



## Exploring pre-service English teachers' perceptions and practices of critical thinking in Indonesian EFL classrooms

Ganang Kuswandaru<sup>1</sup>, Willy Prasetya<sup>✉2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Islam Indonesia, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>✉</sup>E-mail: [willy.prasetya@uui.ac.id](mailto:willy.prasetya@uui.ac.id) (corresponding author)

### ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is essential for success in the 21st century, particularly in language learning. This study explores pre-service English language teachers' (ELTs) perceptions and practices regarding critical thinking instruction in Indonesia. Through a qualitative case study approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two pre-service ELTs from a private university in Yogyakarta. Thematic analysis revealed a rich tapestry of insights into the participants' understanding of critical thinking, their perceived importance in language learning, and their willingness to integrate critical thinking into their teaching practices. The findings highlight the significance of critical thinking in language acquisition, as it empowers students to analyze complex information, evaluate diverse perspectives, and form informed judgments. Participants emphasized the need for incorporating critical thinking strategies into language teaching to enhance students' cognitive abilities and facilitate deeper understanding. Nevertheless, the study also identified potential challenges, including the uneven distribution of critical thinking practices across the education system and the need for specialized teacher training to implement critical thinking instruction effectively. The study contributes to understanding pre-service ELTs' perceptions and practices of critical thinking in Indonesia. It also provides valuable insights for teacher training programs, curriculum development, and future research investigating critical thinking instruction in English language teaching.

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### Introduction

Critical thinking assists individuals in sorting out, identifying the truth, and making rational decisions in a quickly everchanging world where information is extensive and frequently contradictory. Furthermore, the capacity to think critically allows us to avoid bias and stereotypes, fostering a deeper awareness of other perspectives and helping to resolve problems that demand innovation. As Facione (2013) argued, critical thinking is an essential

ability that provides a powerful tool for overcoming obstacles and making wise decisions in education, employment, and everyday life.

Critical thinking is a common skill, but it is highly valued in numerous professions, particularly education. Developing critical thinking skills is frequently regarded as an important educational objective. Marin and Halpern (2011) state that critical thinking skills are believed to facilitate the quick development of new knowledge. Cotton (1991) suggests that understanding and evaluating information skills are necessary in a constantly changing society. Supported by significant technological advancements and globalization, critical thinking skills are becoming a significant objective in education in the 21st century. Dam and Volman (2004) state that expanding globalization encourages improving upper cognitive skills. In 2001, the language class offered by the Council of Europe (CoE) emphasized the significance of developing critical thinking skills. According to Dwyer (2017), higher-order thinking skills are the foundation of critical thinking, making these skills increasingly crucial for students to develop. As a result of this objective, the teacher's role, which consisted simply of transferring information and knowledge, will be expanded to prepare students to analyze information critically and think more creatively.

Many experts also have different ideas about how to define critical thinking. According to Facione and Facione (2011), it includes cognitive and emotional dispositions and skills such as interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation. Kadir (2016) describes critical thinking as the ability to evaluate various information creatively and rationally, concluding by processing data from various sources. Cotrel (2005) defines it as a cognitive activity focused on thinking processes, whereas Halpern (2003) defines it as a disposition involving thought processes, cognitive skills, problem-solving strategies, and appropriate probabilities. According to Paul and Elder (2002), critical thinking is an art of discipline that guides the determination and implementation of optimal thinking in any situation.

Based on those notions, critical thinking involves intentional and reasonable thought processes to obtain the intended result. Fundamentally, critical thinking is a complex idea that integrates emotional intelligence, cognitive skills, and methodical reasoning techniques to assess and analyze things from different perspectives. Critical thinking is also characterized as a metacognitive process that includes skills analysis, evaluation, and inference (Ennis, 1989). These skills empower students to draw logical conclusions and find solutions to problems. Implementing effective tools for teaching critical thinking enhances students' engagement in the learning process. Training students to develop these skills proves valuable, as they will likely apply them more frequently in the future, fostering a broader perspective and aiding in decision-making in school and life.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2005), developing critical thinking skills is necessary. Halpern (2003) advocates for teaching critical thinking in schools, asserting that it facilitates a comprehensive understanding of information. Gambrell's research (2006) supports the idea that critical thinkers make better decisions in complex situations. Dwyer (2017) further emphasizes that critical thinking contributes to logical conclusions and encourages effective decision-making through reflective analysis. Hader (2005) contends that critical thinking is not confined to logical thinking but extends into real-life problem-solving. Integrating critical thinking skills into English as a foreign language (EFL) class broadens students' thinking processes, offering a cultural learning

experience. Alnofaie (2013) highlights the benefits of critical thinking in EFL classes, contributing to thinking skills, language competence, and non-cognitive abilities.

