated, reviewed, and re-drafted.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants in the interview.

Teacher	Gender and age	Education	Years of training exp	Training certification
1	Male 32	Ph.D. candidate (TEFL)	5	Train the trainer
2	Male 49	Ph.D. (TEFL)	15	Train the trainer
3	Male 39	Ph.D. (TEFL)	18	Teacher training
4	Female 38	Ph.D. (TEFL)	11	Train the trainer
3	Male 42	Ph.D. (TEFL)	16	Teacher training

Against this background, 13 questions were formed for the interviews (Appendix 1). As they were semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked some follow-up questions based on the responses. The interviews were held over 2 weeks, they took between 50 and 90 min (a total of 6 h), and all the participants consented to participate in the study knowing the fact that their identity would remain confidential and pseudonyms would be used in the research report. “Theoretical thematic analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83) was employed in this phase of the study as long as the data were analyzed based on the critical perspective in teacher education (Hawkins and Norton, 2009). It should be noted that this phase of the study was in part inductive for it does not ignore the codes which were not clustered under any theme. The same as the previous stage, after coding the data, the codes were collated to form themes and a thematic map was generated, reviewed, and re-drafted.

Findings

The first research question

This study, firstly, aimed to examine the Machiavellian and its anti-model, that is, Anti-Machiavellian SLTE proposed by Kamali (2022) through the literature. The thematic analysis conducted on the related literature revealed a new model that expanded the previous one by far. In the new conceptualization introduced in this study, there are six principles which is an expansion of the 3-principle framework of the previous model (Figure 1).

The first principle (theme) that emerged from the literature is that “unethical amoral behavior is not accepted.” It is discussed against three Machiavellian ideas and one of Kamali’s principles: there are evil deeds for good reasons, do bad things if it does not harm anyone, and certifications should be more important than qualifications. The first two subthemes derived from the essence of Machiavellian thoughts, that is, the end justifies the means, clearly define the nature of his advice. To stay powerful, everything is justifiable. As Kamali (2022) argued the third principle, then, is applicable since you can do anything such as plagiarism and cheating to get the certificate that seems to be more important than the qualification per se.

Knowing that critical reflection is the *raison d’être* for human development, the second theme argues this delicate issue. Within the framework of Machiavellian theory, criticality should be discouraged by the rulers in the Machiavellian school of thought for it gives their doers agency to jeopardize rulers’ authority (Machiavelli, 1531/2009). It is not the same in education, however. Education is a field of thinking and nothing will remain if its spirit is removed. In addition, it can facilitate the learning process; therefore, critical thinking can have positive outcomes for trainers in learning new methods in training as well (Williams, 2005).

The third theme extracted from the literature acknowledges the rule of trust in human relations. Machiavellian posits that you should never trust people while an Anti-Machiavellian SLTE advances the idea that you can trust all colleagues and trainees unless they prove you wrong. Machiavelli believes not all people are wise and you have to only get advice from people who are absolutely wise. Machiavellian SLTE, therefore, advises you to have favorite trainees, especially the ones who are wiser or have utopian characteristics such as beauty and fame to be able to manage your milieu. On the other hand, Anti-Machiavellian SLTE claims that all colleagues and trainees are wise but in different manners. These subthemes try to practice fairness in thoughts, language, and actions (Fairclough, 2000; McNamara et al., 2019).

The fourth theme is that Machiavelli obviously thinks that fear is more powerful than love. He suggested that “it’s much safer to be feared than loved ... So long as you’re generous and, as I said

Machiavellian SLTE**Anti-Machiavellian SLTE****1. Unethical amoral behavior is accepted**

- There are evil deeds for good reasons.
- You can confidently do evil things if it does not harm anyone.
- Certifications should be more important than qualifications.

2. Discourage critical reflection

- It makes the trainees outgrow you and it diminishes your power

3. Never trust all of your colleagues and trainees

- Not all of your colleagues and trainees are wise
- Don't be neutral and always take a side
- Have a favorite trainee

4. Fear is more beneficial than love

- If trainees love you, they dare disagree with you and it can cause some management issues for you
- When they are afraid of you they do follow you and it makes the situation more manageable

5. Generosity weakens you

- Sharing knowledge and materials makes you lack the resources
- To get more knowledge and material you need to plagiarize since your source of knowledge is limited.

