

Developing Critical Thinking Skills Among English Language Learners at Chlef University: Exploring Teachers' Pedagogical Perspectives

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Abstract :

In today's world of rapid information expansion and dynamic societal concerns, developing critical thinking abilities has become an essential goal in education. This paper aims to shed light on the perspectives of English Language Teachers (Henceforth, ELTs) at Chlef University on their crucial role in encouraging their students to develop critical thinking abilities. It investigates the strategies these teachers use to foster critical thinking in the English language classroom, the challenges they face, and the outcomes they perceive. To achieve this, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 10 English Language Teachers to explore the symbiotic relationship between educational strategies and the improvement of critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Assessment, Critical Thinking, English Language Learners, English Language Teachers (ELTs), Instructional Strategies, Professional Development

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الملخص:

أصبح تطوير قدرات التفكير النقدي هدفًا أساسيًا في التعليم مع توسع النمو المعرفي السريع والمخاوف المجتمعية الديناميكية. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى توضيح وجهات نظر معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الشلف فيما يتعلق بدورهم الحيوي الذي يضطلعون به في تشجيع طلابهم على التفكير النقدي. يستقصي البحث الأساليب التي يستخدمها المعلمون لتعزيز التفكير النقدي في الفصل الدراسي باللغة الإنجليزية، والتحديات التي يواجهونها، وكذا النتائج التي يصلون إليها. أجريت مقابلة مع 10 معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لتسليط الضوء على العلاقة التكافلية المتبادلة بين المناهج التعليمية وتحسين مهارات التفكير النقدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم، التفكير النقدي، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية (ELTs)، الاستراتيجيات التعليمية، التطوير المهني

1. Introduction

In today's world, being able to think critically means thinking carefully, making the right decisions, and understanding things deeply. The importance of critical thinking is highlighted by its role in fostering citizenship, effective communication, and empowering people to handle the challenging demands of the dynamic global context. In the field of education, especially when teaching languages, critical thinking skills are crucial. As language facilitators and intellectual guides, English language teachers have a unique opportunity to shape their students' cognitive abilities.

Think about an English instructor who wants to encourage his students to use critical thinking. Pedagogically, it is challenging for language educators to foster critical thinking in their classes, particularly with classes that incorporate both proficient and struggling English language learners. Furthermore, time constraints can worsen the complexities of the teaching process, impeding the development of critical thinking abilities. Consequently, it is crucial to examine how teachers deal with this issue and whether they use differentiated instructional strategies adapted to their students' English language proficiency levels. In addition, it is urgent to investigate how they efficiently manage their instructional time to stimulate critical thinking among their students.

This research aims to examine the pedagogical strategies employed by ELTs in evaluating the development of critical thinking abilities in their students. It scrutinizes whether instructors depend on diverse benchmarks, such as oral presentations, written tasks, or classroom involvement, to assess their students' progress. It is an investigation to comprehend the diverse aspects of critical thinking pedagogy in the context of English language instruction in the Department of English at Chlef University. It explores the educational strategies such instructors employ and sheds light on their concerns about this construct and its importance. Employing a qualitative research approach, a semi-

structured interview was used to gather data about the insights of ten (10) experienced ELTs. The claimed strategies instructors use to develop students' critical thinking abilities—which might range from problem-solving strategies to real-world examples—have been thoroughly examined.

2. Literature Review

In the modern world, critical thinking is decisive for meeting the ever-changing requirements of society. Due to the complexity of knowledge and societal concerns, it is important to emphasize the value of critical thinking abilities in education. English language teachers (ELTs) have an exceptional chance and distinctive role in promoting and assisting their students' cognitive development by stimulating their critical thinking skills (Cottrell, 2017). However, integrating critical thinking instruction in school/university settings can be challenging, particularly in language classes. Teachers should develop critical thinking while managing time constraints in various settings with both competent and struggling English language learners (Halpern, 2014). The teaching strategies should be selected and used appropriately to accommodate students with various levels of language proficiency. More research is required in this area, especially in contexts like English, where critical thinking pedagogy and language instruction cross.

