

Navigating Challenges in Teaching Critical Thinking: A Study of Indonesian EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Practicum



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ABSTRACT

Applying critical thinking is the ability to actively analyze, assess and understand information in depth before making a decision or concluding something. Researchers conducted this research on two English language education students at Nahdlatul Ulama Sunan Giri University to find out what obstacles and efforts were applied when teaching in the classroom. This research uses a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. Based on the research results, there are eight obstacles faced by teachers, namely: traditional teaching methods, time constraints, assessment challenges, teacher training, disciplinary disorders, resistance to change, limited resources, and cultural and social factors. All of these obstacles have been overcome well, namely by using various efforts such as argument mapping, analyzing texts and sources, using real-world examples, encouraging collaborative learning, building relationships, providing clear instructions, encouraging inquiry-based learning, demonstrating thinking processes, improve academic achievement, and problem-solving skills. Recommendations for future researchers are to develop this research by using comparative classes and expanding the scope of the research and further researchers can develop it by using more research instruments to further strengthen the results applying.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession has become increasingly attractive in recent years, largely due to improvements in allowances and salaries that enhance its appeal as a stable career. As a result, the number of individuals entering the profession has risen, including those from non-educational backgrounds. While this trend has expanded the pool of teachers, it has also created new challenges concerning the competencies required to ensure effective instruction. Teacher competency standards, therefore, play a central role in ensuring that professional qualifications align with pedagogical expectations (Brownell, Ross, Colón, & McCallum, 2005). These standards emphasize not only subject-matter expertise but also the pedagogical and reflective skills necessary to facilitate students' cognitive development. Within this framework, the preparation of pre-service teachers, particularly in English language education, becomes critical, as they represent the next generation of professionals responsible for shaping learners' academic and personal growth.

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A particularly significant dimension of teacher preparation is the integration of critical thinking in instructional practice. Critical thinking has long been regarded as an essential educational outcome that transcends subject boundaries, equipping learners with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned decisions (Mangena, 2003; Ennis, 2018). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), critical thinking contributes to language learning in several ways: it enhances reading comprehension, supports the evaluation of texts and arguments, encourages logical expression in writing and speaking, and facilitates effective listening and interpretation. In this respect, critical thinking encompasses both cognitive skills—such as identifying assumptions, evaluating evidence, and recognizing bias—and affective dispositions, such as curiosity, open-mindedness, and reflective judgment (Facione, 2020). By fostering these skills, EFL instruction extends beyond linguistic accuracy to cultivate broader cognitive and communicative competencies, thereby preparing learners to engage critically in academic, social, and professional contexts.

Pre-service English teachers occupy a pivotal position in this process. Defined as individuals undertaking formal education and training to become professional English teachers, they are typically students of education, English, or linguistics who are completing the necessary requirements for certification and practice (Peggy, 2018; Lestari, Sa'idah, Zumrudiana, & Fatoni, 2022). Their practicum experiences, often conducted in junior or senior high schools, are designed to bridge theoretical knowledge with classroom realities, enabling them to develop strategies that foster both language acquisition and higher-order thinking. In addition to teaching language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—pre-service teachers are expected to create inclusive learning environments, encourage active participation, and model proficient communication (Mudra, 2018; Sinem, 2016). They must also design and adapt curricula to meet students' diverse needs while aligning with national standards. As Fatoni and Zainuddin (2021) observed, these practices require not only pedagogical competence but also the ability to implement student-centered approaches that stimulate critical engagement with language and content.

Developing these competencies is particularly demanding because pre-service teachers often work within environments characterized by constraints and challenges. For example, they are required to develop inclusive practices that support learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Effective communication in both English and students' first language is frequently essential for clarifying concepts and addressing learner needs. Moreover, pre-service teachers must continually update their knowledge through professional development and active participation in teaching communities to remain responsive to new methodologies and technological innovations.

A growing body of research highlights the importance of preparing teachers to foster critical thinking in their students. Agustina and Abidin (2022), for example, demonstrated that digital literacy combined with parental involvement significantly enhances students' capacity for critical engagement with information. Podolsky, Kini, and Darling-Hammond (2018) further showed that teaching experience correlates with improved student achievement and greater development of critical thinking skills, suggesting that professional growth over time equips teachers with strategies to go beyond rote instruction. Within Indonesian contexts, Fatoni (2021) observed that online debate activities promoted through platforms such as Zoom encouraged students to articulate arguments critically, while guided peer review in writing classes also contributed to developing evaluative reasoning (Fatoni & Tauchid, 2020). These studies underscore that when teachers integrate critical thinking into instructional design, they foster not only language proficiency but also essential life skills.

