INCORPORATION OF CRITICAL THINKING FOR DEVELOPING READING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOM TEACHING[1]

INCORPORAÇÃO DO PENSAMENTO CRÍTICO PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE COMPETÊNCIAS DE LEITURA NO ENSINO EM SALA DE AULA EFL

BASEM OKLEH SALAMEH
Al-Hawamdeh
Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities in Alkharj
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Abdullah Bin Amer Street,
16278, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
b.alhawamdeh@psau.edu.sa

Corresponding author:
b.alhawamdeh@psau.edu.sa

Abstract: This study endeavoured to analyse the impacts of critical thinking guidance on reading comprehension limits as well as the effect of discussion on EFL understudies' critical thinking. There is a positive connection between etymological capability and critical thinking abilities, as per studies. As a result, the Nelson test was used to homogenise 60 middle school students before they were separated into two exploratory and control groups. A reading comprehension pre-test and a critical thinking evaluation pre-test were then given to the two groups. Through the course of the term, the exploratory gathering took part in 8 groups of treatment involving debate as a classroom activity. As a post-test, comparative tests were directed at the two gatherings. The examination of the assembled information uncovered a significant contrast between the two groups on the perusing understanding test, yet the distinction on the basic thinking test was not especially huge. Notwithstanding, the outcomes truly do suggest that teaching decisive reasoning in an EFL setting can further develop language learning. The survey makes suggestions for instructors, understudies, and educators.

Keywords: Critical Thinking. EFL. Reading skill. Argument.

Resumo: Este estudo procurou analisar os impactos da orientação do pensamento crítico sobre os limites de compreensão da leitura, bem como o efeito da discussão sobre o pensamento crítico dos subestudantes da EFL. Existe uma ligação positiva entre a capacidade etimológica e as capacidades de pensamento crítico, de acordo com os estudos. Como resultado, o teste Nelson foi utilizado para homogeneizar 60 alunos do ensino médio antes de serem separados em dois grupos exploratórios e de controlo. Um pré-teste de compreensão da leitura e um pré-teste de avaliação do pensamento crítico foram então dados aos dois grupos. Ao longo do termo, o encontro exploratório participou em 8 grupos de tratamento envolvendo debate como uma actividade de sala de aula. Como pós-teste, os testes comparativos foram dirigidos aos dois encontros. O exame das informações reunidas revelou um contraste significativo entre os dois grupos sobre o teste de compreensão, mas a distinção sobre o teste de pensamento básico não foi especialmente grande. No entanto, os resultados sugerem verdadeiramente que o ensino de raciocínio decisivo num contexto EFL pode

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desenvolver ainda mais a aprendizagem de línguas. O inquérito faz sugestões para instrutores, graduandos e educadores.

Palavras-chave: Pensamento Crítico. EFL. Capacidade de leitura. Argumento.

1. Introduction

These days, teaching EFL students critical thinking abilities is crucial. The critical thinking abilities of language learners can really be positively or negatively impacted by a variety of situations. The content, instructional strategies, instruments for evaluation, and classroom management are the most crucial considerations when integrating critical thinking skills into EFL curricula. Critical thinking skills (CTS) are required for EFL students to read deeply and look beyond the strict implications of subjects or ideas in an EFL setting. This is well demonstrated in the article by Alam, S., & Al-Hawamdeh, B. O. S. (2022). They have discussed about the use of techniques and strategies that can help to foster the learners' needs. For example, critical thinking skills ought to be a vital part of the educational programme trained in schools to urge understudies to compose pugnacious expositions, make sense of their viewpoints with a few bits of proof and verifications, and support or legitimise their perspectives by restricting those of others. CTS occasionally provide tools to assist EFL students in making decisions and making the best choices on their own. Also, they make language learning more extravagant and significant for youngsters. In this review, the specialist arrived at the conclusion that creating EFL students' degrees of English language capability requires an EFL educational programme that emphasises the utilisation of critical thinking skills in the educating and growing experience.

