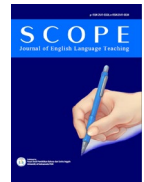




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Research Article

## Unveiling the Obstacles: Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions and Challenges in Promoting Critical Thinking in EFL Context

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### KEYWORDS

CT skills;  
 pre-service teacher;  
 perception;  
 EFL context

### A B S T R A C T

Despite Critical thinking (CT) has been promoted as being important skill to be nurtured in English language teaching (ELT) context, pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions of CT have drawn less attention. This study investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions and challenges in the way of their attempts to encourage CT in the EFL classroom and look into potential ways to get beyond these perceived obstacles. The study used descriptive quantitative. The data were collected through an online survey of 25 pre-service language teachers in 7<sup>th</sup> semester of ELE program in a university. The finding reveal several issues that the participants had an inadequate understanding of CT and are not given the necessary more training or support in their programs to adopt CT-oriented teaching approaches. The results additionally reveal a variety of contextual and individual difficulties that the participants encountered while attempting to include CT into their language instruction. The study concludes with suggestions that may assist language teachers construct CT-oriented pedagogies while still fostering a CT.

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## INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking (CT) is paramount in today's era due to the complex and dynamic nature of contemporary challenges (Fandiño, 2013; Khalid et al., 2021; P21, 2019). As we navigate a world characterized by rapid technological advancements, information abundance, and global interconnectedness, the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information becomes essential (O'Reilly et al., 2022). CT empowers individuals to discern the credibility of information sources, question assumptions, and make informed decisions (Defianty & Wilson, 2022; Lai, 2011). It is a fundamental skill for

problem-solving, enabling individuals to approach issues with a systematic and logical mindset.

As described by (Duron et al., 2006) critical thinkers are individuals capable of analyzing and evaluating information. Nevertheless, (Riddell, 2007) emphasized that CT is best elucidated not through a single definition but by delineating its components, features, stages, and characteristics. The essence of CT, as revealed in previous research, involves reflection, identification and assessment of assumptions, inquiry, interpretation and analysis, and reasoning and judgment, all within the contextual framework.

Consequently, CT has emerged as an intricate process demanding elevated levels of cognitive skills for effective

information processing. In line with it, (Ennis, 2015) underscores the necessity for individuals to develop the capacity to assess evidence, recognize logical connections, and engage in reflective and independent thinking (Mehta & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015) Furthermore, the acquisition of CT skills equips students with the intellectual tools needed to navigate the challenges of the 21st century, fostering a capacity for discernment and adaptability in the face of evolving societal and professional landscapes.

CT is deemed as crucial skill to be acquired since it is able to promote students' ability and to prepare them to acquire successfully with social, scholastic, practical problem, and make thoughtful choices (Jamiai & El Karfa, 2022). The integration of CT into EFL classroom essentially advantageous to reassure active learning by teaching students not only how to think through language but also to think about language (Defianty & Wilson, 2019; Vaseghi, 2012). Thus, Incorporating CT into EFL classroom is a crucial step in encouraging students in gaining knowledge and abilities necessary for success in both education and life (P21, 2019). Therefore, it's crucial to find out how EFL teachers, who play a key role in the teaching and learning process, view and understand CT concept in EFL classrooms (Defianty & Wilson, 2019; Ilyas, 2018).

In the realm of ELT, CT has been incorporated through some language skills by researcher, such as teaching CT in writing (Murtadho, 2021; Susilo et al., 2021), reading (Muthoharoh & Hartono, 2022; Trang & Anh, 2020), critical reading (Yulian, 2021), and extensive reading (Husna, 2019). However, teachers are conscious of prior CT knowledge (Ilyas, 2018; Steffen, 2011). They have not yet acquired an in-depth understanding of CT (Defianty & Wilson, 2022).

Previous studies of CT have been conducted in the EFL context. Anaktototy & Lesnussa (2022) conducted a study on the implementation of CT into reading classroom by utilizing Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA). They discovered that the DRTA technique can improve students' reading comprehension and CT since it places a major emphasis on student interaction with the text. The learning process becomes more interesting and appealing as a result. Sari and Prasetyo (2021) focus on the implementation of Project-based learning (PjBL) to enhance students level of CT in reading class (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021). Lintang Sari et al., (2022) also conducted study on the use of the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) and Scocrates Questioning in the classroom to improve students' comprehension skills. They also discovered that NGT significantly improved students' CT abilities in an online setting. (Lintangsari et al., 2022). These studies have proven that CT is able to be incorporated in EFL context.