Similarly, other research emphasizes the role of creativity and innovation in teaching critical thinking. Pentury (2017) found that creative teachers enhance students' cognitive and affective development by designing learning activities that align with the demands of globalization. Such practices cultivate not only critical thinking but also values, life skills, and professional attitudes. In international contexts, studies have also identified challenges that hinder the integration of critical thinking. For instance, Abdulkarim and Ali (2023), in their investigation of high schools in the Kurdistan Region, highlighted obstacles such as limited teacher training and resistance to pedagogical

change. Ag-Ahmad, Thamrini, Syed, and Bakar (2023) conducted a systematic review of pre-service English teachers in Malaysia, identifying persistent issues including gaps between theory and classroom practice, insufficient professional development, and difficulties in classroom management. Similarly, Maharani and Fithriani (2023) reported that Indonesian pre-service teachers frequently encountered discrepancies between their expectations and classroom realities, including inadequate supervision and challenges in managing student behavior. These studies reveal that while the value of critical thinking is widely recognized, the practical implementation remains fraught with systemic and pedagogical barriers.

The importance of addressing these challenges becomes even more pronounced in light of broader societal changes. The rapid expansion of technology and the proliferation of digital information have transformed the ways in which knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Learners now navigate environments characterized by constant communication, instantaneous news, and a flood of information that requires discernment and evaluation. While technology facilitates access to knowledge, it also increases exposure to misinformation, underscoring the need for critical thinking as a safeguard against unreliable sources (Paul & Elder, 2019). Within this context, EFL classrooms represent a strategic site for cultivating critical thinking, as language learning inherently involves interpretation, negotiation of meaning, and engagement with diverse perspectives. Pre-service teachers, therefore, must be trained not only to teach English but also to integrate critical thinking pedagogy that prepares learners for participation in a knowledge-driven society.

Pre-service English teachers' practicum experiences highlight the tension between theoretical preparation and classroom realities. As Topkaya and Uztosun (2012) note, motivations for entering the teaching profession are varied, ranging from intrinsic passion for education to pragmatic considerations of job stability. Once in practicum, however, pre-service teachers face the complexities of classroom management, curriculum implementation, and adapting instructional strategies to diverse learners. Yunus, Hashim, Mohd, and Mahamod (2010) found that reflective activities following practicum experiences were crucial in helping pre-service teachers navigate these challenges and develop adaptive strategies. These findings resonate with Richards and Farrell (2011), who argue that reflective practice is indispensable for bridging the gap between pre-service training and the demands of real classrooms.

Critical thinking in English language teaching, therefore, emerges not only as a pedagogical skill but also as an essential competency for preparing learners to thrive in contemporary society. Murawski (2012) defined critical thinking as a form of disciplined reasoning that guides decision-making and belief formation. Similarly, Halpern (2014) emphasized that critical thinking involves purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed thought that improves problem-solving and decision-making. These frameworks underscore the importance of integrating critical thinking explicitly into EFL contexts, where language serves as both a medium of communication and a tool for cognitive development. When pre-service teachers are able to incorporate strategies such as inquiry-based learning, argument mapping, and reflective dialogue, they help students cultivate the analytical and evaluative skills necessary for lifelong learning.

The teaching profession is increasingly recognized as central to the development of learners' critical thinking skills, particularly within the EFL context. Pre-service English teachers are positioned at the intersection of educational theory and classroom practice, and their ability to foster critical thinking is both a professional responsibility and a pedagogical necessity. Prior studies have documented the benefits of critical thinking integration, as well as the systemic and contextual challenges that hinder its effective implementation. At the same time, societal transformations driven by technology and globalization have heightened the urgency of equipping learners with the ability to discern, evaluate, and apply knowledge critically. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their practicum in implementing critical thinking and to identify the strategies employed to overcome these obstacles. By addressing this issue, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen teacher preparation, enrich English language

education, and support the cultivation of critical, reflective learners capable of meeting the demands of the 21st century.

Pre-Service English Teacher's Characteristics

The term pre-service refers to the preparatory stage prior to formally entering a profession. In education, it denotes the period when individuals are still undergoing academic preparation before officially becoming teachers. Pre-service English teachers are typically undergraduate students in education or linguistics who have completed foundational coursework and are engaged in practicum experiences as part of their professional preparation (Alghamdy, 2018). These practicum placements often occur in junior or senior high schools, where pre-service teachers teach for several months under supervision, applying theories and methodologies learned in university settings.