Students battle with language acquisition abilities regardless of the multitude of endeavours and costs of foreign language teaching. By all accounts, the issue is that teachers customarily attempt to teach understudies "what to think" as opposed to "how to think" (schaferrsman, 1991) about the subjects, which is alluded to as "critical thinking."

(Paul, 2004) argues that in most educational institutions, where students acquire tactics for short-term memory and performance, lower request learning, which incorporates affiliated learning and repetition retention, prompts misconception, bias, and debilitation. According to traditional teaching methods, teachers neglect the thoughts and opinions of their students, preventing them from speaking their minds.

There are numerous approaches and tools for training, assessing, and comparing critical thinking abilities. Teaching critical thinking skills has also brought up a number of difficulties, including those related to culture, emotion, transferability, and generalizability, which are explored and addressed by experts. Despite all the different theories and points of view on how to do so, everyone nevertheless recognises that cultivating critical thinking abilities is the basic goal of education. (Reed,1998)

Given that many children are not taught to think critically in their own language, it is essential to give them the right environment in which to develop these skills when learning a foreign language. Considering that children's language abilities don't exhibit the components of critical thinking, it is vital to examine whether imparting critical thinking skills to youngsters could assist them in becoming more familiar language clients. This study gives data with respect to the association between critical thinking and students' presentations on perusing perception messages utilising critical thinking strategies and banter to experts in the field of language education. Scientists who are interested in critical thinking and its relationship with etymological abilities will find a niche in this. Therefore, the following questions are what this study aims to address:

Q1: Does strengthening the critical thinking abilities of EFL students have any appreciable impact on their reading comprehension?

Q2: Does debate in EFL classes improve students' capacity for critical thought?

2. Review of Literature

Critical Thinking

The definitions of critical thinking used in the writing (Ennis, 2013; Fisher & Scriven,1997 and Paul & Elder, 1990) vary. According to critical thinking theorists, exercising control over one's own reasoning and a commitment to advancing it are necessary components of critical thinking, despite the accentuation put on different regions. Critical thinking, according to one of the most widely used and recognised definitions of the term, refers to people's ability to deal with their own reasoning and lay out appropriate measures and principles for analysing it. Assert that there are three components that make up critical thinking: the components of cognition (reasoning), as well as intellectual norms and abilities. Paul and Elder contend that understanding two fundamental features of thinking is necessary before one can learn how to improve it (Intellectual standards and thinking components). Alam, Karim & Ahmad (2020)

demonstrated that critical thinking can be improved by the active use of activities in the pedagogy and they have demonstrated in their article. People must be able to identify the "pieces" (components) that make up their thinking and be able to assess their usage of these components according to intellectual norms. The capacity for intellectual growth could be gradually increased.

Relevant studies

Using critical thinking strategies, (Marashi & Hosseini, 2019) looked at the relative effects of convergent and divergent tasks on the writing of EFL learners. A sample of 60 male and female students from one of Tehran's language schools was selected. The example was divided into two gatherings for the tests (divergent and convergence). The educator started by training the two groups in the critical thinking (CT) process of thinking, characterising and dissecting, and determining direction. Before beginning treatment on the two distinct types of assignments, to be specific, disparate and merged assignments, the educator/scientist acquainted the understudies with CT strategies. Results showed that neither gathering impressively outflanked the other. To further help the possibility that critical thinking education is a profoundly huge element in ELT, this result, according to researchers, was brought about more by critical thinking instruction than by the variety of convergent and divergent tasks.

A study by (Sumarni et al., 2018) sought to create evaluation tools to gauge critical thinking abilities. They offered valid, dependable, and useful assessment techniques as their study's suggested conclusion.

(Manel et al., 2019) although learners are aware that using English only has advantages, it is still important to look into how they feel about it. The current reform, which actively involves students in classroom activities and centres them at the centre of the learning process, has students believing that L1 must be employed in the classroom on occasion to meet their needs.

The goal of Margana M.'s (Widyantoro, 2017) study was to create English textbooks that would help students in Yogyakarta's vocational high schools improve their higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). It is based on data showing that current secondary school textbooks value memorization and comprehension above micro-language skills. As a result, pupils graduate with weak verbal skills and uncommon HOTS. Data were gathered through a survey given to 320 students, 14 teacher interviews, and documentation. The

findings indicated that teachers and students preferred textbooks that were packed with HOTS that might foster creativity and critical thinking (Alam et al., 2022).