Many studies have examined the different facets of instructing critical thinking, with a focus on the Socratic method in particular. To encourage students to think critically, the Socratic approach uses questioning strategies during discourse (Clark & Egan, 2015). Developing students' critical thinking skills can be facilitated by collaborative learning practices, including group projects and discussions (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Additionally, research has looked at numerous strategies to assessing critical thinking abilities, such as the use of rubrics and other evaluation strategies (Alsaleh, 2020).

In light of the earlier research, this paper adds knowledge to the subject of critical thinking by examining the strategies employed by English language instructors at Chlef University to promote critical thinking. It aims to close knowledge gaps and provide beneficial insights into efficient strategies for teaching critical thinking.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed in the study to investigate the strategies adopted by English Language Teachers (ELTs) at Chlef University to promote critical thinking skills among their students. Through the use of semi-structured

interviews, the data was collected from ten experienced ELTs, purposefully selected to ensure diversity in experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a research tool because they allow flexibility while maintaining a standardized framework, enabling in-depth exploration of participants' viewpoints. Thematic analysis was performed on the collected data, which entails finding recurring themes and patterns in qualitative data. This procedure made it easier to identify instructional strategies and points of view related to the development of critical thinking skills. Ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure participants' confidentiality, anonymity, and consent. The study offers valuable insights into ELTs' perspectives and acknowledges limitations such as the small sample size and potential bias from relying solely on self-reported data. Despite these limitations, the research methodology facilitated the exploration of critical thinking skills progress among English language learners through the lens of their experienced ELTs.

4. Results

The examination of English language teachers' (ELTs') attitudes and strategies for developing critical thinking abilities in English language learners at Chlef University is presented in this part as the study's findings.

4.1 Recognizing and Valuing Critical Thinking in English Language

Instruction:

Participants' understanding of the notion of critical thinking was remarkable. According to 45% of respondents, the ability to logically examine, evaluate, and synthesize data defines critical thinking and helps prepare students for effective communication and decision-making. The other 55%, on the other hand, focused on the value of critical thinking in building lifelong learning abilities by encouraging the investigation of diverse perspectives and challenging knowledge. The participants' responses demonstrated an awareness of the complex facets of critical thinking and its potential advantages for personal development and job advancement.

4.2 Including Activities to Promote Critical Thinking:

Throughout the interview, a wide range of strategies were reported by participants, all of which aimed to foster critical thinking in English language classes. A large majority of the suggestions made—a whopping 73%—were in favour of conducting problem-solving activities and having talks that focused on global challenges. 27% of the respondents favoured the application of Socratic questioning along with the incorporation of real-world examples. The participants were evidently

skilled in promoting critical thinking and willing to exchange knowledge with one another.

4.3 Critical Thinking Skills Teaching Strategies:

According to the participants' comments, it has been found that group projects and conversations can spark fruitful dialogues and make it easier to evaluate other viewpoints. Such exercises help students go beyond their preconceived notions and take into account diverse points of view, which results in a deeper comprehension of difficult ideas. In general, integrating collaborative learning strategies and multimedia resources into learning environments can significantly aid students in improving their critical thinking skills.

4.4 Challenges and Solutions:

Participants acknowledged some challenges they encounter among English language learners. 78% of participants regarded the students' different levels of proficiency as a major obstacle. They explained that they offer directed questioning and a variety of exercises specially targeted to each student's unique needs to address this issue. The other 22% of the respondents concentrated on how tough it was to cover all the necessary content in a short amount of class time. They claimed that they overcame this difficulty by giving students narrowly focused tasks that were in line with the curriculum, enabling more effective use of class time.