One defining characteristic of pre-service English teachers is their dual identity as both learners and practitioners. While they are still acquiring pedagogical knowledge and subject expertise, they are simultaneously expected to apply these skills in authentic classroom contexts. This dual role can generate tension, as pre-service teachers must balance theoretical understanding with practical application (Topkaya & Uztosun, 2012). In many cases, they experience challenges in adapting to classroom realities, such as managing student behavior, addressing diverse learner needs, and aligning instruction with curriculum expectations.

Pre-service teachers are also expected to demonstrate adaptability and resilience. The practicum environment requires them to tailor instructional strategies to specific classroom conditions, often within a limited time frame. They must therefore rely on reflective practices to analyze their teaching, evaluate student responses, and adjust strategies accordingly (Farrell, 2019). Such reflection enables them to transition from passive recipients of knowledge to active practitioners who engage critically with pedagogy. Moreover, their role extends beyond delivering language instruction: they are models of communicative competence, expected to exemplify accuracy, fluency, and clarity in their use of English (Mudra, 2018).

Equally important is the expectation that pre-service English teachers foster supportive and inclusive learning environments. They are tasked with developing sensitivity to learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and with using this awareness to design instruction that is equitable and engaging. This aligns with Kabilan et al. (2011), who argue that teacher education must prepare candidates not only for technical aspects of teaching but also for the intercultural and interpersonal dimensions of pedagogy. The ability to communicate effectively in both English and the students' first language further strengthens this inclusivity by ensuring that learners' needs are addressed comprehensively.

Thus, the characteristics of pre-service English teachers can be summarized as encompassing pedagogical competence, communicative proficiency, adaptability, reflective capacity, and intercultural awareness. These attributes form the foundation for effective teaching and are central to their role in promoting critical thinking in EFL contexts.

Pre-Service Teacher's Teaching Experience

Teaching practicum represents one of the most significant experiences for pre-service teachers, as it bridges the gap between theoretical coursework and real classroom practice. According to Pratiwi, Eka, and Wardhana (2021), these experiences typically involve multiple stages, including lesson planning, classroom instruction, observation, and mentoring by experienced educators. Practicum provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge, refine classroom management strategies, and engage in reflective practice.

A central challenge in teaching practicum is the translation of theory into practice. While teacher education programs emphasize teaching methods, instructional design, and assessment strategies, pre-service teachers frequently struggle to implement these theories in classrooms with diverse learners and dynamic conditions. Mudra (2018) highlighted that many pre-service teachers

encounter difficulties in adjusting to unfamiliar school environments, which may lead to feelings of uncertainty and limited confidence in their teaching. Mentor guidance, therefore, becomes critical in helping them navigate these complexities.

The quality of teaching experience is also influenced by the constructivist beliefs and motivation that pre-service teachers bring to the classroom. Teachers with strong intrinsic motivation and a constructivist orientation are more likely to adopt student-centered approaches that encourage active participation and critical engagement (Yunus, Hashim, Mohd, & Mahamod, 2010). In contrast, those with limited motivation may resort to traditional, teacher-centered practices that restrict opportunities for learners to think independently.

Teaching practicum not only develops professional competence but also shapes pre-service teachers' professional identity. Kini and Podolsky (2016) noted that accumulated teaching experience contributes to greater teacher effectiveness over time, which, in turn, enhances student achievement and engagement. However, Ismail (2011) emphasized that such experiences are not without obstacles: pre-service teachers often face classroom management issues, resource limitations, and challenges in balancing their dual roles as students and teachers. These difficulties can hinder their ability to implement innovative methods, including critical thinking strategies.

Reflective practice is a crucial mechanism for overcoming these obstacles. By engaging in post-lesson reflections, peer discussions, and mentor feedback, pre-service teachers can evaluate their performance, identify areas for improvement, and develop adaptive strategies (Richards & Farrell, 2011). These processes help them cultivate resilience and adaptability—key traits for navigating the uncertainties of teaching. Moreover, reflective practice reinforces their capacity to link theory with practice, enabling them to transform classroom experiences into professional growth.

In sum, teaching practicum provides pre-service teachers with invaluable opportunities for professional development. Despite the challenges, these experiences prepare them to navigate complex classroom realities and enhance their ability to integrate critical thinking into instruction.

Critical Thinking in English Language Teaching

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a central educational goal and a key skill for the 21st century. It can be defined as purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed thinking that involves analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to make sound judgments (Halpern, 2014). In the field of language education, critical thinking is particularly important because language learning inherently involves interpretation, meaning-making, and communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries (Ennis, 2018).