A report by (Zoho et al., 2016) focuses on three groups of research-backed teaching methods that can be used in EFL classrooms to promote CT. The primary areas of focus were explicit instruction, instructor questioning, active and cooperative learning tactics, as well as a discussion of the characteristics of good CT instruction, with the overall goal of illuminating instructional strategies for CT. Al-hawamdeh & Alam, S. (2022) opine in their article about the problems and issues faced by the pedagogues as well as the learners'.

After completing their English classes, Finnish university students were evaluated by (Aaron Orszag, 2015) for their ability to use critical thinking. It also examined the connection between numerous other parameters and students' self-reported critical thinking abilities. By giving a questionnaire to 24 students, data were gathered. The findings showed that pupils were aware of their capacity to engage in critical thought. Regardless, they expressed a desire to become more acquainted with the components of these critical thinking skills. The understudies focused on perusing and social contact as essential parts of creating and advancing their critical thinking skills. The findings also suggested that encouraging students to engage in meaningful conversation through dialogic teaching techniques and strategies can help them enhance their capacity for critical thought.

In their study, (Asharheidari & Tahriri, 2015) sought to understand how EFL teachers felt about the teaching of critical thinking (CT). To collect data, 30 EFL teachers were chosen. The study asked about teachers' attitudes toward imparting critical thinking abilities. The results demonstrated that EFL teachers comprehend the idea of critical thinking skills and are conscious of how important it is to include these abilities within the EFL curriculum. They also said that they would be open to training sessions on how to impart these abilities.

3. Methodology

A. Participants

75 female EFL students were chosen as the subjects for the current study. They were learning intermediate English at the English Institute and had comparable educational backgrounds, social statuses, and families. They were between the ages of 16 and 19. Few of the participants were university freshmen, while the majority were high school pupils.

To ascertain their degree of proficiency, they took the Nelson test. In view of the after effects of the Nelson test, 60 students were isolated into the control and trial groups. In each gathering, there were 30 students (n = 30).

B. Instrumentation

1. Test for Homogeneity

An English capability test, the Nelson 150D, was given to guarantee that the subjects were uniform. There are 50 inquiries with numerous decisions about grasping English syntactic structures. The time limitation for this test was 25 minutes, and a maximum score of 50 was given. To decide whether the capability levels of these 60 understudies were uniform, a different t-test was performed. The aftereffects of the autonomous t-test and the consequences of the scores showed that the two gatherings had comparable degrees of language capability.

2. Reading Comprehension

There were 25 inquiries after five entries on the test. Therefore, a score arrangement of 25 was utilized. Both the trial bunch and the benchmark group were exposed to this test. The test's unwavering quality, legitimacy, thing office, and thing segregation were all determined during the review's steering stage. Through the KR-21 formula, the dependability of the test results was judged to be.

3. Test of Critical Thinking

The subjects completed the critical thinking appraisal test (CTA), which consists of 30 items and checks a portion of critical thinking's most significant abilities, before the treatment to survey the subjects' critical thinking breaking point and after the treatment to survey any upgrades in the subjects' decisive reasoning cut-off using debate. The reliability's Cronbach Alpha coefficient was 89. As a result, the scores were between 30 and 150. The scores of the contestants were totalled to determine their score.

4. Subjects for Debate

The researcher chose eight extremely contentious issues after taking into account the goals of the study and the compelling evidence that discussion is the greatest way to learn and put the concepts of critical thinking into practise (Freeley & Steinberg, 2013). According to the students' interests, (Fahim & Saeepour, 2011) chose the informal and contentious issues from the books Landmark by (Haines et al., 2000), for and against by (Alexander, 1973), and Mosaic 1 for reading. Then, in order to make them suitable for

intermediate EFL students, they were updated and streamlined using websites. These subjects were chosen with the idea that debate topics ought to be very contentious.