Critical thinking in EFL classes extends beyond communication; it involves organizing thoughts, argumentation, and reviewing the thinking process. This approach provides students with a more insightful understanding, fostering objectivity, open-mindedness, and emotional regulation. According to Michael Roth (2013), intelligence and critical thinking work together to help students navigate and solve complicated problems. Critical thinking should be incorporated into EFL classes since it fosters critical thinking, creative problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and creativity in individual and group contexts. Developing critical thinking skills is increasingly recognized as crucial for success in today's world. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, fostering these skills equips learners to effectively analyze information, evaluate arguments, and communicate their ideas thoughtfully in English.

However, effectively integrating critical thinking into EFL classrooms requires well-equipped teachers. While there is growing emphasis on critical thinking in EFL education, a gap exists in our understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices regarding this integration. This lack of understanding presents a significant problem for several reasons. First, pre-service teachers may not receive adequate training or guidance on integrating critical thinking skills into their teaching, hindering their ability to develop these skills in their future students effectively. Next, current EFL curriculum development and instructional practices may not fully address the integration of critical thinking, potentially limiting opportunities for learners to develop these essential skills. Last, the absence of a comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices in this area creates a barrier to designing and implementing effective training programs to empower future EFL teachers to foster critical thinking within their classrooms.

Previous studies on perceptions of critical thinking in the teaching of English as a foreign language have been conducted in various contexts, such as China (Ma and Luo, 2020), Iran (Sadeghi et al., 2020), and Saudi Arabia (Gashan, 2015). Dehghayedi and Bagheri (2018) claim that teachers assist students in developing their critical thinking skills, particularly in language and culture learning. The importance of equipping EFL teachers with strong metacognitive awareness and critical thinking skills is well-documented (Çakici, 2018; Ghaemi & Taherian, 2011). Ghaemi and Taherian (2011) even suggests a significant link between these skills and a teacher's success. Further studies support this notion. Gürbüz (2021) and Çakici (2018) both found positive correlations between pre-service teachers' critical thinking tendencies and their understanding of teaching and learning (teaching-learning conceptions). Additionally, Çakici (2018) identified a strong relationship between metacognitive awareness and critical thinking abilities in pre-service teachers. As a result, having an understanding and notion of critical thinking is essential for educators today. A teacher must comprehend the concepts and characteristics defining critical thinking processes and the qualities students need to develop to become critical thinkers.

As the demand for critical thinking instruction in foreign language education grows, a significant gap in the research landscape exists on how pre-service teachers in Indonesia perceive and grasp critical thinking instruction. Despite the growing interest in fostering critical thinking skills, there is insufficient exploration of the specific views held by Indonesian pre-service teachers. In response to this void, the current study aims to provide significant

insights by exploring the perceptions of Indonesian pre-service teachers about critical thinking development in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. The study aims to fill this research gap by improving our knowledge of the particular possibilities and difficulties faced by pre-service teachers in Indonesia when incorporating critical thinking into their language instruction methods. By understanding their viewpoints and experiences, the research can contribute to developing more effective strategies for teaching critical thinking in EFL settings.

## **Method**

### ***Research design***

This research aims to delve into the perceptions and practices of pre-service teachers regarding critical thinking in the EFL context. This encompasses strategies they deem effective in fostering critical thinking among students in language learning classrooms, commonly conducted activities, challenges, and potential ideas for developing critical thinking in EFL classrooms. To achieve this goal, the study employs a phenomenology approach. This approach enables a more detailed, comprehensive, and in-depth investigation of the topic, leading to a more thorough understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices of critical thinking in EFL.

### ***Research setting and participants***

The participants of this study were two pre-service English teachers named Sara and Linda (pseudonyms used with their consent). They were students at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They were chosen based on two criteria. First, they had completed a teaching practice program from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture called "Kampus Mengajar." Second, the two participants participated in various English language teaching-related activities. Sara had experiences ranging from teaching high schoolers to attending conferences. These experiences likely exposed her to diverse teaching methodologies and critical thinking frameworks, potentially influencing her developing understanding. Linda participated in similar activities in addition to her involvement in a voluntary teaching program at an orphanage. This experience likely provided her with valuable firsthand exposure to the challenges and rewards of teaching in a non-traditional setting, potentially shaping her approach to critical thinking in the classroom.