Within EFL contexts, critical thinking contributes directly to learners' academic and communicative competence. It enhances reading comprehension by enabling learners to evaluate arguments and detect biases; it improves writing by encouraging logical organization and evidence-based reasoning; and it strengthens speaking and listening by fostering dialogue, questioning, and perspective-taking (Facione, 2020; Paul & Elder, 2019). By integrating critical thinking into language instruction, teachers not only develop students' linguistic proficiency but also prepare them for active participation in an information-rich and globally interconnected world.

However, the integration of critical thinking into English language teaching presents several challenges. Traditional teaching methods, which prioritize rote memorization and grammar accuracy, often leave limited space for analytical or reflective activities (Rahman, Azmi, Wahab, Abdullah, & Azmi, 2016). Moreover, assessment practices in many contexts focus on standardized testing, which may discourage teachers from implementing inquiry-based or problem-solving tasks. These systemic barriers contribute to a gap between policy aspirations—such as fostering higher-order thinking—and classroom realities.

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of specific strategies for embedding critical thinking into language teaching. Inquiry-based learning, for example, encourages students to ask questions, investigate topics, and construct knowledge collaboratively, thereby promoting critical

engagement (Ramli, Riniati, Al Haddar, Munandar, & Ubaidillah, 2023). Debate activities have also been shown to cultivate critical reasoning, persuasive communication, and openness to multiple perspectives (Fatoni, 2021). Additionally, peer review and collaborative projects provide opportunities for students to evaluate evidence, critique arguments, and reflect on their own reasoning (Fatoni & Tauchid, 2020).

Teacher education plays a decisive role in equipping pre-service teachers with these strategies. As Richards and Farrell (2011) argue, teacher training programs must emphasize not only technical competencies but also reflective and critical pedagogies. Farrell (2019) further contends that reflective practice enables teachers to interrogate their assumptions, evaluate their classroom decisions, and adapt to diverse learner needs. By incorporating frameworks for critical thinking into teacher education, pre-service teachers can be better prepared to meet the demands of 21st-century classrooms.

Ultimately, critical thinking in English language teaching is both a pedagogical tool and an educational objective. Its successful integration depends on teachers' willingness and capacity to adopt innovative strategies, adapt to diverse contexts, and reflect critically on their practice. For pre-service teachers, cultivating critical thinking skills in students not only enhances language learning but also prepares learners to navigate the complexities of contemporary life.

METHODS

Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a descriptive case study approach. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes in natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study design was chosen because it allows for in-depth analysis of a small number of participants, generating insights into how pre-service teachers implement critical thinking during their practicum. This approach is suitable for capturing the complexity of teaching practices and the challenges faced when theory meets classroom realities.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in the English Language Education program at one private Islamic university in East Java, Indonesia. Two pre-service English teachers in their final year of study participated. Both had completed most pedagogical and linguistic coursework and were teaching in junior high schools as part of their practicum requirement. The participants were selected purposively, as they were directly involved in classroom teaching and able to reflect critically on their experiences. Although both participants shared similar academic backgrounds, their practicum contexts differed. One was assigned to an urban school with relatively better resources, while the other taught in a rural school with limited facilities. These contextual variations enriched the study by providing comparative insights into how critical thinking is fostered under different conditions. Pseudonyms (S1 and S2) are used to protect participants' identities.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for consistency in guiding questions while also enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences. Each participant took part in two interview sessions, each lasting 45–60 minutes. Questions explored obstacles in implementing critical thinking, student responses, and the strategies teachers employed to address challenges. Examples of guiding questions included, namely challenges they faced in fostering critical thinking in your classroom, how the students responded to tasks requiring critical thinking, and effective strategies in encouraging students' critical engagement. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. To supplement the interviews, observational notes were also taken during visits to the practicum schools. These notes provided contextual background

on classroom dynamics, resource availability, and teaching practices. Together, these instruments ensured a richer understanding of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved six phases: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Interview transcripts were read multiple times, and segments of text were coded according to emerging patterns related to obstacles and strategies. Themes such as "traditional teaching methods," "time constraints," and "resource limitations" were derived inductively from participants' narratives. Strategies such as "argument mapping," "use of real-world examples," and "collaborative learning" were also identified as recurring themes. Thematic analysis ensured that findings reflected both individual perspectives and broader issues in pre-service teacher education.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed summaries of their transcripts and preliminary findings to confirm accuracy. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the context and participants, enabling readers to assess relevance to other settings. Dependability was achieved by documenting procedures clearly so that the study could be replicated. Confirmability was maintained through an audit trail that recorded analytic decisions and interpretations, minimizing researcher bias. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining approval from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were presented in two distinct sessions. The initial session centered on the challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers when implementing critical thinking. The subsequent session delved into the endeavours undertaken by pre-service English teachers in implementing critical thinking.

