

Integrating Critical Thinking into Indonesia's EFL Curriculum: Insights from Bengkulu Teachers

Adwitya Widya Dhari¹, Ira Maisarah²

^{1,2} English Education Postgraduate Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Bengkulu, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received: August 2024

Revised: September 2024

Accepted: October 2024

Keywords:

Critical thinking skills, EFL curriculum, Teacher perspectives, Higher-order cognition, Curriculum reform

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and critical thinking are indispensable skills for Indonesian students. However, traditional EFL curricula in Indonesia often prioritize linguistic competence and neglect critical thinking skills. This study explores the perspectives of EFL teachers in Bengkulu regarding their students' critical thinking skills and their views on integrating critical thinking instruction into the EFL curriculum. Using two adapted questionnaires, data was collected from 23 teachers in various educational institutions in Bengkulu. The results showed that although students demonstrated basic critical thinking concepts, they struggled with higher-order skills such as evaluating evidence objectively and anticipating consequences. Most teachers (91.3%) believe that teaching critical thinking is part of their job, and 65.2% support its incorporation into the EFL curriculum. However, 65.2% felt that they needed more training, and 34.8% were unsure about what critical thinking entailed. These findings underscore the need for a comprehensive curriculum overhaul in which critical thinking is woven throughout the language domain, supported by extensive teacher training, localized learning materials, and innovative assessments. By undertaking such reforms, Indonesia can nurture a generation of globally competent communicators capable of navigating the complexities of the 21st century.

Corresponding Author:

Adwitya Widya Dhari,

Email: adwityaw0@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.33369/espindonesia.v4i1.34754>

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly connected and complex globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and think critically are indispensable skills for Indonesian students to navigate the academic, professional, and personal spheres successfully (Itmeizeh & Hassan, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). As information flows rapidly across national and disciplinary boundaries, students must develop not only language proficiency but also higher-order cognitive abilities such as problem solving, analyzing arguments, and evaluating sources of information from multiple perspectives (Abrami et al., 2015; Brown, 2008; Liao & Uden, 2018). This combination of language acquisition and critical thinking is essential to seriously engage with diverse ideas, cultures and global issues.

Teacher perspectives play a crucial role in understanding the implementation of educational innovations, particularly in the context of critical thinking instruction. In this study, perspective refers to teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and understanding of both their students' critical thinking abilities and the integration of critical thinking instruction in EFL teaching. Examining teacher perspectives is vital as they are the primary agents of

curriculum implementation and their beliefs significantly influence instructional decisions and practices (Brown, 2008). Previous studies on teacher perspectives regarding critical thinking have revealed various insights: Zhao et al. (2020) found that Chinese EFL teachers' understanding of critical thinking influenced their teaching approaches, while Itmeizeh & Itmeizeh & Hassan (2020) demonstrated how Palestinian teachers' perspectives shaped their willingness to incorporate critical thinking instruction. This study builds upon this literature by specifically examining perspectives in the Indonesian context, where cultural and institutional factors may influence how teachers view and implement critical thinking instruction.

Recognizing this importance, education systems around the world are shifting towards integrating the teaching of critical thinking into language curricula, aligning with the broader 21st century skills framework (Zheng & Erisson, 2022). However, in Indonesia, where access to quality education and opportunities to learn English vary widely across the vast archipelago, traditional EFL curricula often prioritize linguistic competence while explicitly neglecting the development of critical thinking skills (Indah, 2020; Malik & Gunawan, 2018).

This curriculum disconnect is particularly concerning in areas such as Bengkulu, where socioeconomic disparities and geographical isolation can limit students' exposure to English and their engagement with diverse perspectives (Aziz & Amalia, 2017; Yustina et al., 2015). In such contexts, integrating critical thinking into EFL education is not only a desirable educational goal, but also an important means to equip students with the cognitive tools to navigate an increasingly information-rich and globalized world. Moreover, developing critical thinking is in line with Indonesia's broader national priorities, where the government has emphasized the need to develop a skilled and innovative workforce capable of driving economic growth and addressing complex social challenges (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). By integrating critical thinking into the EFL curriculum, Indonesia can foster a generation of globally competent citizens who can communicate effectively in English while analyzing information, solving problems, and making sound decisions.

Against this background, this study explores the perspectives of EFL teachers in Bengkulu regarding the current state of their students' critical thinking skills and their views on integrating critical thinking instruction into the EFL curriculum in Indonesia. By understanding the experiences and insights of educators who work directly with students in this region, policy makers and curriculum developers can more effectively design and implement curriculum reforms that align language proficiency and critical thinking development.