C. Method and Design

In this work, a quasi-experimental control group plan without randomization was undertaken. The accompanying activities were completed in order to put this review's examination speculation to the test. Toward the start of the review, 75 students took the standard Nelson 150D test to affirm that the members' degrees of language capability were uniform. 60 of the 75 students were divided into the control and trial gatherings. There were 30 members (n) in each gathering. Then, at that point, to check how they might interpret composed data, members were given a reading comprehension exam.

D. Treatment

After the pre-test, 15 subjects were decreased to 8, and the trial bunch had the choice to pick 8 of them in view of their inclinations. As recommended by (Alexander, 1973), it is important to pick subjects that address the students' interests. Following the selection of eight, they were distributed to the students in a consistent manner. The specialist heeded the guidance given in (Alexander, 1973) in regards to how to introduce the contention in the study hall. The initial step was to acquaint the subject with the students and give them the books to peruse at home to direct the resulting audit and order appropriate data. It's a common misconception that having an understanding of a hot-button issue is a requirement for participating in a debate. Cognitive science research backs up Willingham's claim that "the process of thinking is linked with domain knowledge." They were then required to provide lists of the issue's benefits and drawbacks to the class. The second step involved breaking the students up into smaller groups so they could discuss their viewpoints and consider any potential counterarguments. To dispel any misunderstanding regarding the precise meaning of the words, one of the students would convey the subject matter in an understandable manner and precisely define the notions. Determining the language used in an argument is crucial since it establishes the topic and scope of the discussion, according to claims (Halvorsen, 2005). The discussion would then proceed, and the participants would argue for or against their positions. After the students had a chance to voice their thoughts, the lecturer would summarise their points of view, point out their strengths and faults, and ask the class which side they thought had made a stronger argument. This section is crucial because it teaches the students that the process of reflection and discussion may result in concrete outcomes. Each session ended with the

students presenting a written summary of the lesson's main points and their personal conclusions on the subject. Students receive grades after the debate depending on the strength of their arguments. He also made an effort to teach them how to back up their claims with facts, logic, statistics, and the advice of experts. They were experts at starting an argument with "I think or believe that... because..." (Djuranovic, 2003).

4. Results and Discussion

A. An assessment of homogeneity

On the pre-test, the language, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills of the two groups were the same, as per the discoveries of the ongoing survey, which are introduced in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The mean scores for the trial and control groups are 18.13 and 17.90, respectively, as displayed in Table 1. The homogeneous fluctuations of the two gatherings, which both have a similar populace, are 4.024 and 4.032, separately.

Table 1: Nelson descriptive statistics

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SME
NELSON	Experimental	30	28	4.024	0.919
	Control	30	25.83	4.032	0.921

B. Comprehension of Reading Pre-test

The homogeneity of the reading comprehension levels of the two gatherings is displayed in Table 2 by an autonomous t-test. According to Table 2, the two groups' respective mean scores are 18.13 and 17.90. The homogeneity of the groups is indicated by the homogenous variances of 2.083 and 2.356.

Table 2: Pre-test for reading and understanding descriptive statistics

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SME
RCPRE	Experimental	30	18.13	2.083	0.665
	Control	30	17.9	2.356	0.711

C. Pre-test CT

Table 3 shows how similar the two groups were on the critical thinking pre-test. According to Table 3, the two groups' respective means are 97.10 and 98.83. The homogeneity of the groups is indicated by the homogenous variances of 14.087 and 14.483.

Table 3: pre-test for critical thinking using descriptive statistics

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SME
CTPRE	Experimental	30	97.1	14.087	2.390
	Control	30	98.83	14.483	2.573

D. Post-test on Reading Comprehension

Tables 4 and 5 portray the difference in reading comprehension between the trial and control groups after treatment, however not the less sensational distinction on the trial of critical thinking.

Table 4: Comprehension of descriptive statistics reading post-test

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SME
RCPOST	Experimental	30	22.67	3.468	0.551
	Control	30	20.23	4.645	0.766

E. Post-test CT

As indicated by table 4, the individual mean scores for the exploratory and control bunches are 21.67 and 19.23. We could reason that further developing EFL understudies' critical thinking abilities fundamentally affect their reading comprehension.