Pre-Service English Teachers' Obstacles in Implementing Critical Thinking

Based on the data gathered from semi-structured interviews, it is evident that the two participants in this study, referred to as S1 (Student 1) and S2 (Student 2), presented contrasting responses to the five interview questions relating to research question one. The findings from the interviews shed light on several challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers in terms of integrating critical thinking. These obstacles encompass:

The first interview with pre-service English teachers about the obstacles faced in implementing critical thinking in the classroom.

*Implementing critical thinking in the classroom can face several obstacles, including: **Traditional Teaching Methods, Time Constraints, Assessment Challenges, Teacher Training, and Disciplinary Disorders.** (S-1:11/7/24) [Obstacles]*

*The obstacles I encountered was **Resistance to Change, Resource Limitations, and Cultural and Social Factors.** (S-2:12/7/24) [Obstacles]*

Based on the aforementioned statement, it is apparent that pre-service English teachers encounter multiple challenges when it comes to integrating critical thinking into the classroom. These challenges encompass conventional teaching approaches, time limitations, assessment difficulties, inadequate teacher training, disciplinary issues, resistance to change, limited resources, and cultural and social influences.

The second interviews with pre-service English teachers about what happens if students cannot think critically in the classroom?

*If students cannot think critically in the classroom, **several negative consequences can arise: Difficulty in Problem-Solving, Limited Understanding, Vulnerability to Misinformation, Weak Analytical Skills, Poor Decision-Making, Reduced Creativity, and Limited Engagement.** (S-1:11/7/24) [Negative Consequences]*

*Students who cannot think critically **tend to be rigid in their thinking and do not easily accept other people's opinions or perceptions.** (S-2:12/7/24) [Tend to be Rigid in Thinking]*

From these two statements it can be concluded that if students are unable to think critically it can have negative consequences, such as: difficulty in problem-solving, limited understanding, vulnerability to misinformation, weak analytical skills, poor decision-making, reduced creativity, and limited engagement.

The third interviews with pre-service English teachers about how to encourage students who cannot think critically in the classroom?

*Create a classroom culture where **questioning is valued and encouraged.** Prompt students to ask why, how, and what if questions to deepen their understanding and challenge assumptions. (S-1:11/7/24) [Encourage Questions]*

***Provide constructive feedback on students' thinking processes rather than just their answers.** Encourage reflection on how they arrived at their conclusions and what alternative approaches could be considered. (S-2:12/7/24) [Feedback and Reflection]*

From these two statements, it can be concluded how to encourage students who cannot think critically, namely first by creating a class culture that respects questions so that it can foster students' self-confidence and happiness because they feel cared for and secondly by providing feedback on students' thinking processes. Encourage reflection on how they came to their conclusions and what alternative approaches could be considered.

Fourth interviews with pre-service English teachers about the main challenge that occur when implementing critical thinking in the classroom.

*The big challenges that I encountered were **difficulty managing student discipline, and difficulty controlling student behavior.** (S-1:11/7/24) [Disciplinary Disorders]*

***Resource Limitations.** Access to materials, technology, and other resources that support critical thinking activities may be limited in some schools or classrooms. Lack of access to these can affect the effectiveness of learning and create educational gaps between students. (S-2:12/7/24) [Resource Limitations]*

From the statement above, S1 said that the big challenge experienced was discipline disorders. Disciplinary disorders in critical thinking refer to barriers or obstacles that prevent the process of critical thinking effectively. These disorders can come from a variety of sources, both internal and external, and can affect a person's ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information logically. Meanwhile S2 stated that resource limitations were the big challenge that had been experienced. Limited resources in critical thinking refer to obstacles that arise due to lack of access or availability of materials, time, or support needed to carry out the critical thinking process effectively. Access to materials and technology that support critical thinking activities may be limited in some educational settings. So, this becomes an obstacle to critical thinking.

Fifth interviews with pre-service English teachers about the positive and negative impacts that occur when implementing critical thinking in the classroom.