6. Education should be gender-based

- Women like to be dominated and treated harshly
- All women like strict trainers and teachers

1. Unethical amoral behavior is not accepted

- All evil deeds are evil regardless of their aims.
- You cannot do evil things even if it does not harm anyone since it normalizes wrongdoings.
- Qualifications should be more important than certifications.

2. Encourage critical reflection

- Trainees who grow can push you to grow further

4. Trust all colleagues and trainees unless they prove you wrong

- All colleagues and trainees are wise in different manners
- Always be fair and take a side only if you think that is right
- Always treat all trainees fairly

4. Love is more beneficial than fear

- Trainees need to educate in a win-win context where their voice is heard, respected and appreciated
- When they are afraid of you they may follow you but they do not learn from you

5. Generosity strengthens you

- Sharing with others can encourage them to do the same
- To get more knowledge and material you do not need to plagiarize since you can easily cite the sources.

6. Education should be gender-free

- Women are like men and have different personality types
- Some women (like some men) like strict trainers and teachers

Figure 1. Machiavellian vs. Anti-Machiavellian SLTE features.

before, not in immediate danger, they [people]’re all on your side” (p.66). He went on to say “... but when you need them they turn their backs on you” (p.66). He concluded that “men are less worried about letting down someone who has made himself loved than someone who makes himself feared” (Machiavelli, 1531/2009, p.66). In the same vein, Machiavellian SLTE reckons that if trainees love you, they dare disagree with you and it can cause some management issues for you, and when they are afraid of you they do follow and it makes the situation more manageable. Anti-Machiavellian SLTE, unlike it, warns trainers that although trainees may follow them based on their fears, learning never occurs in these environments.

The concept of generosity, as the fifth theme, is another virtue condemned by Machiavelli. He asserted that generosity will bring loss by forcing you to run out of sources. Therefore, in Machiavellian SLTE, sharing knowledge and materials either finishes the resources or forces you to plagiarize since your source of knowledge is limited. However, in Anti-Machiavellian SLTE sharing has an evident benefit which is to promote its culture. In addition, It does not only reduce plagiarism but can also increase the chances of learning by reading and searching more materials (Estébanez et al., 2023).

Gender discrimination has long attracted controversies in different disciplines including education. Alike any other new movements in gender equity such as feminism, Anti-Machiavellian SLTE concerns about the exploitation of gender differences in suppressing women. Machiavelli (1531/2009) very explicitly stated that women enjoy being treated harshly when he expressed that “... if you want to stay on top of her you have to slap and thrust. You’ll see she’s more likely to yield that way ...” (p. 101). Hence, Anti-Machiavellian SLTE does not consider education as a gender-based phenomenon holding the view that women are like men and have different personality types meaning that some women (like some men) like strict trainers and teachers and others vice versa.

The second research question

To answer the second research question—that is, how much does Anti-Machiavellian SLTE lend itself to critical teacher education from TEs’ perspective?—five expert TEs participated in an in-depth interview and answered the questions regarding Anti-Machiavellian SLTE which will be discussed based on the principles of CTE (Hawkins and Norton, 2009).

Teacher education is context-specific. The first category of CTE under which three themes emerged is the specificity of context in SLTE which includes context specificity of teaching and training, the influences of economic and sociocultural statuses, and contextual demands. Two of the TEs argued that teaching and training methods should depend on the context. One of them stated:

Extract 1

Method slavery was something done in the past and as teacher trainers, we need to stop it by asking trainees to think about what they do. We cannot use the same method in different situations and contexts because we deal with different people in every classroom.

As the extract shows, methods prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach for all contexts and do not take social, cultural, and ideological differences into account by which power takes a top-down form, and educational context participants’ voices, needs, wants, and rights are neglected.