4.5 Adapting Strategies to Varying Language Proficiency Levels:

It was noted that when developing their teaching strategies, the participants considered their students' levels of language proficiency as a hindrance to critical thinking development. To address this issue, they stressed the necessity of gradually introducing higher-order thinking skills to beginner-level students while giving more challenging assignments to more competent students. The learning outcomes were improved as a result of this strategy's success in accommodating each student's unique demands and capabilities.

4.6 Critical Thinking Evaluation:

A variety of strategies were used to assess students' critical thinking abilities. The results revealed that a sizeable number, 26% to be exact, employed strategies including presentations, written assignments, and active involvement in class to evaluate convincing arguments, perceptive observations, and evidence-based theories. Most participants—74%—suggested using rubrics with specific criteria for evaluating critical

thinking skills. These requirements include outlining assumptions and providing counterarguments. It was claimed that using such rubrics successfully delivered a more systematic and thorough evaluation of critical thinking abilities.

4.7 Tools, Materials, and Resources for Fostering Critical Thinking::

Online discussion boards and critical thinking journals are extremely important today. According to this study, a considerable portion of participants—36%—use critical thinking diaries as a tool to improve their students' self-awareness of their cognitive thinking. The improvement of self-reflection and personal development has been shown to be greatly aided by these diaries. The majority of respondents—roughly 64%—use online forums to help their students express their ideas and opinions on a range of subjects. This trend is especially noticeable in academic and professional settings where people actively participate in fascinating and thought-provoking discussions in order to enhance their knowledge and perspectives.

4.8 Aligning Critical Thinking and Language Skills:

The results showed that the participants were able to recognize a strong connection between language proficiency and critical thinking abilities. Almost half of those who took part in the interview (45%) advocated introducing critical thinking activities into language acquisition, such as studying vocabulary terms' definitions to increase comprehension. Additionally, 55% of respondents supported the idea of using language-focused critical thinking exercises, such as writing argumentative essays, to improve both language competency and argumentation skills.

4.9 How Critical Thinking Exercises Affect Language Proficiency:

According to the comments given by the respondents, it has been concluded that including critical thinking activities improves language proficiency. Participants reported that students who engaged in critical thinking exercises showed an obvious improvement in their capacity for comprehension and communication. They also added that critical thinking activities strengthened their abilities to comprehend and analyze texts, which aided in improving their comprehension of the language and expanding their vocabulary. These results underline the importance of incorporating critical thinking activities into language acquisition curricula.

4.10 Overcoming Resistance to Activities that Involve Critical Thinking:

The interview revolved around how to deal with students who show resistance to critical thinking exercises. The results showed that a considerable majority of

participants, or 88%, gave their students detailed, precise directions while gradually raising the difficulty of the activities to help them overcome their first misgivings. In addition, 22% of the participants said they encouraged hesitant students by telling stories of successful outcomes that critical thinking has contributed to, particularly in terms of enhancing language abilities. The participants indicated their satisfaction with the outcomes, and it has been demonstrated that these strategies are extremely helpful in encouraging students to foster critical thinking.

4.11 The Role of Critical Thinking in Academic and Personal Development:

The development of critical thinking abilities is a fundamental part of academic and personal growth. The interviewees stressed the need to enhance one's capacity for communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. They provided students with the skills they need to succeed in their higher education pursuits and future work possibilities by elaborating on how these skills may be used in real-world situations. Critical thinking enables people to take on difficulties and make judgments based on facts and logical reasoning.

5. Discussion

After carefully reviewing and reflecting on the research findings, it can be deduced that there are some reasonable conclusions about how to include critical thinking in teaching English as a second/or foreign language.

5.1 Effective Instructional Strategies:

The study explores the instructional strategies that can develop students' critical thinking abilities when they are studying English as a second or foreign language. With the use of these strategies, teachers can get their students involved in tasks like problem-solving activities, discussions of current events that affect them personally, Socratic questioning, and practical simulations. They can improve students' higher-order thinking skills by pushing them to analyze and evaluate the information given to them, which will result in a more thorough comprehension of the subject.