***Yes, there is.** Among others are: A.) Positive impacts: Enhanced Problem Solving Skills, Deeper Understanding of Concepts, and Improved Decision-Making. B.) Negative impacts: Initial Resistance, Time-Intensive, and Assessment Challenges. (S-1:11/7/24) [Positive and Negative Impacts]*

***Yes, there is.** Among others are: A.) Positive impacts: Encourages Creativity and Innovation, Preparation for Future Challenges, and Promotes Lifelong Learning. B.) Negative impacts: Complexity, Misinterpretation of Concepts, and Resource Limitations. (S-2:12/7/24) [Positive and Negative Impacts]*

In this case, S1 has a similar view to S2, where both have positive and negative impacts that occur when applying critical thinking skills in the classroom. The positive and negative impacts include:

- a. Positive impacts: Enhanced Problem-Solving Skills, Deeper Understanding of Concepts, Improved Decision-Making, Encourages Creativity and Innovation, Preparation for Future Challenges, and Promotes Lifelong Learning.
- b. Negative impacts: Initial Resistance, Time-Intensive, Assessment Challenges, Complexity, Misinterpretation of Concepts, and Resource Limitations.

Pre-Service Teachers' Strategies in Implementing Critical Thinking

This section presents the findings of research question number two, which examines the endeavours undertaken by pre-service English teachers in cultivating critical thinking skills. The data for this section were gathered through semi-structured interviews.

The first interview from research question number two about teachers' efforts to develop critical thinking skills.

*Teach students how to visually represent arguments and their underlying reasoning **using tools like concept maps or argument diagrams**. This helps students see the structure of arguments and analyze the logical flow of ideas. (S-1:11/7/24) [Argument Mapping]*

***Guide students in analyzing texts, articles, and other sources critically.** They teach strategies for identifying bias, evaluating evidence, and assessing the credibility of sources. (S-2:12/7/24) [Analyzing Texts and Sources]*

Based on the transcript of the interview question provided, S1's focus is on "argument mapping". This approach aims to teach students how to visually represent arguments and the

supporting reasons using tools such as concept maps or argument diagrams. By doing so, students are able to gain a better understanding of the structure of arguments and analyze the logical flow of ideas. On the other hand, S2's focus is on "analyzing text and sources". This method is valuable for guiding students in critically analyzing texts, articles, and other sources. By consistently implementing these strategies and fostering a supportive classroom environment that values critical thinking, teachers can effectively nurture and develop students' abilities to think critically, analyze information thoughtfully, and make well-informed decisions.

The second interview from research question number two about how do pre-service English teachers cultivate critical thinking skills during the second interview?

Connect classroom learning to real-world situations or current events. This helps students see the practical application of critical thinking skills and understand their relevance in everyday life. (S-1:11/7/24) [Use Real-World Examples]

Foster collaboration among students through group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects. Working with peers encourages students to consider different viewpoints and learn from each other's reasoning processes. (S-2:12/7/24) [Promote Collaborative Learning]

Based on the interview, it is evident that both respondents employ real-world examples and advocate for collaborative learning. Respondent 1 explained that using real-world examples in teaching helps students make connections between classroom learning and practical situations or current events. This allows them to see the practical application of critical thinking skills and understand their relevance in everyday life. On the other hand, Respondent 2 emphasized that implementing collaborative learning strategies, such as group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects, promotes cooperation among students. By working with their peers, students are exposed to different perspectives and can learn from each other's reasoning processes. By incorporating these strategies into their teaching, teachers can assist students in developing and enhancing their critical thinking abilities over time. Regular practice and guidance in critical thinking about information and concepts will ultimately empower students to become more effective learners and decision-makers.

The third interview from research question number two about efforts to handle students who are difficult to manage when applying critical thinking.

Develop positive relationships with students based on trust and respect. When students feel valued and understood, they are more likely to engage in learning activities, including critical thinking tasks. (S-1:11/7/24) [Build Relationships]

Break down tasks into manageable steps and provide clear instructions for critical thinking activities. Ensure that students understand what is expected of them and how they can succeed. (S-2:12/7/24) [Provide Clear Instructions]

Based on the interview above, it can be inferred that there are two distinct approaches to addressing the challenges faced by students in relation to critical thinking. The first approach, as proposed by S1, revolves around the establishment of strong relationships with the students. The second approach, as underscored by S2, focuses on the provision of clear instructions. By consistently implementing these strategies and customizing them to cater to the individual needs of each student, educators can cultivate a constructive and nurturing learning atmosphere. This conducive environment will empower all students, even those who present difficulties, to proficiently acquire and apply critical thinking abilities.

The fourth interview from research question number two about how to foster critical thinking attitudes in students?