This study addresses two main research questions: (1) How do EFL teachers in Bengkulu perceive the current level of critical thinking skills of their students? (2) What are their attitudes and readiness to incorporate critical thinking instruction into the EFL curriculum? By examining these questions through a local lens, the findings can inform national efforts to transform the Indonesian language education system, ensuring that it meets the evolving needs of a diverse student population facing an increasingly complex global landscape.

2. METHOD

This study involved 23 EFL teachers from various educational institutions in Bengkulu, to ensure representation from different districts and levels of education. This regional focus is particularly important; although previous studies have examined critical thinking in EFL nationally (e.g., Indah, 2020; Fajrina, 2017), few have investigated perceptions in specific provinces. However, as Aziz and Amalia (2017) argue, understanding the regional context is crucial to tailoring curriculum changes to local needs.

The study utilized Itmeizeh and Itmeizeh & Hassan's (2020) validated questionnaire, which was originally developed and implemented with Palestinian EFL teachers. The only modification made was adapting the context from Palestinian to Indonesian settings, while maintaining the original structure and items. The questionnaire consists of two sections:

- Section 1 (25 items): Assesses teachers' perceptions of their students' critical thinking skills
- Section 2 (7 items): Examines teachers' views on incorporating critical thinking into the EFL curriculum

Both sections use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The original questionnaire demonstrated strong psychometric properties in Itmeizeh & Hassan's (2020) study, with high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$) and content validity established through expert review. Since our adaptation maintained the original items with only contextual modifications, the researchers preserved the instrument's fundamental psychometric properties.

The questionnaire was distributed online to EFL teachers in Bengkulu, with response rates calculated for each item. This quantitative data provides a nuanced picture of teachers' perceptions, providing insight into strengths and gaps in students' critical thinking skills, as well as teachers' readiness to foster these abilities in the EFL curriculum.

For data analysis, the researchers calculated response frequencies and percentages for each item. These descriptive statistics were organized by questionnaire section to provide a clear picture of:

1. How teachers perceive their students' critical thinking abilities
2. Teachers' attitudes toward and readiness for incorporating critical thinking instruction

The findings were then interpreted within the Indonesian EFL context, considering local educational policies and cultural factors that might influence teachers' perspectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents the survey results of 25 questions assessing English teachers' perceptions of students' critical thinking skills. These include aspects such as identifying problems, drawing conclusions, evaluating evidence, constructing arguments, and displaying dispositions such as open-mindedness and curiosity. For each item, the data shows the percentage of teachers who "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Uncertain", "Disagree", or "Strongly Disagree" about their students having a particular critical thinking ability or disposition.

Table 1. Percentages of participants' responses to the first section of the questionnaire

No.	Item	SA	A	U	DA	SD
1.	My students have a strong intention to recognize the importance of good thinking	47.8 %	26.1 %	13 %	0	13%
2.	My students can identify problems and focus on relevant topics and issues.	21.7 %	43.5 %	26.1 %	4.3 %	4.3 %
3.	They can distinguish between valid and invalid inferences.	39.1 %	34.8 %	21.7 %	0	4.3%
4.	They suspend judgments and decisions in the absence of sufficient evidence.	21.7 %	30.4 %	34.8 %	8.7 %	4.3 %
5.	They can anticipate the consequences of alternative actions.	21.7 %	30.4 %	13 %	13 %	21.7 %
6.	They can accurately explain their decisions	39.1 %	21.7 %	17.4 %	13 %	8.7 %
7.	They consider alternative explanations for any state of affairs	34.8 %	17.4 %	26.1 %	8.7 %	13 %
8.	They can curb their emotional reactions to others' arguments	21.7 %	34.8 %	17.4 %	8.7 %	17.4 %
9.	They are able to determine the truth or falsity of assumptions	21.7 %	30.4 %	34.8 %	0	13 %
10.	They develop and present reasoned and persuasive arguments	17.4 %	47.8 %	21.7 %	0	13%
11.	They distinguish between primary and secondary sources of information	34.8 %	17.4 %	26.1 %	8.7 %	13 %
12.	My students distinguish credible from non-credible sources of information	30.4 %	30.4 %	21.7 %	4.3 %	13 %
13.	They differentiate evidence from opinion, common sense and anecdotes	34.8 %	26.1 %	13 %	13%	13 %
14.	They distinguish opinions from facts	39.1 %	30.4 %	26.1 %	0	4.3 %
15.	My students can draw inferences	30.4 %	39.1 %	17.4 %	4.3 %	8.7 %
16.	My EFL Students formulate and ask appropriate questions	30.4%	39.1 %	17.4 %	4.3%	8.7 %
17.	They gather data from multiple sources relevant to a problem to be solved or a decision to be made	34.8 %	26.1 %	30.4 %	13 %	13 %
18.	They identify their preconceptions about important issues	30.4 %	26.1 %	30.4 %	4.3 %	8.7 %
19.	They can listen attentively to others and provide them with appropriate feedback	43.5 %	17.4 %	26.1 %	8.7 %	4.3 %
20.	They can assess and evaluate statements	39.1 %	26.1 %	13 %	0	21.7 %
21.	They have a keen sense of curiosity	47.8 %	21.7 %	17.4 %	0	13 %
22.	They have a strong proclivity to validate statements	30.4 %	30.4 %	17.4 %	8.7 %	13 %
23.	My students are open to criticisms	21.7 %	17.4 %	30.4 %	13 %	27.4%
24.	They are malleable	21.6 %	30.4 %	17.4 %	8.7 %	17.4 %
25.	They can self-assess themselves	39.1 %	26.1 %	13 %	8.7%	13 %