Table 5: Critical thinking post-test using descriptive statistics

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SME
CTPOST	Experimental	30	99.5	17.021	2.925
	Control	30	97.37	16.384	2.809

Table 5 presents the unique data from the Critical Thinking test for the two groups. The exploratory and control groups' separate mean scores are 99.5 and 97.3.

It is required to provide the opinions of some cognitive specialists on these two factors in order to support the conclusion in the first question, which demonstrates the effect of teaching critical thinking abilities on reading comprehension. Inference, synthesis, analysis, and assessment are some of the mental processes involved in reading comprehension. These processes are considered by experts to be at the basis of critical thinking. In terms of cognitive abilities, the following are those that experts consider to be fundamental to critical thinking: interpretation, analysis, assessment, inference, explanation, and self-control (Facione).

This construction of meaning during reading is "a complex merger of skills, prior knowledge, and text mediated by the language skills, motivation, and interest of the reader," according to Collins, Gambrell, and Pressley taking Dorothy Durkin's definition of reading

comprehension as a starting point. The aforementioned assertion has thus been proven true by the experimental group's notable reading comprehension improvement. As can be seen, critical thinking and understanding are both cognitive processes that share cognitive skills, therefore developing the first can help develop the second reading comprehension. This corroborates the study's main finding of improving reading comprehension through critical thinking instruction.

However, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups when comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the critical thinking post-test. The lack of a significant difference prompted the researcher to look into the variations in pre- and post-test mean scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental and control groups' respective mean critical thinking pre-test scores were 97.10 and 98.83, as shown in table 3 above, but these mean scores on the post-test (table 5) were 99.50 and 97.37. The experimental group's post-test means scores increased from 97.10 to 99.50, which shows a trend in the improvement of students' critical thinking following the intervention. It can be said that debaters gained a little bit more than non-debaters, but not much more than gains made by non-debaters in a comparable group. However, there are several reasons why there isn't a discernible difference: While the limited time revealed the trend of improvement in students' critical thinking ability and the significant improvement in their reading comprehension, a longer time may produce better results, according to the researchers' assumption that the limited time and low number of conducted debates, which were inevitable during one term. Despite the fact that the present study was not significant, the slight benefits seem to point to a connection between the two factors and should spur future investigation.

The fact that all of the students in the experimental group were inexperienced debaters who were taking part in debate for the first time was another explanation that the researcher considered for why there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups on the post-test of critical thinking. While in the aforementioned research, the majority of the students had debate participation experience (Alam et al., 2021). According to Cross, who conducted research in which novice debaters participated, high engagement in competitive debate improves a debater's capacity for critical thought, whereas low participation may not excess critical thinking beyond the standard progress in an academic year. The poor advances in critical thinking may therefore be justified by some students' low engagement. This justification suggests that a considerable improvement in critical

thinking for rookie debaters is improbable given the intensity of time and the small number of debate sessions. The aforementioned trials, in which the experimental group dramatically outperformed the control group, involved a large number of more than 200 seasoned debaters and were conducted over a lengthy period of more than 6 months of debate. These elements are regarded as this study's shortcomings that contributed to the non-significant outcome.

Facione is of the opinion that although all instruments for assessing critical thinking ability have been carefully developed and tested for reliability and validity and have been widely used to test people's thinking ability, "One test purported to measure every aspect of critical thinking.

The large improvement in reading comprehension of the experimental group can be explained in two ways, keeping in mind the aforementioned discussion and the lack of significant advances in critical thinking following the use of debate in language classrooms:

First, despite the fact that the discussion has not shown a statistically significant effect, considering its cognitive complexity, it may have indirectly impacted students' ability to comprehend, which is also a complicated cognitive skill.

Pressley contends that there is still much to learn and teach about reading comprehension and higher order thinking. He states in Improving Comprehension Instruction: "We are still a long way from understanding how to instruct readers who will carefully consider what they can do with textual concepts, when they apply, and when they do not. There needs to be a lot of thought put into how to teach children to absorb and use what they read to make wise decisions. We have more knowledge of comprehension techniques that encourage simple text memorization than we have of those that encourage in-depth analysis of texts' ideas ".