5.2 Collaborative Learning Activities and Multimedia Resources:

The study has demonstrated the efficacy of engaging in collaborative learning activities and incorporating multimedia resources into educational programs for the purpose of improving critical thinking skills. These two types of activities promote group work, facilitate discussion, and encourage the examination of varying viewpoints in order to foster a more sophisticated and analytical thought process in students. By

engaging in these activities, students can develop a more well-rounded and multifaceted approach to thinking that enables them to deal with complex issues with greater ease and success.

5.3 Challenges and Strategies:

When talking about strategies to promote critical thinking in students, participants in the interview brought up the challenges that can result from differences in language proficiency levels and constrained class time. They recommended incorporating specific goals, well-thought-out inquiries, and various activities into the curriculum to deal with these problems. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of tailoring instructional strategies to the various degrees of language proficiency that students may possess. They claimed that teachers might effectively and inclusively enhance students' critical thinking skills by implementing these strategies.

5.4 Critical Thinking Assessment:

It has been found out that there are several ways to assess how well critical thinking abilities are developing. The efficient strategies include giving written assignments, promoting participation in class discussions, oral presentations, and using rubrics. Teachers can get a complete and accurate picture of their students' progress in critical thinking by using a diverse approach that includes these strategies. With this all-encompassing strategy, teachers may get a complete picture of their students' critical thinking skills and monitor their growth over time.

5.5 Role of Tools and Resources:

Online discussion forums and critical thinking diaries have been found to be helpful tools and resources for people looking to develop their self-awareness and engage in thought-provoking dialogues. These forums are recommended for students to reflect on their own thought processes and engage in fruitful peer discussions. Students can gain a deeper understanding of their own beliefs and values by participating in such activities and gaining knowledge from those who may hold different thoughts and viewpoints. Ultimately, these tools offer a safe, supportive, and intellectually stimulating environment for people to grow and learn personally and academically.

5.6 Integration of Critical Thinking and Language Skills:

Participants acknowledged the link between language ability and critical thinking. They suggested that engaging in exercises that require word analysis and essay writing could improve one's ability to make persuasive arguments as well as language

skills. Additionally, participating in activities that encourage critical thinking can heighten linguistic competency by strengthening communication skills, vocabulary improvement, and text interpretation.

5.7 Overcoming Students' Resistance:

Instructors can use several tried-and-true strategies to develop their students' critical thinking abilities. Giving clear instructions and progressively more demanding tasks is one successful strategy that can make difficult jobs more achievable and less intimidating. Sharing success stories about critical thinking usage is another effective strategy that can inspire and motivate even the most hesitant students by highlighting the benefits of persistence and hard effort. Last but not least, transparency in the learning process can be a game-changer since watching others succeed can make difficult tasks seem more manageable. Instructors can use these strategies to encourage students by encouraging confidence and passion.

6. Recommendations

The primary objective of this research is to strengthen the teachers' capability to foster the invaluable skill of critical thinking in their students. In order to achieve this, a number of recommendations are suggested aiming not only at enhancing the educators' skillset but also to highlight the plethora of benefits that critical thinking holds for both personal and professional growth.

6.1 Professional Development:

The proficiency of the English language instructors is crucial to the achievement of the students' critical thinking development. For these educators, creating a culture of ongoing professional development is essential. It is necessary to implement workshops, seminars, and team-building exercises to improve teachers' abilities to foster critical thinking in their students. The curriculum for the course should be viewed as a blank canvas that can be imaginatively infused with critical thinking exercises. As a result, University English language instructors ought to actively encourage the inclusion of such activities in their curricula, lesson plans, and learning materials. This approach will help create a climate where university students can enhance their critical thinking abilities.