### ***Data collection***

The data collection method utilized in this research was semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were based on Ma and Luo (2020) which were then adapted to the context of this study. These questions outlined in Table 1 were focused on identifying the participants' perceptions of critical thinking and their implementation in educational and everyday settings. Each participant was interviewed once for 45 minutes. Indonesian language was used in the interview to allow the participants to answer the questions more easily because it was their first language. The interview results were then translated into English. The data collection techniques employed in this research aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions and

practices related to critical thinking in the EFL context. The findings from this study have the potential to inform the development of effective teacher training programs and pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking skills among EFL learners.

**Table 1***Interview Questions*

Key component	Interview question	Aspect	Theoretical framework
Personal conception of critical thinking	How do you understand critical thinking? What do you know about it (explain it based on your understanding)?	Definition and understanding	Cognitive factors
Importance of critical thinking for students' learning process	In your view, how important is critical thinking for students' learning process? Explain the reason.	Benefits and values	Cognitive factors
Importance of critical thinking in English language learning in Indonesia	In your view, how important is critical thinking for English language learning in Indonesia? Explain the reason.	Context-specific relevance	Contextual factors
Experience in learning critical thinking skills in English language learning	Have you been taught critical thinking skills during your experience as an English language learner? If yes, in what way?	Personal exposure	Personal factors
Willingness to integrate critical thinking into teaching	Are you willing to integrate/have you integrated critical thinking in your teaching? If yes, how and why?	Teaching approaches	Willingness and motivation
Factors affecting beliefs about critical thinking	What factors do you believe affect your beliefs about critical thinking?	Influencing factors	Personal factors, cognitive factors
Factors affecting beliefs about integrating critical thinking skills into ELT	What factors affect your beliefs about integrating critical thinking skills into ELT?	Challenges and considerations	Contextual factors, difficulties, and strategies

***Data trustworthiness***

A rigorous data collection process was implemented to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Each interview was conducted individually, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. As Bernard (2011) stated, interviewers should refrain from relying on their memory during the interview. Triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance the credibility of the research. This involved consulting additional sources of information, such as relevant literature and observations of pre-service teachers' teaching practices, to cross-check and validate the interview findings.

***Data analysis***

The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis technique to identify, categorize, and interpret themes emerging from the data.

Thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes emerging from the interview transcripts. The thematic analysis ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' voices, reflecting their genuine perspectives and experiences regarding critical thinking in EFL. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices related to critical thinking integration in their teaching.

Following the completion of data collection through semi-structured interviews, the transcripts were subjected to rigorous analysis using thematic analysis, a widely employed qualitative data analysis technique. Thematic analysis involves a systematic and iterative process of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting recurring themes emerging from the data. The first step in the analysis involved verbatim transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. This ensured the accurate and detailed preservation of participants' responses, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

Next, the transcribed data was subjected to line-by-line coding, identifying key concepts and patterns related to the research objectives. The codes were assigned based on the pre-determined aspects, which aligned with the key components of teacher cognitions. The coded data was organized into a structured table to facilitate further organization and analysis. This table comprised three columns: Content; this column contained the verbatim participants from the interview transcripts. Meaning; This column provided interpretations and elaborations of the coded excerpts, capturing participants' statements with deeper meaning and significance. Code; This column assigned the relevant codes to each excerpt, linking the data to the pre-determined aspects and key components of critical thinking.

The table's construction served as a foundation for identifying and interpreting recurring themes. Themes emerged through an iterative process of reviewing and comparing coded data and identifying patterns and connections between participants' responses. These themes were then analyzed to understand their broader implications and contributions to the research objectives.

## Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings from a comprehensive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with pre-service teachers to explore their perceptions of critical thinking in EFL. The analysis involved rigorous coding and categorizing interview transcripts, guided by pre-determined aspects aligned with key components of critical thinking. The resulting themes emerged from the data, capturing the essence of participants' perspectives and experiences.

Thematic analysis revealed a rich tapestry of themes illuminating pre-service teachers' multifaceted understandings of critical thinking and its integration into EFL instruction. The analysis identified a total of 33 distinct codes that were organized into seven overarching themes. These themes encompass a wide spectrum of factors, including:

1. Conceptions of Critical Thinking (CON) (frequency: 40): This theme delves into participants' understandings and definitions of critical thinking, revealing their diverse perspectives.