Another TE brought social and economic status into the spotlight when discussing the Machiavellian motto, that is “the end justifies the means” combining it with contextual demands that form the laws in answering one of the interview questions:

Extract 2

Researcher: Have you ever broken the ethical rules because you had to or because you didn't think it brought harm to you and your trainees or colleagues?

TE: Yes, mmmm, to be honest, if I think this is right I don't break it. But some of these are not true for all contexts. For example, living in Iran we don't have access freely to different sources; so, we can't meet copyright... this is a force for us imposed by social and economic conditions we are at.

Copyright was a concrete example provided by him to clarify the rules that cannot be met in some contexts due to economic, institutional, ideological, and social constraints.

Teacher education is responsive to learners. Three other extracted themes were related to this category where they discussed fear and trust, gender differences, and mental, psychological, and individual considerations.

In describing how spreading love is a more effective way to be accompanied and followed by trainees than spreading fear, one of the TEs pointed out that fear can reduce the level of trust and does not permit people to think critically.

Extract 3

Although I believe we should show some knowledge charisma, I guess if trainees are afraid of us we have closed the ways to their minds and have harvested fear in their hearts. Love accompanied with respect is the best combination a teacher or trainer needs.

It is implied in the extract that if we do not consider trainees' emotional needs such as fear and love we may lose their contribution and participation; or if we do not, these contributions are not genuine.

The next topic was gender differences which was raised by three TEs where they called for following equity rules but considering the differences.

Extract 4

TE: I think female teachers like trainers who are positive and have good vibes. They like energetic trainers more specifically the ones who are praise-oriented. I also think female teachers are more concerned with accents. The ones I worked with appreciated the trainers with good accents I think it is very important for them.

Researcher: Do you know why?

TE: Not really. This is what I noticed in recent years especially.

It should be noted that the accent issue was a claim made by the participant based on his own observation with no proof; therefore, it should be considered with caution. However, it does show a difference between genders.

Mental and psychological peculiarities are determining factors in running successful training sessions as one of the TEs asserted:

Extract 5

People who share common goals, emotions, and even desires with you will definitely get more support from you and it can help them to improve easier and faster.

It is needless to say that people who share commonalities can benefit and enjoy more being with each other and can help one another in learning.

Teacher education is dialogically engaging. There were three themes that were extracted from the interview under this category, namely, observers can also learn, voices should be heard and appreciated, and guided discovery and reflection should be encouraged.

It was raised in one of the TEs' interviews that not only observees can learn from the observer but it can also be a way around as well.

Extract 6

The observer should go to a class to learn something and he or she can do it. I learned a lot from the classes I observed even more than from the training workshops I attended. Of course, if you have a reflective look; otherwise, it is just like giving your ideas to the observee without any discussion or reflection.

As it can be seen from the extract, the observer should go for observation with the intention of learning not teaching.

Another theme classified under this category is that the voices of trainees should be heard and appreciated.

Extract 7

TE: Teachers should know the reason for reflection. They need the environment to freely discuss their ideas and don't be afraid of being mocked, or being criticized harshly, of course, we can challenge their ideas but it shouldn't be as if we are criticizing them....

Researcher: So we shouldn't criticize them?

TE: No, we don't criticize THEM but their ideas.

As the extract shows, trainees should have the room to be able to discuss their ideas freely without fear of being judged or mocked and this is the TE's duty to provide such an environment.

The last extracted theme in this category is that guided discovery and reflection should be encouraged. The role of a mentor or a more experienced colleague is vital here.

Extract 8

The role of application of what they have studied in their training sessions and reflection on them should be gradual. They need guidance in applying the learned strategies, techniques ... they need to know why they are doing something.

As the extract explains, it is necessary for a reflection to be guided in that they do not find something wrong.

Teacher education is reflective. This category of CTE emphasizing the role of reflection in TE development takes three themes of the data from the interviews: seeking fear and reflective experience, mutual growth, and goals and ends.

One of the TEs evidently argued that the relationship between experience and spreading fear in the trainees is negatively correlated; that is, the more the experience, the less the desire to be frightening.