Thus, the urgency of CT is surely significant. By contrast, many studies reported that CT students' CT level are categorized as low order thinking skills. Further, numerous studies regarding the perception of teachers on the integration of CT has been done in Indonesia particularly in the EFL context. For example, Defianty & Wilson (2019) explored EFL teachers' perception and how they incorporate CT in EFL classroom. Similar studies have also investigated the conception and understanding of in-service teachers' of CT, strategies, and the challenge of fostering CT in EFL classroom (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Defianty & Wilson, 2022; Ilyas, 2018).

All of them found that teachers have already known the basic knowledge of CT as a skill and disposition. In addition, another study also reported that students have low level of CT due to several factors, one of them is their prior knowledge and student's habit (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022). While Wang & Seepho, (2017) conducted research on the learners' voice in Chinese EFL college students that focused on the three implemented strategies to enhance CT of the students.

However, none of the aforementioned studies focused on studying about pre-service EFL teachers' and practice on their learning experiences of the strategies implemented to enhance their CT in classroom for Indonesian EFL context. Consequently, the research of how pre-service teacher perceive CT is limitless. Thus, this study try to fill the gap by exploring the EFL pre-service teachers' perception, experience, and challenge of CT in ELT.

This study is crucial to contribute to the body of knowledge about definition of CT and problems in implementing CT in EFL classroom. At the beginning, the research about the pre-service teachers' perception about CT is limitless, conducting this research shed light the empirical data about how pre-service teachers perceive about the term. Another impact of this paper is related to teacher development aligned with the new curriculum in Indonesia, which emphasizes the integration of CT into classroom.

## METHOD

This study is descriptive quantitative to explore the Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers' definition of CT practice and the challenge to implement it to English subject.

The study involved 7th-semester undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Teaching Program at a university in East Java. The selection of participants was purposive, focusing on those who had completed a 5-week teaching practicum (PPL) during each academic year. The total number of participants was 25 students, comprising 5 males and 20 females, with ages ranging from 21 to 23 years old. Each student in the study had undergone the

specified teaching practicum and is set to receive a bachelor's degree in education upon completion of the 4-year training program.

The survey used in this study was adapted from the work of (Khalid et al., 2021) because of the similarity of culture and context of the study. The questions consisted of Likert-scale questions with responses ranging from Likert-scale questions ranging from 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The participants expressed their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The decision to adapt the questionnaire from Khalid et al. (2021) was motivated by the similarity in cultural backgrounds. This adaptation facilitated a better comprehension of pre-service teachers' perceptions and challenges related to CT in EFL classroom.

The gform is used to collect the data from the participants. The researcher contact them via Whatsapp to ease the communication, then they fill in the survey via online. The estimation of time to fill in the survey is three weeks. So after three weeks, the online questionnaire are closed.

A two-stage method was utilized to assess the reliability of the data collection instruments. In order to check the validity, surveys were disseminated to three instructors and five pre-service teachers. The participants were encouraged to provide any feedback they deemed necessary. Following the feedback received from the initial study, adjustments were made to the survey accordingly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will delineate the findings and analyze the data. Descriptive statistics are predominantly employed to scrutinize the questionnaire results, coupled with a summary of interviews to reinforce the findings. The presentation will be organized into two subcategories. The initial segment will expound on the participants' levels of agreement and disagreement with the defined statements on CT. Subsequently, the second part will delve into the

challenges and issues encountered in implementing CT in the EFL classroom.

### 1. Definition of CT

The participants responded to inquiries concerning their perception of CT. The findings indicate a positive outlook on the understanding of CT among English pre-service teachers. For instance, as depicted in Table 1, in response to the statement, "I am sure I understand the concept of CT" as many as 28% answered agree, 40% answered strongly agree and 32% answered neutral. These results highlight that the majority of respondents possess a sound perception of CT, and no data suggests a lack of awareness among pre-service teachers regarding this concept. The pre-service teachers express a strong belief in the crucial relevance of CT skills in the contemporary era, emphasizing the importance of incorporating CT instruction in English language classes. They affirm that CT skills facilitate higher-order cognitive abilities in learning English. Furthermore, pre-service teachers concur that CT involves offering evaluations, enabling teachers to deliver pertinent feedback to students.