Table 2. Percentages of participants' responses to the second section of the questionnaire

No.	Item	SA	A	U	DA	SD
1.	Indonesian EFL teachers need more training about how to teach critical thinking skills	39.1 %	26.1 %	13 %	8.7 %	13 %
2.	Teaching critical thinking skills is an important part of my job as a language teacher	56.5 %	34.8 %	8.7 %	0	0

3.	It is necessary to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum	26.1 %	39.1 %	30.4 %	0	4.3 %
4.	Critical thinking is especially important in English language teaching classes.	34.8 %	26.1 %	27.1 %	0	17.4 %
5.	I build critical thinking explanations and exercises into most of my English lessons	34.8 %	30.4 %	17.4 %	4.3 %	13 %
6.	I have a clear understanding of what critical thinking actually involves.	30.4 %	26.1 %	34.8 %	8.7 %	0
7.	It is the primary job of the EFL teacher to teach critical thinking in the classroom	30.4 %	30.4 %	17.4 %	4.3 %	17.4 %

Table 1 presents teachers' perceptions of their students' critical thinking abilities, while Table 2 shows their views on integrating critical thinking into the EFL curriculum. It shows the percentages of teachers who "Strongly Agreed", "Agreed", were "Uncertain", "Disagreed", or "Strongly Disagreed" with statements like needing more training, teaching critical thinking being part of their job, whether it should be incorporated into the curriculum, and if they already implement critical thinking activities in their lessons. The results indicate a mix of viewpoints, with most valuing critical thinking's importance but also revealing uncertainties around their preparation and what critical thinking precisely entails.

The results of this study reveal a different landscape regarding Bengkulu EFL students' critical thinking abilities and their teachers' perspectives on integrating these skills into the curriculum. According to Item 1 of the questionnaire, 73.9% of teachers believe their students recognize the importance of good thinking. This awareness is a positive indicator of student engagement with critical thinking as a concept. Additionally, 74.9% of teachers agree that students can draw valid conclusions (Item 15), while 69.5% perceive that students are effective in constructing reasoned arguments (Item 10). These responses suggest that while students have a basic understanding of critical thinking principles, they may still struggle with applying these skills in complex contexts, a limitation that has also been observed in similar studies (Marin & de la Pava, 2022).

Despite the positive foundation in basic skills, responses to Items 5 and 23 indicate gaps in students' higher-order thinking. Only 52.1% of teachers believe their students can anticipate the consequences of alternative actions, and 39.1% think students exhibit openness to criticism and are willing to reassess their views based on new information. These results align with Item 4, where teachers show mixed responses regarding students' capacity to suspend judgments without sufficient evidence: 56.5% agree, while 34.8% remain uncertain. This division suggests that although some students grasp critical thinking basics, they find it challenging to apply these skills under conditions requiring objective analysis and flexible reasoning.

This observation is consistent with global findings that language learners often struggle to engage deeply with advanced critical thinking processes (Liao & Uden, 2018; Zheng & Erisson, 2022), reinforcing the need for explicit and sustained instruction targeting higher-order skills such as evaluating evidence and handling criticism objectively (Itmeizeh & Hassan, 2020).

Responses to Items 2 and 3 show that a significant majority (91.3%) of teachers feel responsible for incorporating critical thinking into their teaching, with 65.2% supporting its inclusion in the EFL curriculum. Moreover, Item 5 reveals that 65.2% of teachers report incorporating critical thinking activities in their lessons. These findings reflect a general alignment with the global trend of recognizing critical thinking as an essential component in language education (Anderson & Pelletreau, 2017; Tomlinson, 2017).

However, responses to Items 6 and 7 raise concerns about teachers' preparedness for teaching critical thinking effectively. Specifically, 65.2% express a need for additional training, and 34.8% are uncertain about the actual scope of critical thinking skills. This uncertainty highlights a gap in teacher preparation, with some teachers unsure about the fundamental competencies required for fostering critical thinking.