Another conclusion is that the students may have benefited from the readings and conducted some study in advance of the discussion. The students were exposed to more reading materials than the control group, despite not receiving any instruction in comprehension skills. The texts that were provided to them for the debate as well as any texts that they may have looked up while doing research for the debate were among the resources. They participated in more new vocabulary and structures as a result than the control group. Each one of these may help to increase reading comprehension. According to Dorn and Soffos, understanding is a positive process that is individualised by each reader's ideas and thoughts. They go on to say that concepts and ideas can only be

transmitted through direct interpersonal contact "What can educators do to encourage understanding? The only thing we can probably do is establish a series of real circumstances that prompt pupils' thought processes. The language teachers use to get their students talking about books is the most crucial instrument. Therefore, according to these statements, it is highly likely that the students' comprehension ability has been increased by the argument in the classroom. Our classroom must be alive with literate task- filled dialogue about books that apprentice kids into deeper comprehension.

Students who participated in discussion sessions throughout the treatment period reportedly scored much higher on the post-test for reading comprehension compared to the control group. Given that the students in this study did not receive any instruction in reading comprehension techniques, it can be inferred that applying critical thinking techniques will enable the students to digest material more deeply and to enhance comprehension as a general cognitive talent.

With regard to the second query, the study revealed a minor benefit for the experimental group as a result of the intervention. The results demonstrated that integrating critical thinking abilities in language classrooms is essential to improving language teaching and learning, notwithstanding the modest difference between the two groups on the (CTA) exam and taking into account all the limitations and restrictions placed on the study. Every effort student made, such as reading class materials, looking up information online, discussing their opinions with others, working together in the classroom, and participating in debates, was a significant contribution to triggering their thinking skills, or more specifically, activating their cognitive ability, which improved their reading comprehension. It is thought that more research in the area of language teaching is necessary before generalising the findings.

5. Conclusion

Executing critical thinking standards in the ongoing review can act as an imaginative motivation for prospectus and material fashioners, educators, students, and test engineers since it is widely accepted that showing critical thinking skills is fundamental to improving language capability (Alam, 2022).

The findings of the study may serve as inspiration for curriculum and course designers to incorporate critical thinking topics into student textbooks and teacher

preparation programs. Textbooks that encourage critical thinking are needed for students, and teachers must receive training to alter their own and their students' mindsets (Krieger, 2005).

In addition, they should be more flexible when it comes to teaching and take into account students' mentalities, interests, and abilities to help them use their reasoning and communicate their thoughts clearly and imaginatively rather than being test-centered and producing students who might perform well on their exams (Kabilan, 2000).

The importance of subject-matter knowledge in critical thinking is demonstrated by the use of debate in language schools. Familiarity with the issue is the crucial part of preparation for argument, according to ADSA (Fahim & Saeepour, 2011). The students at first seemed unfit to discuss the subject; however, after studying it and furnishing themselves with the vital data, they were more anxious to participate in the conversation, contributing splendid thoughts, posing clever inquiries, and showing phenomenal critical thinking skills.

The students, who shockingly valued the programme and pushed for having a more drawn-out length and more discussion meetings following each class, are the third side remembered for this review. While in normal classrooms they are vigorously dependent on the speakers and the course readings, the training programme taught the students how to independently look up information about the subjects from various sources. They would be encouraged to think broadly by conducting investigations. The understudies' assistance in speaking during the discussion meetings was another benefit of the program, allowing even the most saved children to express their own thoughts. The students were encouraged to use their writing skills and convey their opinions in writing by creating a report about the discussion's overall conclusion. According to Cohen, cited by (Peirce, 2005), "discussion can develop the students' four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing."

This study also addresses test creators. Given the discharge impact of testing, teaching critical thinking abilities in EFL circumstances would be trivial to the same extent as teachers depend on customary testing that requires repetition and retention. This paper motivates test engineers to make changes in testing by creating tests to affect the type of guidance as well as improve students' capacity for creative thinking during test-taking.

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