Based on the findings, the data underscores a positive perception among English pre-service teachers concerning their comprehension of CT learning activities. This optimistic outlook suggests that pre-service teachers possess a solid theoretical understanding of CT concepts. However, the transition from understanding to practical implementation faces notable challenges within the classroom setting. Despite the favorable perception, the application of CT encounters hurdles, particularly concerning student readiness. It is in line with Ilyas (2018) and Anggraeny (2022) finding, indicating that teachers have already perceived the similar definition about CT with what proposed by western countries (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Ilyas, 2018; Lombardi et al., 2022). For instance, the teachers define CT such as giving agreement or disagreement about things, analyzing and evaluating things, thinking rationally, criticizing and giving opinion, etc (Ilyas, 2018).

**Table 1** The degree of agreement or disagreement among pre-service teachers to the definition of CT

Definition	Strongly Agree (1) (%)	Agree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Disagree (4) (%)	Strongly Disagree (5) (%)	Median
I believe that I understand about the concept of CT.	7	10	8	0	0	2
In my opinion, CT is a very important set of skills in the present era.	17	5	3	0	0	1
CT plays a very important in my class.	10	10	5	0	0	1.5
CT involves evaluation or assessment, ideally with the aim of providing relevant and accurate feedback to improve the thinking process.	11	11	3	0	0	1.5
I prefer the role of the teacher that serves as a facilitator and guide.	13	4	7	0	0	1

I believe that the role of role is to provide information and skills to students.	14	9	2	0	0	1
CT is a method of thinking method that can help students enjoy the learning process.	7	10	7	1	0	2
CT allows students to use higher order thinking skills (HOTS) (eg, problem solving, decision making, evaluation, and analysis).	15	6	4	0	0	1
CT can be integrated into English lessons.	12	10	3	0	0	1

**Table 2** The degree of agreement or disagreement among pre-service teachers regarding statements on student competence as a barrier to enhancing CT.

Students' competence	Strongly Agree (1) (%)	Agree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Disagree (4) (%)	Strongly Disagree (5) (%)	Median
Students lack necessary background knowledge for practicing CT.	6	6	7	4	2	3
Students find it difficult to practice CT activities.	8	6	9	2	0	3
Students lack interest in CT activities.	7	7	8	3	0	3
Students prefer activities and assignments with simple factual questions and answers.	9	7	8	1	0	1

**Table 3** The degree of agreement or disagreement among pre-service teachers to the teachers' support to implement CT

Teachers' support	Strongly Agree (1) (%)	Agree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Disagree (4) (%)	Strongly Disagree (5) (%)	Median
Teachers usually lecture to deliver knowledge to the students.	9	7	7	3	0	1
Teachers feel pressured to cover the content.	2	4	14	2	3	3
Teachers provide adequate CT opportunities within lesson plans.	4	11	9	1	0	2
Teachers are comfortable with their students' questions that they may not be able to answer.	5	6	6	5	3	4

## 2. Implementation of CT in the EFL classroom

### a. Students' Background Knowledge

Regarding the query about the sufficiency of background knowledge for applying CT, responses from teachers were notably varied. Approximately 48% of teachers concurred that students lacked adequate background knowledge, while 28% remained neutral or undecided, and 24% disagreed with the assertion that students were deficient in background knowledge. This observation was corroborated during interviews, where students were found to... In the subsequent question, a majority of pre-service teachers concurred that their students encountered challenges in practicing CT activities during English language learning in the classroom. This observation aligns with insights garnered from interviews with selected respondents, revealing that students' disinterest in activities involving CT contributes to the difficulty in activating such activities. This qualitative finding is consistent with quantitative data indicating that 56% of pre-service

teachers observed diminished student interest in CT activities, and 64% noted a preference among students for simpler tasks or activities in English language learning.

One significant challenge arises in terms of students' readiness to engage with critical thinking (CT) during English learning. Many students demonstrate difficulties in integrating CT practices, often preferring simpler tasks and activities. This finding aligns with Anggraeny and Khongput (2022), who also observed a reluctance among students to apply critical thinking in the classroom.

This finding is also relevant with Anggraeny's finding, stating that students are lazy to use their CT in classroom (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022). Students are not motivated to have the lesson in classroom with stimulate them to use their CT. This inclination suggests a reluctance to leverage CT and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) during the learning process. This lack of interest becomes a barrier to the effective integration of CT practices in the classroom, highlighting the need for strategies that capture students' attention and motivate them to actively participate in CT activities.