The results suggest that there is a pressing need for comprehensive EFL teacher training focused on critical thinking pedagogy, as underscored in Items 1 and 5 of the second questionnaire section. Findings indicate that many educators feel underprepared to address the complexities of critical thinking, echoing observations from studies conducted in other parts of Indonesia (Indah, 2020; Fajrina, 2017). By investing in professional development that includes robust pre-service and in-service training, educators can be better equipped to scaffold critical thinking skills from basic to advanced levels.

Further, Items 4 and 6 of the second section reflect an emerging consensus among teachers that critical thinking should be integrated as a central learning outcome across all language domains. Aligning with international models such as those developed in Taiwan (Liao & Uden, 2018) and Palestina (Itmeizeh & Hassan, 2020), a paradigm shift in the Indonesian EFL curriculum could holistically embed critical thinking within language instruction, fostering students' abilities to engage meaningfully with complex global issues and diverse perspectives.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study of EFL teachers' perspectives in Bengkulu reveals important insights about critical thinking instruction in Indonesia. The findings show that while teachers generally recognize the importance of critical thinking (91.3% viewing it as part of their job), many feel inadequately prepared to teach these skills effectively (65.2% expressing need for more training). This gap between recognition and readiness highlights the need for comprehensive teacher professional development. Furthermore, the varying levels of teacher understanding about critical thinking (34.8% uncertain about what it entails) suggest the need for clearer conceptual frameworks in teacher education programs. To address these challenges, a complete curriculum overhaul is needed where critical thinking is positioned not as an add-on, but as a core learning outcome that is intentionally woven throughout reading, writing, speaking and listening activities in English. This shift requires major investments in comprehensive teacher training focused on critical thinking pedagogy, development of learning materials tailored to students' life experiences, and innovative assessments that evaluate both linguistic and cognitive dimensions

REFERENCES

- Abrami, P. C., Bernard, R. M., Borokhovski, E., Waddington, D. I., Wade, C. A., & Persson, T. (2015). Strategies for teaching students to think critically: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 85(2), 275-314.
- Anderson, K. M., & Pelletreau, K. N. (2017). A comparative analysis of differentiated instruction and ability grouping in EFL classrooms. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(1), 1-10.
- Aziz, Z. A., & Amalia, D. R. (2017). Critical thinking analysis of EFL learners in an Indonesian higher education context. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(1), 1-10.
- Brown, S. I. (2008). Differentiated instruction: Principles and practices. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 20(3), 432-434.
- Fajrina, D. (2017). A survey on critical thinking instruction in EFL curriculum: Teachers' perspectives. *Jurnal Pendidikan Biologi Indonesia*, 1(3), 272-284.
- Indah, R. N. (2020). Critical thinking in EFL curriculum: Voices from Indonesian tertiary education. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 8(2), 85-94.
- Itmeizeh, M., & Hassan, A. (2020). New approaches to teaching critical thinking skills through a new EFL curriculum. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(07), 8864-8880.
- Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. (2020). Merdeka Belajar: Kampus Merdeka. <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2020/01/mendikbud-luncurkan-kebijakan-merdeka-belajar-kampus-merdeka>
- Lauder, A. (2008). The status and function of English in Indonesia: A review of key factors. *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, 12(1), 9-20.
- Liao, Y. H., & Uden, L. (2018). Enhancing English language learning and teaching through differentiated instruction: A framework for EFL teachers in Taiwan. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(1), 419-434.
- Malik, R. S., & Gunawan, W. (2018). Reformulating ELT in Indonesia: A theoretical perspective on putting critical pedagogy into practice. *ELTIN Journal*, 6(2), 100-111.
- Marin, M. A., & de la Pava, L. (2022). Critical thinking analysis of EFL learners in an Indonesian higher education context. *Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(7), 8864-8880.
- Marin, M. A., & de la Pava, L. (2022). Critical thinking skills in the EFL classroom: Teacher and learner perceptions. *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal*, 24, 127-148.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms* (3rd ed.). ASCD.
- Yustina, R., Jalmo, T., & Sumardjo, S. (2015). Profil muatan keterampilan berpikir kritis pada pembelajaran IPA SD di Bengkulu. *Jurnal Pendidikan Biologi Indonesia*, 1(3), 272-284.
- Zhao, Y., Pinto-Llorente, A. M., & Sánchez-Gómez, M. C. (2020). Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and its teaching: An exploratory study. *SAGE Open*, 10(2), 1-15.
- Zheng, Y., & Erisson, G. (2022). Fostering critical thinking through a flipped EFL classroom: An exploratory study in a Chinese university. *Language Teaching Research*, 26(1), 118-137.