2. Factors Affecting Beliefs about Critical Thinking (FAC) (frequency: 33): This theme explores the various factors influencing pre-service teachers' beliefs about critical thinking, including personal experiences, contextual influences, and cognitive factors.
3. Importance of Critical Thinking for Students' Learning (CON) (frequency: 10): This theme highlights participants' recognition of the significance of critical thinking skills for students' overall learning process and intellectual development.
4. Importance of Critical Thinking in English Learning in Indonesia (CON) (frequency: 6): This theme underscores participants' understanding of the specific relevance and importance of critical thinking for English language learners in the Indonesian context.
5. Willingness to Integrate Critical Thinking in Teaching (CON) (frequency: 6): This theme explores participants' openness and inclination towards incorporating critical thinking into their EFL teaching practices.
6. Experience of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in English Learning (CON) (frequency: 4): This theme delves into whether pre-service teachers have been exposed to critical thinking instruction during their English learning experiences.
7. Challenges and Considerations in Integrating Critical Thinking into TEFL (CON) (frequency: 4): This theme identifies pre-service teachers' potential challenges and considerations when integrating critical thinking into their EFL teaching approaches.

These themes, grounded in the voices of pre-service teachers, offer valuable insights into their perceptions and practices related to critical thinking in EFL. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and multifaceted nature of integrating critical thinking into EFL instruction.

### ***Teacher understanding about critical thinking***

One of the important aspects of this research is to understand pre-service teachers' understanding of the concept of critical thinking. This aims to ensure that they can promote and guide students in developing critical thinking skills in the classroom. This is evidenced by the interview vignettes:

Don't jump to conclusions when you receive information. For example, if there's news or something, accept it first, then analyze it again, and then look for more information. For instance, if it is news, look for it from other, more reliable sources to verify the news. So, don't just blindly accept any information (Sara, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Based on the interview data, Sara highlights the dangers of jumping to conclusions too quickly. She suggests a three-step approach to avoid this. First, instead of immediately rejecting information, listen and take it in. Second, think critically about the information. This means breaking it down and considering any possible biases it might contain. Finally, actively search for more information, especially from trustworthy sources, to confirm whether the initial information is accurate. By following these steps, Sara emphasizes the necessity to avoid unquestioningly accepting everything.

When we get information or an idea, we can't just conclude based on what is written. However, we can also think critically by trying to find other points of view. If there's this news, we can't just believe it immediately. We need to look for more information. That is critical thinking to me, looking for more information to ensure whether the idea or the news is true (Linda, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview excerpt, Linda builds on Sara's ideas by stressing the importance of looking at things from different angles. She says that just reading or hearing something is not enough. They should actively search for different opinions on the same topic. It is like Sara's suggestion to check information from multiple sources – Linda also encourages us to consider different viewpoints. This wider perspective helps them grasp the information better and avoids making quick judgments based on just one source or opinion.

Based on data analysis, the participants demonstrated a good understanding of critical thinking concepts and were able to provide opinions relevant to the context of globalization. They agreed that critical thinking is crucial in modern life, particularly in learning. Participants believed critical thinking can help students understand complex information, such as mastering foreign languages.

Their opinion is reinforced by Ruxandra Buluc (2018), who states that critical thinking can help prevent the realization of the end states that fake news aims at: misinformation, disinformation, polarization of society, diversion of attention, avoidance of the issue, promotion of emotional rather than rational responses. Murawski (2014) adds that with the vast amount of information available online, individuals need strong critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility, relevance, and accuracy of the information they encounter. Critical thinking helps individuals sift through the overwhelming information and discern what is trustworthy and valuable.

The vignettes from the two participants highlight their understanding of critical thinking in dealing with the vast amount of information in the digital era. In this era of information overload, not all information they receive can be trusted, making critical thinking crucial to assess information validity. A critical attitude encourages us to digest information thoroughly, seek reliable sources, and compare various points of view before forming an opinion. Linda's opinion complements Sara's by emphasizing the importance of considering different perspectives. The news or ideas received may only represent one side of the story. It builds a more comprehensive understanding by seeking information from multiple sources and considering different perspectives.