*Fostering critical thinking attitudes in students **involves creating an environment that encourages questioning.** Allow students to explore topics by asking their own questions and seeking answers. (S-1:11/7/24) [Promote Inquiry-Based Learning]*

***Demonstrate Thinking Processes.** By showing our own thought process when solving problems or making decisions, students will start to become interested and can foster critical thinking attitudes in the classroom. (S-2:12/7/24) [Demonstrate Thinking Processes]*

In the aforementioned excerpt from the interview transcript, S1 highlighted the significance of cultivating critical thinking dispositions among students by cultivating an environment that fosters inquiry. This entails granting students the freedom to explore the subject matter through their own questions and seek answers. Conversely, S2 proposed that by demonstrating our own cognitive processes when problem-solving or making decisions, students will become more invested and cultivate a critical thinking mindset in the classroom. From these two statements, it can be inferred that through consistent application of these strategies, educators can effectively aid students in developing robust critical thinking abilities that will prove advantageous both academically and in practical situations.

The fifth interview from research question number two is about why are efforts to develop critical thinking skills in students important?

*By developing critical thinking skills students **can enhances academic performance.** Critical thinking helps students understand and internalize complex concepts, leading to better academic performance. (S-1:11/7/24) [Enhances Academic Performance]*

*Because, developing critical thinking skills helps students in **Problem-Solving Skills.** Critical thinking equips students with the ability to analyze problems, consider various solutions, and make informed decisions. (S-2:12/7/24) [Problem-Solving Skills]*

Based on the provided interview transcript, it is evident that S1 emphasized the significance of fostering critical thinking skills in order to enhance academic achievement. By developing critical thinking abilities, students are better equipped to comprehend and internalize complex concepts, leading to improved academic performance. Conversely, S2 highlighted the importance of cultivating critical thinking skills as a means to develop effective problem-solving capabilities. Through critical thinking, students gain the ability to analyze problems, consider multiple solutions, and ultimately make informed decisions. In essence, the development of critical thinking among students is imperative for their success and well-being in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. This skill empowers them to navigate challenges, make informed choices, and contribute positively to society.

The main objective of this research is to identify the challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers in implementing critical thinking and to investigate the measures teachers need to take to promote the cultivation of critical thinking abilities in the classroom.

The first finding of this research aims to examine the challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers in implementing critical thinking in the classroom. These challenges, diverse in nature, have the capacity to impede the efficacy of the learning process. By conducting interviews with two participants, the researchers identified various obstacles, such as conventional teaching methods, time constraints, assessment difficulties, inadequate teacher training, disciplinary problems, resistance

to change, limited resources, and cultural and social factors. These findings align with a prior study conducted by Higgs (2024), which also underscored the influence of obstacles on the teaching process.

In addition to the aforementioned obstacles, this research (S1 and S2) uncovered a variety of experiences regarding the impact of critical thinking among students. S1 and S2 expressed both positive and negative views on critical thinking. The positive impacts observed by these students include enhanced problem-solving skills, a deeper understanding of concepts, improved decision-making, encouragement of creativity and innovation, preparation for future challenges, and promotion of lifelong learning. These findings align with earlier research conducted by Nappi (2017), which emphasized the positive effects of critical thinking on students. Nappi's study highlighted that critical thinking improves various aspects of education and personal growth, such as problem-solving abilities, understanding of material, analytical skills, creativity, and communication skills. Moreover, these results are reinforced by the research conducted by Altas and Mede (2021), which also emphasized the positive view of critical thinking. Their study revealed that implementing critical thinking in the classroom greatly benefits students by increasing their confidence, self-development, ethical and moral awareness, independence in learning, and readiness for future challenges. Overall, critical thinking plays a crucial role in helping students become better learners, more independent individuals, and responsible members of society.

Apart from that, respondents (S1 and S2) have expressed unfavourable opinions regarding critical thinking. While critical thinking has numerous benefits, there are instances where its implementation can negatively impact students. This is consistent with the findings of Rahman et al. (2016), who determined that an intensive critical thinking process can induce stress and confusion, particularly when students feel overwhelmed by the information they need to analyze and evaluate. Furthermore, highly skilled critical thinkers may become excessively skeptical of other information or perspectives, leading to cynicism or resistance towards new ideas. Not only that, previous study by Elbyaly & Elfeky (2023) have also conducted research that supports these findings, revealing that excessive analysis and deliberation can impede decision-making, causing students to hesitate due to overthinking various aspects. Additionally, students who are overly critical may encounter difficulties in engaging with peers who do not share their aptitude or interest in critical thinking, resulting in social isolation.