### b. Teachers' Performance

Regarding English language instruction in the classroom, as described in Table 3, 64% of pre-service teachers indicated that they employed the lecture method to deliver learning materials, while 8% disagreed with this approach, and the remaining respondents positioned themselves as neutral or undecided. According to insights gleaned from interviews, pre-service teachers assert that, when executed correctly, the lecture method in English learning can enhance students' CT skills. It is crucial to note, however, that an exclusive reliance on the lecture method, without incorporating other strategies, may pose challenges in

fostering CT skills. Despite this, pre-service English teachers actively endeavor to incorporate ample opportunities for CT activities as outlined in their lesson plans (RPP). In instances where teachers may encounter difficulties responding to students' questions during CT activities, some teachers find it enjoyable and collaborate with students to solve problems, while 32% express discomfort with such situations, and the remaining teachers are unable to decide.

The stages involved in the research, the concept development or the case resolution are written in the methodology section.

**Table 4** The degree of agreement or disagreement among pre-service teachers to teaching strategies to implement CT

Teaching strategy	Strongly Agree (1) (%)	Agree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Disagree (4) (%)	Strongly Disagree (5) (%)	Median
I can use CT and cover the content simultaneously.	3	13	9	0	0	2
I use memorization as a main method of instruction.	4	7	10	3	1	3
I have adequate resources to implement CT in my classroom.	2	10	11	1	0	3
I believe the available resources foster CT (e.g., class book).	8	12	3	2	0	2

**Table 5** The degree of agreement or disagreement among pre-service teachers to teachers' professional development to implement CT

Professional development	Strongly Agree (1) (%)	Agree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Disagree (4) (%)	Strongly Disagree (5) (%)	Median
I was equipped with strategies to teach CT in my current pre-service training.	6	11	7	1	0	2
I would be interested in learning more about CT.	8	12	4	0	1	2
I took pre-service training courses about teaching or improving CT.	4	4	14	0	3	3
I implement new ideas and strategies in my classroom.	6	7	12	0	0	3

### c. Teaching Strategy

After assessing the preparedness of both students and teachers, the subsequent focus shifts to the learning strategies employed by pre-service teachers in facilitating CT activities within English language learning. A substantial 64% of pre-service teachers affirm their capability to seamlessly integrate CT processes with the delivery of English language content. Recognizing the significance of effective teaching strategies, pre-service teachers undergo training in various methods for teaching CT during their studies, subsequently implementing these strategies during teaching practicum sessions. Successful execution of English instruction incorporating CT activities relies on the English teachers' adeptness with available resources. 52% of pre-service teachers assert that they possess sufficient resources to execute CT activities in English language classrooms. Proficiency and accessibility of these resources are pivotal for fostering CT in English language learning. However, it is noteworthy that 44% of pre-service teachers still resort to memorization as their primary teaching method. Memorization, while a method used in teaching English, cannot serve as the primary approach for CT activities.

### d. Professional Development

A significant portion, as shown in Table 5, 68%, of pre-service teachers has received comprehensive training in various strategies designed to facilitate English language learning through CT activities. This extensive preparation proves particularly beneficial when these pre-service teachers embark on teaching practicum activities at schools, extending over several months. Encouragingly, a substantial majority, constituting 80% of pre-service teachers, demonstrates a strong enthusiasm for continuous learning and a desire to deepen their knowledge and comprehension of teaching with CT. As a result, more than half, precisely 52%, of pre-service teachers actively integrate fresh ideas and employ strategies associated with CT during their English classes. While, Muniroh et al. (2022) state that teachers have different ideas about CT, but they all agree that it is relevant to the knowledge component of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly the factual knowledge dimension, because teachers

associate CT with the capacity to solve problems. However, they learn how to implement CT from their teaching experience and the implementation of international based curriculum, in particular from the textbook. As a result, recommendations are provided to improve CT development in Indonesia (Muniroh et al., 2022). First of all, there isn't a clear policy regarding the implementation of CT; thus, it is hoped that it can be included to the policy so that later on the implementation of CT will be more explicit. Second, there is no oversight of the content development and the development of materials. A supervisor for material development is therefore required in terms of both language and substance.