These findings align with research by Ma & Luo (2021) and Gashan (2015), which indicates that pre-service teachers have a positive understanding of the importance of critical thinking in teaching. Sadeghi et al. (2020) further highlight the alignment between teachers' and learners' perceptions of critical thinking principles, emphasizing its significance in the educational process. By honing critical thinking skills, we can become intelligent consumers of information, avoid misinformation, and make the right decisions amid an infinite sea of information.

### ***Critical thinking and language acquisition***

The ability to think critically plays a significant role in the process of learning and mastering a new language. Here are some insights from the participants:

It's definitely challenging if we don't think critically. Language usage can vary greatly, and language itself is constantly evolving. So, if we don't think critically, we might not realize that there have been significant changes in how language is used to express different things. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain critical thinking (Sara, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Sara underscores the importance of staying abreast of language evolution. New meanings and expressions emerge constantly, and critical thinking allows us to analyze and interpret complex texts effectively, leading to a deeper understanding of language structures, vocabulary usage, and contextual meanings. This ensures we do not miss these subtle changes.

Language and culture are inextricably linked, each influencing the other regarding usage and meaning. Therefore, enhancing language proficiency necessitates the cultivation of critical thinking. Critical thinking empowers us to effectively seek information and resources that align with our needs, preventing misinterpretations and ensuring accurate communication. To convey the intended meaning effectively, we must comprehend and analyze each word or sentence, evaluating it thoroughly before employing it (Linda, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

On the other hand, Linda emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural context to avoid misinterpretations. Language and culture are intricately linked, and critical thinking empowers us to navigate these nuances. We can ensure our message is conveyed accurately across cultures by critically evaluating each word or sentence before using it.

Based on the interview excerpts, both Sara and Linda emphasize the critical role of critical thinking in language learning and communication. Critical thinking allows us to use language effectively in a constantly evolving environment. We can adapt to changing language and communicate with sensitivity across diverse cultural contexts. Sara and Linda believe critical thinking helps students develop a deeper understanding of language. This is supported by a study by Mori et al. (2018) found that lecturers strongly desired to continue incorporating critical thinking activities into their language courses, as they observed positive student improvements and outcomes.

Sara and Linda believe critical thinking helps students develop a deeper understanding of language and benefits them in everyday life. Echoing the recommendation of Rezaei et al. (2011), teachers play a crucial role in empowering students to become effective critical thinkers. This entails equipping students with both critical thinking skills and critical attitudes to navigate the everchanging and challenging landscape of the information age. Critical thinking empowers students to analyze complex language-related problems, identify underlying issues, and formulate effective solutions. By fostering critical thinking, we nurture students' curiosity, encourage them to explore diverse viewpoints and cultivate an open-minded approach to language learning and understanding. Integrating critical thinking skills into language education equips students with the tools to navigate real-world language-related situations, adapt to diverse linguistic contexts, and engage effectively in global communication.

### ***Nurturing critical thinkers: The role of the education system***

Participants believe that critical thinking facilitates comprehension of complex and unfamiliar concepts, particularly in language acquisition and mastery of language.

Cultivating critical thinking in the learning process is crucial because it indirectly facilitates students' comprehension of difficult and unfamiliar concepts, particularly in language acquisition. Therefore, I believe critical thinking should be actively implemented in classrooms, especially considering its numerous benefits in everyday life (Sara, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Sara highlights the role of critical thinking in helping students grasp challenging and unfamiliar concepts, particularly in language learning. She believes critical thinking skills

enable students to analyze and interpret complex linguistic structures, vocabulary usage, and contextual meanings, leading to a deeper understanding of the language.

Language acquisition for students goes beyond textbook learning; it involves a broader process. Critical thinking aids in this process. Hence, I believe critical thinking should be integrated into all subjects, not just language classes (Linda, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Linda emphasizes that language acquisition goes beyond simply studying from textbooks; it involves a dynamic process that benefits from critical thinking. She believes critical thinking fosters effective learning by encouraging students to question assumptions, evaluate evidence, and engage in active discussions. She suggested integrating critical thinking practices across all subjects, not just language classes, to enhance learning experiences.

They believe critical thinking is essential for understanding complex and unfamiliar concepts, especially when learning and mastering languages. They argue that critical thinking practices should not be limited to language classes but should be incorporated across all subjects. Critical thinking skills benefit students in many aspects of their daily lives and empower them to become effective learners, strong critical thinkers, and successful communicators.