Extract 9

I believe that, based on my experience, novice trainers try to make people afraid of them (I was the same) because they don't want to lose their authority or they think if they are friendly with their trainees, the trainees become opportunists. But as they grow and metamorphosis happens in them they understand that authority doesn't come from fear but knowledge and being loved is more beneficial than being frightening.

The other theme extracted is that not only helping others grow does not weaken you but also assists you in growing professionally. One of the TEs expressed:

Extract 10

When my trainees or even colleagues grow or run more workshops and I see their improvements, I'm motivated to study more, work harder, and make a better version of myself. This is what I can do to compete with them; otherwise, I am left behind in this competitive world.

The role of external motivators is highlighted in this extract when the TE discusses the competitive nature of this world. It is, therefore, necessary to make others grow, if we would like to do so.

The other theme of the reflective feature of CTE deals with reflection on rules and regulations. One of the TEs stated:

Extract 11

The rules for me are not sacred. They may be wrong. The ones that are based on my logic, mindset, or beliefs are the ones I try to follow; otherwise, those rules are into question for me ... and if it is the case I don't need to follow them. The problem is that we think whatever rules others set for us should be followed. I don't agree. We need to reflect on them and see if they are even humane or not.

The TE provided a deeper look at breaking the rules by questioning the legitimacy of the rules themselves and the people who set them. To him, it is necessary to reflect on the rule per se and see if it works for us or not.

Teacher education is practical. The last category of CTE in which three categories are classified is that teacher education should be practical. The themes are qualification and certification, content and process, and remedial help.

Regarding the first theme, all of the TEs agreed with the statement expressing that qualifications are prominent; however, certifications are proof of them.

Extract 12

Researcher: certificates are not as important as qualifications. Do you agree?

TE: Yes, I do believe that qualifications are more important. There are a lot of people who hold certificates but they don't get enough skills to do it. For example, ... there are some who really don't know how to teach.

Researcher: So do you think they should be omitted? I mean certificates.

TE: No. Definitely not. Imagine a driver. How can we trust him to let him drive if he doesn't show the necessary certificate of it? But even with the driving license, we need to check his skills which are the qualifications.

The extract evidently showed that although the TE does not agree with the omission of certification (since they are the signs of qualifications), he believes its prominence should be replaced by qualifications.

Content and process are considered to be two inseparable parts of training sessions. This is where “loop input” (Woodward, 2003) plays a role. The other theme which is “not only content but also process can be informative” shows the importance of it.

Extract 13

When we facilitate the process of reflection in training sessions we are teaching trainees to do the same in their own classes and make their learners reflect on what they learn.

As the extract suggests, it is a practical implication of reflection in training sessions that can raise awareness in trainees to do it in their own classrooms.

The last theme extracted is the one that highlights practical solutions for the real problems of the classrooms.

Extract 14

In post-observation sessions, teachers need to receive some practical help. If you just tell them what you did was wrong they are not satisfied and they for sure ask “So, what should I do?” and if you can't provide the help they won't listen to you anymore.

The extract shows the necessity of remedial help without which you cannot make the learners be with you, listen to you, and be a part of the team.

Discussion

Anti-Machiavellian SLTE revisited

The concept of ethics in education has a long history; it dates back to Plato, who argued that education should be grounded in moral principles and values. More recent works of ethics stem from John Dewey's works (1930), which emphasized the importance of ethics in the development of a democratic society. The findings of this study, albeit not new, go against Machiavellianism and emphasize the importance of ethics in education. The findings go hand in hand with numerous studies (e.g., Cliffe and Solvason, 2022; Moore and Tillberg-Webb, 2023; Zembylas, 2015) which contributed highly to educational ethics and its impact on society.

The other concept—reflection—has also been long discussed. Socrates' thoughts on who has the right to educate (Akbari, 2008) were the first attempt to inject reflection into education. Although Akbari (2008) posed two serious concerns to the concept of reflection, namely, conceptual and practical, it does not deny the fact of its necessity in educational contexts. More specifically, reflection in language education gained momentum with the advent of reflective teaching and training, which emphasizes the role reflection can play in being a better teacher and teacher educator

(Calderhead, 1989; Kamali, 2023b; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). This study lends support to these findings indicating that reflection has evident benefits for both educators and educatees.