In the initial finding, the researcher examined the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with two students who encountered various obstacles while attempting to apply critical thinking in the classroom. These obstacles, which frequently arose during their instruction, disrupted the learning process. Consequently, it can be inferred that the process of implementing critical thinking among students in the classroom does not proceed seamlessly. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Alghamdy (Alghamdy, 2018), which investigated the perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of pre-service English teachers participating in a training program. The researchers discovered that while the training program helped enhance the self-assurance and social skills of pre-service English teachers, it also exposed weaknesses, obstacles, and barriers in their instructional practice. These challenges encompass disruptive behaviour exhibited by students, low levels of English proficiency that impede communication and comprehension of instructions, difficulties faced by pre-service teachers who are simultaneously pursuing their studies in college and participating in a training program, lack of guidance from experienced teachers, and feelings of shyness and embarrassment in front of students. Furthermore, many pre-service teachers express difficulty in preparing lesson materials due to a lack of necessary resources.

However, critical thinking offers numerous advantages, including enhancing decision-making skills, improving problem-solving abilities, and enabling individuals to evaluate information objectively. Through the practice of critical thinking, individuals can approach problems from various perspectives, leading to well-informed judgments and innovative solutions. Nonetheless, there are certain challenges associated with critical thinking, such as the potential risk of overthinking, which can impede one's ability to appreciate humour and engage in casual conversations. Moreover,

individuals who possess strong critical thinking skills may encounter difficulties in social interactions due to their inclination towards intellectual discussions and self-assurance. This idea is supported by Franco et al. (2017), who suggest that excessive critical thinking can lead to self-doubt. Additionally, it can also cause individuals to become overly critical of themselves and others, resulting in reduced self-confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, excessive critical thinking can diminish empathy and consideration for the feelings and needs of others, as it tends to prioritize logical reasoning over emotional awareness.

The second finding of this research revolves around the efforts required from teachers to cultivate critical thinking skills in the classroom. The study has discovered various obstacles through interviews with two participants. These obstacles encompass argument mapping, text and source analysis, utilization of real-world examples, promotion of collaborative learning, establishment of relationships, clear instructions, encouragement of inquiry-based learning, demonstration of thinking processes, enhancement of academic performance, and development of problem-solving abilities. This finding aligns with a previous study conducted by Ramli et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of teachers possessing the skills to guide students in enhancing critical thinking abilities. Teachers are acknowledged as knowledge facilitators who share and disseminate information to their students. To foster critical thinking skills in students, teachers are expected to promote students' growth, establish effective learning environments, and encourage interactive teaching and learning activities.

Furthermore, educators employ a range of strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking abilities. According to Fhaeizdhyall (2017), these methods include encouraging students to pose questions, assigning both individual and group projects, and possessing a wealth of knowledge to impart to their students. Teachers utilize a variety of instructional methods and models, administer oral and written assessments that incorporate analytical inquiries and student perspectives, all with the aim of nurturing students' capacity to articulate their own thoughts. In this particular study, two students (S1 and S2) expressed parallel viewpoints, suggesting that they employed similar approaches in their pursuit of enhancing their critical thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers in fostering critical thinking during their practicum and the strategies they employed to address these obstacles. The findings revealed that participants encountered difficulties such as traditional teaching methods, time constraints, assessment challenges, disciplinary issues, resistance to change, limited resources, and cultural factors. Despite these obstacles, they demonstrated creativity in adopting strategies such as argument mapping, text and source analysis, real-world examples, collaborative learning, clear instructions, inquiry-based tasks, and modeling of thinking processes.

The results highlight the importance of preparing pre-service teachers not only with technical knowledge but also with the pedagogical skills necessary to integrate critical thinking into English language teaching. Critical thinking is a vital competency that enables students to analyze, evaluate, and apply information effectively. Teacher education programs, therefore, should provide explicit training in strategies that promote higher-order thinking, supported by reflective practice and mentoring. In contexts where resources are limited, innovative adaptation and the use of locally relevant materials can help bridge gaps.

This study has limitations, particularly the small number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the qualitative design offered in-depth insights into the lived experiences of pre-service teachers. Future research should expand the participant base, explore diverse practicum contexts, and employ longitudinal or comparative designs to capture how approaches to critical thinking evolve over time. In conclusion, pre-service teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating critical thinking in EFL classrooms. With appropriate training, resources, and reflective

support, they can integrate critical pedagogy in ways that prepare learners not only for academic achievement but also for active engagement in a complex and information-rich society.

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