Despite their initial opinions, the interviewees' accounts revealed a stark contrast between their beliefs and the actual realities of their school environment. While they shared the commonality of being located in a rural area, their school lacked English language instruction and suffered from a shortage of educators equipped to address modern student needs. These factors contributed to a diminished emphasis on critical thinking within the school's curriculum. Moreover, the lack of adequate facilities and the reliance on rote textbook-based learning further hindered the development of critical thinking skills among the students. Linda's comparison to schools in urban areas with more advanced educational systems highlighted the stark disparities in opportunities and resources.

The data analysis results indicate that the education system is not yet fully equitable. There is still a lack of understanding of critical thinking among some teachers, resulting in its underutilization in rural schools. Teachers also do not fully understand student needs and underutilize available learning facilities. Therefore, specialized training is needed for teachers to enhance their ability to teach and facilitate students in developing critical thinking. This aligns with the findings of Gashan (2015), which emphasize the importance of teacher training and professional development to improve their knowledge and skills in applying critical thinking in teaching. Developing critical thinking in students requires commitment from teachers and support from a more equitable and adequate education system. With joint efforts, critical thinking can become a powerful tool to empower students and prepare them for future challenges.

### ***Interaction and dialogue as a way of facilitating critical thinking***

Interaction and dialogue are not simply passive activities; they are dynamic processes that stimulate critical thinking, foster collaboration, and empower individuals to become effective learners and communicators in an everchanging world. By incorporating interaction and dialogue into teaching practices, educators can cultivate critical thinking skills in their students, preparing them for success in academic pursuits and beyond.

In my opinion, students asking questions and expressing their opinions is already a form of critical thinking. Giving them activities like observing a picture with open-ended questions can also trigger their critical thinking. They will surely have their perspective when interpreting the picture and answering the questions from the given picture. From there, they can share their opinions based on their understanding (Sara, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Sara believes that questioning, expressing opinions, and interpreting information are all aspects of critical thinking. She suggests using activities like analyzing pictures with open-ended questions to encourage these behaviors. Encouraging Questions and Opinions: Students can challenge assumptions, explore different viewpoints, and develop their perspectives. Using Open-Ended Questions with Visual Aids: prompt students to analyze information, interpret it based on their understanding, and form their conclusions. Discussing these interpretations fosters critical thinking.

In my opinion, students who can rephrase their understanding of something or material in their own words are also a result of critical thinking, so they analyze and understand something and make a conclusion they can finally convey in their own words. Usually, I prefer group discussion methods because they can express their opinions and accept other people's opinions or rebuttals to their opinions. From there, they will learn how to deal with all that and how they get the same voice, which is a form of critical thinking process (Linda, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Linda focuses on the ability to rephrase understanding as a sign of critical thinking. This implies that students have analyzed, formed conclusions, and can explain them in their own words. She suggests group discussions where students can share and debate ideas, further developing critical thinking skills. Utilizing group discussions aims to allow students to share their interpretations, listen to others' perspectives, and learn to evaluate and modify their thinking. This interaction strengthens critical thinking skills.

Participants believe that incorporating interactive activities can enhance students' critical thinking skills. According to Fung et al. (2016), discussion plays a key role in highlighting the importance of teachers in fostering students' critical thinking skills through group work. Their research showed that students who received teacher guidance during collaborative discussions achieved higher scores in critical thinking assessments. This finding showcases teacher involvement's importance in promoting students' critical thinking.

As Murawski (2014) reminds us, critical thinking is not about negative criticism but 'thinking deeply or questioning.' It is about actively engaging with information to form a nuanced understanding. By engaging students in activities that require higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information, educators can help students develop their critical thinking skills.

The participants also suggested that learning activities supporting critical thinking development should be enhanced. Additionally, pre-service teachers expressed their willingness to integrate critical thinking into every lesson in the future when they become teachers. Sara believes that observing pictures and artwork, particularly in the context of open-ended questions, can enhance critical thinking skills. Ku (2017) highlights the ability of visual stimuli to elicit pre-logical and preverbal thoughts and reveal nuances and details that may be overlooked. Cojocariu and Butnaru (2014) further emphasizes the role of questioning in developing critical thinking, which can be effectively combined with visual stimuli.

### ***Inquiry and project-based learning as a way cultivating critical thinking***

Tasks and projects are often designed to simulate real-world scenarios. This challenges students to think beyond the textbook and apply their knowledge to solve problems and make decisions. Completing tasks and projects requires students to develop critical thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation, problem-solving and collaboration.