Despite the positive perception of pre-service teachers' understanding, the implementation of CT activities in classrooms reveals a prevalent reliance on lecture methods and rote memorization strategies. This reliance is unfortunate, as these methods can impede the effective application of CT learning activities. However, as indicated in the previously discussion, pre-service teachers endeavor to provide ample opportunities for CT learning activities in line with the Teaching Plan (RPP). It is expected that incorporating CT learning activities outlined in the RPP, pre-service teachers will consistently strive to implement planned learning experiences beyond just employing lecture methods and rote memorization strategies.

This commitment to ongoing learning and the application of innovative teaching methods reflects a positive trend among pre-service teachers, suggesting a collective effort to enhance the quality of English language education through the incorporation of CT skills.

### **Discussion**

The study result indicated that, Indonesian Pre-service teachers underscore a positive perception among English pre-service teachers concerning their comprehension of critical thinking learning activities. This optimistic outlook suggests that pre-service teachers possess a solid theoretical understanding of critical thinking concepts. However, the transition from understanding to practical implementation faces notable challenges within the classroom setting. Despite the favorable perception, the application of critical thinking encounters hurdles, particularly concerning student readiness. It is in line with Ilyas (2018) and Anggraeny (2022) finding, indicating that teachers have already perceived the similar definition about critical thinking with what proposed by western countries (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Ilyas, 2018). For instance, the teachers defined critical thinking such as giving agreement or disagreement about things, analyzing and evaluating things, thinking rationally, criticizing and giving opinion, etc (Ilyas, 2018). However, it is crucial to

explore how participants defines CT without reffering to term provided in the survey.

One significant challenge emerges in terms of student readiness to engage with critical thinking during English learning. Students exhibit difficulties incorporating critical thinking practices, showcasing a preference for simpler tasks and activities. This finding is also relevant with Anggraeny's finding, stating that students are lazy to use their CT in classroom (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022). Students are not motivated to have the lesson in classroom with stimulate them to use their critical thinking. This inclination suggests a reluctance to leverage critical thinking and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) during the learning process. This lack of interest becomes a barrier to the effective integration of critical thinking practices in the classroom, highlighting the need for strategies that capture students' attention and motivate them to actively participate in critical thinking activities. While, Muniroh et al. (2022) state that teachers have different ideas about CT, but they all agree that it is relevant to the knowledge component of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly the factual knowledge dimension, because teachers associate CT with the capacity to solve problems. However, they learn how to implement CT from their teaching experience and the implementation of international based curriculum, in particular from the textbook. As a result, recommendations are provided to improve CT development in Indonesia (Muniroh et al., 2022). First of all, there isn't a clear policy regarding the implementation of CT; thus, it is hoped that it can be included to the policy so that later on the implementation of CT will be more explicit. Second, there is no oversight of the content development and the development of materials. A supervisor for material development is therefore required in terms of both language and substance.

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## CONCLUSION

Drawing on the research findings and subsequent discussions, it is asserted that pre-service teachers possess a conceptual understanding of learning through CT and harbor the belief that such an approach enhances students' CT. However, when translated into practice, a considerable number of pre-service teachers encounter challenges and exhibit confusion in implementing CT practices within the classroom, such as students' lack of interest and motivation to use CT in English learning. The suboptimal readiness and limited interest among students in engaging with CT, combined with the insufficient comprehension of CT implementation by pre-service teachers, pose impediments to the effective execution of English language learning using CT. The outcomes of this research serve as a valuable reference for various stakeholders, including universities, schools, and particularly English teachers, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to enhance pre-service teachers' understanding and stimulate students' interest in learning through CT. It is important to provide extra training about CT implementation, community to share CT, and also the handbook as a guide to teach CT in classroom.

This study primarily focuses on exploring pre-service teachers' conceptual understanding of CT. However, several limitations are identified. First, while the study examines pre-service teachers' theoretical grasp of CT, it does not account for all external classroom factors that may affect the practical application of CT-based learning. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data from pre-service teachers may limit insight into their actual CT implementation skills and student engagement. Moreover, the study's findings are limited to English language learning contexts, which may not generalize to other subject areas or educational settings. Finally, the research does not extensively explore the curriculum structure of teacher education programs or examine how CT training is provided, which limits understanding of curriculum effectiveness in preparing teachers for real-world CT application. Further researchers may explore the landscape of university curricula to assess how effectively they integrate and address pre-service teachers' comprehension of learning through CT.

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