6.2 Inclusive Pedagogical Strategies:

English language learners have complex interconnected language proficiency levels. In order to accommodate this diversity, teachers should use inclusive teaching

strategies. These strategies may include specialized education, additional language support, and the customization of critical thinking tasks to accommodate different levels of language proficiency. Digital learning platforms have created a previously unheard-of opportunity to advance critical thinking outside the traditional classroom's confines. ELT teachers at Chlef University have to start looking into digital resources, including online forums, discussion boards, and virtual classrooms. These interactive platforms encourage in-depth debates, group problem-solving, and perceptive analysis while overcoming the limitations of traditional teaching strategies.

6.3 Assessment and Feedback

Because assessment is a key part of critical thinking, ELTs should introduce a thorough assessment framework that includes a wide range of assessment strategies. This paper emphasizes developing rubrics designed to measure critical thinking abilities like argument analysis, evidence evaluation, and creative problem-solving. Such a strategy develops students' critical thinking skills and gives them a clear growth plan. Creating a specialized resource centre is essential to provide strong support for instructors and students who are working to raise critical thinking. This centre would provide a repository for information, case studies, and academic articles related to critical thinking. Its purpose goes beyond simple storage, enabling sharing best practices, innovative instructional strategies, and the appreciation of successes achieved through critical thinking instruction.

6.4 Collaboration Spaces:

It is important to create both real-world and virtual collaborative learning environments. Chlef University ought to design settings that promote group discussions, peer reviews, and team problem-solving. These areas serve as vessels for active student interaction, encouraging the convergence of various viewpoints and refining analytical ability. It is crucial to foster a culture of cooperation among English language instructors and learners. Holding regular meetings, peer observations, and knowledge-sharing sessions should be standard practice. This cooperation encourages sharing of successful strategies, conversations about difficulties, and the emergence of fresh concepts to inject critical thinking into teaching strategies.

6.5 Rewards:

The appreciation of creativity is necessary for inspiring and motivating students. Chlef University should establish venues like events, contests, and exhibitions to display its students' research, creative thinking, and projects. University is the place that

highlights the value of critical thinking and encourages a spiralling progression of brilliance. Chlef University should think about using research to track the development of students' critical thinking abilities over time as it plots its future route. Insights into the long-lasting effects of instructional strategies will be provided by gathering data on performance, attitudes, and self-perceived growth in critical thinking. Adopting the suggestions would enable the university to create a dynamic learning environment. Students can learn the language and the craft of critical thinking in this setting and will be prepared to excel academically to meet obstacles in the real world with wisdom and skill.

7. Conclusion

From the pedagogical perspectives of the ELTs, the study examined the development of English language learners' critical thinking skills at Chlef University. It has shed light on the complex nature of critical thinking pedagogy and examined the strategies used by ELTs to enhance this cognitive ability. The results showed that ELTs have a variety of critical thinking conceptualizations. These conceptualizations include a wide range of subjects, such as the importance of critical thinking in fostering a lifelong love of learning as well as its role in preparing students for effective communication and decision-making. ELTs use several teaching strategies, such as problem-solving exercises, discussions of global issues, Socratic questioning, and real-world scenarios. These strategies would aid students in information evaluation, synthesis, and analysis. ELTs have acknowledged difficulties in promoting critical thinking because of students' different levels of language proficiency and time restraints. To address these issues, targeted tasks, directed questions, and adaptable exercises were used, showing teachers' commitment to fostering critical thinking in the context of English language learning. Additionally, it is crucial to have an assessment framework that incorporates strategies and criteria for judging various critical viewpoints. The study supplied valuable data that may help ELTs, in general and at Chlef University in particular, enhance their critical thinking curriculum. Incorporating critical thinking exercises into the curriculum, adopting digital learning platforms, setting up a resource centre, and developing student achievement recognition and celebration programs are some suggestions for the promotion of critical thinking in the university. There are various limitations to the research, all of which should be carefully taken into account. First, the tiny sample size—ten English Language Teachers from Chlef University—may constrain the range of viewpoints and the applicability of the findings in different contexts. Second, collecting self-reported data from interviews could add bias, and eliminating student viewpoints might result in a narrower comprehension of the subject.

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