I usually give them a task at the end of each lesson. The task is like asking them to list new vocabulary words they have learned and/or don't know. In the next meeting, we will share the vocabulary list in class and discuss the meaning and usage together (Sara, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Sara describes a valuable strategy for reinforcing vocabulary acquisition. At the end of each lesson, she assigns students to create a personal list of new vocabulary words encountered during the class. This list can include words they are unsure about. The class shares their lists in the following lesson, creating a comprehensive vocabulary bank. This collaborative approach fosters discussion about the meaning and usage of these words, solidifies understanding, and promotes active learning. This strategy leverages student self-assessment and peer learning, both effective methods for enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Integrating vocabulary assessment and personalized feedback offers promising prospects for enhancing students' learning outcomes and motivation. Fengyu (2023) emphasized the importance of personalized feedback in vocabulary assessment, which can be integrated into self-assessment and peer learning. Khusnia (2017) highlighted the role of self-assessment and peer feedback in developing critical thinking skills, particularly in extended speaking courses. These studies collectively underscore the value of these methods in promoting vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking.

I once assigned them a group project to create a mini bulletin board about tourism. So, they would research information and process it with the outcome of the mini bulletin board they created with their creativity (Linda, Semi-structured interview, Researcher translation).

Linda is describing a teaching approach that combines research and creativity. She gave her students a group project to create a mini bulletin board on tourism. This project likely involved students researching different aspects of tourism, like popular destinations or cultural experiences. Nevertheless, simply finding information was not the end goal. Linda highlights that they would then process this information together, presumably discussing and selecting the most interesting or relevant details for their bulletin board. Finally, they would use their creativity to design and present the information engagingly on the board. This approach encourages students to go beyond memorization and develop critical thinking skills by applying their research to a creative project.

Through the activities, students enhance their language proficiency and develop essential skills such as collaboration, independent exploration, and innovation. According to Wang's (2022) research, project-based learning (PBL) emerges as a powerful tool for fostering essential skills in students. This approach encourages students to take a more active role in their learning by engaging them in projects that require them to Seek and process information independently, develop solutions to problems, analyze information, evaluate options, and make informed decisions throughout the project process.

Project-based learning (PBL) fosters critical thinking skills by requiring students to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions. Engaging in complex, open-ended projects compels students to navigate challenges, consider diverse viewpoints,

and solve problems creatively. This active participation in authentic tasks fosters a deeper understanding of content. Ultimately, project-based learning emerges as a valuable pedagogical approach, promoting critical thinking and enhancing overall learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explores the perceptions and practices of pre-service teachers regarding critical thinking in English language teaching. Interviews with two participants from a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, demonstrated a strong understanding of the value of critical thinking in language learning. Both participants expressed a willingness to integrate critical thinking into their teaching.

These findings highlight the crucial role of critical thinking in foreign language acquisition and its potential to enhance students' language proficiency, critical analysis skills, and overall learning experience. Implementing critical thinking strategies in language teaching is, therefore, essential. Such strategies strengthen students' cognitive abilities and facilitate the language learning process. Promoting critical thinking equips students with language proficiency and essential skills valuable for academic success, personal development, and professional growth in our interconnected and complex world.

However, the study also identified potential challenges. Data analysis suggests an uneven distribution of critical thinking practices across the education system, with some schools, especially in rural areas, potentially lacking resources or teacher training for effective integration. Despite these limitations, this study highlights the potential benefits of integrating critical thinking into language teaching. Future efforts should focus on providing pre-service teachers with the resources and training necessary to implement critical thinking strategies across all educational settings effectively.

This research has limitations that are important to acknowledge. The study might not fully capture the experiences of all pre-service English teachers due to the potential for a small sample size. This means the findings may not be generalizable to Indonesia's broader population of pre-service teachers. Additionally, while the research explores pre-service teachers' understanding and practices of integrating critical thinking, it might not directly observe their implementation in real classroom settings. This limits the ability to link their understanding to actual teaching practices definitively. Finally, the focus on pre-service teachers presents another limitation. Their experiences and approaches may differ from those of in-service teachers with more classroom experience. Therefore, the findings might not directly translate to the challenges and opportunities faced by practicing EFL teachers in Indonesia. Despite these limitations, the research offers valuable insights into pre-service teachers' perceptions. It can inform future studies with larger sample sizes, classroom observations, and comparisons between pre-service and in-service teachers.

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