Trust is a necessary element for any human relationship and lack of it can impose serious damage to it. However, Machiavelli argued that not everyone deserves it, a concept the present study disagrees with arguing that you can trust people unless they prove you wrong. The findings acknowledge the findings of other studies in different disciplines arguing that the concept of trust has an influence on the outcome, for example, psychology (Rotenberg, 2018), sociology (Sztompka, 1999), leadership (Burke et al., 2007), and education (Vidovich and Currie, 2011), to name a few.

Love and generosity are two virtues impacting human interactions and relations (Benham and Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Brooks, 2017). Anti-Machiavellian SLTE (unlike Machiavellian one) posits that trainers who love and are loved by their trainees or have stronger emotional bonds are more effective. It is in accordance with a line of research on emotional bonds, and labor (e.g., Bellocchi, 2019; Hargreaves, 1998, 2000; Kamali and Nazari, 2023; Nazari and Karimpour, 2022) which agrees that emotion is an indicator of the success of any language program and its lack can cause resistance and ineffectiveness.

The last theme worth discussing is the concept of gender discrimination explicitly encouraged in Machiavellian advice when he argued that women like men who are dominant and harsh to them. This study asserts that both genders expect equity and justice. Feminism has an influential impact on the awareness of gender discrimination that its manifestation in education is prominent (Adamovic and Leibbrandt, 2023), and in the same vein, teacher education has put this delicate issue in the spotlight (Doornkamp et al., 2022).

Teacher educators' viewpoints

This study aimed to revisit Anti-Machiavellian SLTE having its roots in critical pedagogy to find their relationship with one another. In line with the theoretical underpinning of the study, that is, CTE (Hawkins and Norton, 2009), the gathered data from the TE interviews revealed a pentagon model of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE informed by critical teacher education (Figure 2).

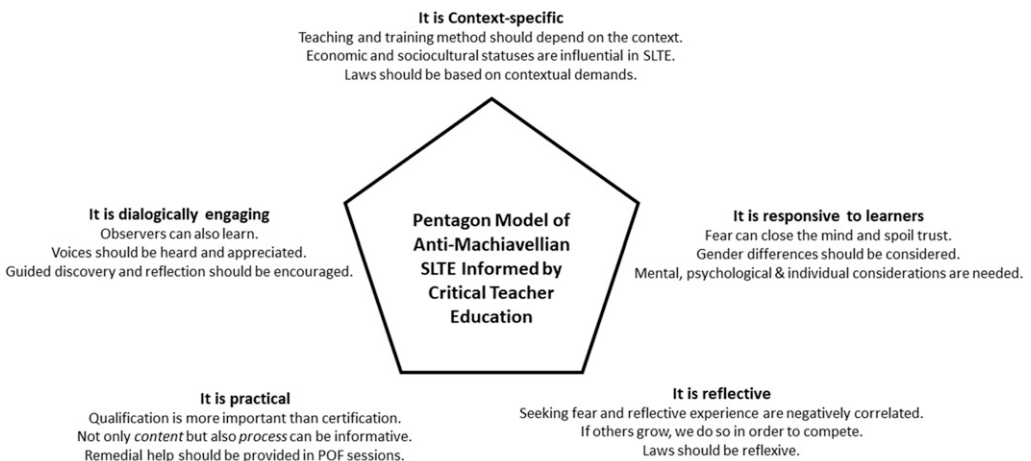


Figure 2. Pentagon model of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE informed by critical teacher education.

As [Figure 2](#) depicts, five categories of CTE are in line with the principles of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The first category in CTE is context-specificity which brought *context* into the spotlight. The findings of this study are not only in line with [Sjøen \(2023\)](#) who argued that the focus should be shifted from globalization to cultural competition but also added the sociocultural, economic, and ideological aspects to it. In accordance with a line of research on teachers' well-being that suggested that payment is a determining factor in teacher well-being (e.g., [Brandt and Lopes Cardozo, 2023](#); [Zakaria et al., 2021](#)), this study posits that economic status can act toward more criticality in SLTE and against teacher burnout and frustration.

As a principle in CTE, teacher education should be responsive to learners' needs, wants, and rights. The findings of this study reject gender equality in teacher education ([Lahelma and Tainio, 2019](#)) for the study posits different characteristics and needs for males and females. Nonetheless, it highlights the importance of equity and inclusion ([Florian and Camedda, 2020](#); [Rice and Smith, 2023](#)). For a teacher education program to be Anti-Machiavellian, it should inform the practice which promotes equity while considering the differences between genders in terms of mental and psychological idiosyncrasies.

The next principle in CTE is that it should be dialogically engaging which involves hearing and appreciating teacher's voice and agency. The findings are in the same vein as [Waters' \(1998\)](#) calls for a guided form of discovery to avoid misunderstanding. He stated that "when learners start trying to solve problems for themselves, they will inevitably make mistakes. Safeguards therefore need be built into the process to ensure that the consequent risks are kept to an acceptable level" (p.17). In line with other studies (e.g., [Froneman et al., 2023](#); [Johns, 2009](#)), this study also promotes guided discovery and reflection to ensure a deep understanding of a topic.

Being reflective and practical are the other principles of CTE which encompass assisting others, loop input, remedial help, and emotional bonds. This study agrees with [Kamali \(2014, 2021\)](#) that teacher metamorphosis should occur if we want teachers to be critical. Teachers need to change to a package of different roles such as assessors, planners, and the like. The findings of the study go also hand in hand with [Woodward's \(2004\)](#) concept of "loop input" which refers to "an alignment of the process and content of learning" (p.301). By integrating the process of reflection in their training, TEs can empower the trainees with this skill. The findings of this study also approve those of [Jones and Jones \(2013\)](#) who concluded that "reflection can be effectively taught through scaffolding opportunities" (p.73). Finally, emotional considerations are necessary for making an Anti-Machiavellian SLTE which is CTE informed where the culture of fear is condemned and love is appreciated. This is in line with numerous studies to date considering affective filters counter-productive in educational contexts ([Holzberger et al., 2021](#); [McGugan et al., 2023](#); [Pennington, 1996](#)).

Conclusions and implications

The present study attempted to revisit Anti-Machiavellian SLTE ([Kamali, 2022](#)) and align it with CTE by discussing its principles with five expert TEs in extensive semi-structured interviews. The result of the literature analysis of Machiavellianism and its opposite (Anti-Machiavellianism) was an extension to the previously proposed model of Anti-Machiavellian SLTE with six principles apropos of ethics, criticality, trust, fear and love, generosity, and gender (see [Figure 1](#)). Almost 6 h of in-depth interviews also revealed that Anti-Machiavellian SLTE principles are compatible with CTE in the sense that they both encourage context-specificity, learner responsiveness, dialogical engagement, reflectivity, and practicality (see [Figure 2](#)).

The results of this study can inform teacher educators to adopt a more critical look at their position, duties, and roles they play in their own community and how their job can influence their immediate and distant environment. Based on the results, teacher educators should ensure that future teachers are grounded in moral principles and values, encourage and guide aspiring teachers in developing reflective practices, promote trust-building strategies among teachers and students, and foster a more positive and productive educational atmosphere. They should also create inclusive environments that accommodate the specific needs and characteristics of all students, acknowledge the significance of context-specific education considering cultural, sociocultural, economic, and ideological aspects, encourage dialogical engagement in teacher education programs, and highlight the importance of promoting a culture of love and emotional considerations in education. Teachers can also use the proposed model as an awareness-raising tool to learn more about equity, inclusion, and some virtues impacting their classrooms' milieu. All in all, the findings call for a more ethical, reflective, and inclusive approach to teacher education, underscoring the importance of context, gender equality, emotional bonds, and trust in the educational process. Other studies can apply the proposed model in different educational settings with different numbers of teachers or teacher educators to revalidate the findings of this study.

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ORCID iD

Jaber Kamali  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4018-7597>

Data availability statement

The data is available but not shared because it could identify research participants.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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