A CLOSER LOOK INTO THE ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF CRITICAL THINKING

İngilizce Okutmanların Eleştirel Düşünme Becerilerine İlişkin Algıları ve Deneyimleri Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine English language instructors' awareness and perceptions of critical thinking and their experiences of teaching English to promote their students' critical thinking ability. Thus, the study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigating teacher perceptions and experiences with the participation of a total of 15 instructors working at School of Foreign Languages at two different universities in Konya, Turkey. The data were gathered through a questionnaire, which all the participants completed, and follow-up semi-structured interviews with four participants. The findings reveal teachers' optimism for integrating critical thinking into the ELT curriculum, and show that they adopt critical thinking pedagogies and that their perceptions of critical thinking influence their practises in the classroom. It has also been found out that although teachers strongly believe that critical thinking should be incorporated into teaching a foreign language, they find it demanding and meet several barriers to teaching critical thinking, mostly set by their learners.

Keywords: *Critical thinking; ELT curriculum; teacher perceptions.*

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce öğretim elemanlarının eleştirel düşünme konusundaki farkındalıklarını ve algılarını incelemek ve eleştirel düşünme uygulamalarının İngilizce öğretiminde kullanılmasına dair deneyimlerine ilişkin fikir edinmektedir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, araştırma, Konya'daki iki farklı üniversite bünyesinde Yabancı Diller Yüksekokullarında çalışan 15 okutmanın katılımıyla gerçekleşmiştir. Eleştirel düşünme uygulamaları üzerine öğretmen algılarını ve deneyimlerini araştırmayı hedefleyen bu çalışma, bir karma yöntem araştırmasıdır ve veriler, tüm katılımcıların tamamladığı bir anket formu ve ardından dört öğretim elemanı ile gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin eleştirel düşünmeyi yabancı dil öğretim müfredatına entegre etmeye yönelik istekliliğini ortaya koymakta ve eleştirel düşünme pedagojilerini benimsediğini ve eleştirel düşünme algılarının sınıf içindeki uygulamalarını etkilediğini göstermektedir. Fakat diğer yandan öğretmenler, eleştirel düşüncenin yabancı dil öğretimine dahil edilmesi gerektiğine inansa da, eleştirel düşünme becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik uygulamalarda çoğunlukla öğrencilerden kaynaklanan bir takım zorluklar yaşadıklarını dile getirmektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Eleştirel düşünme; yabancı dil öğretim müfredatı; öğretmen algıları.*

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Introduction

Recent trends in the field of education indicate a shift from a traditional methodology to a more critical, inquisitive pedagogy in the classrooms of the 21st century, which require adopting more innovative and creative ways of teaching and learning and also adjusting to new developments and technological advances. Many researchers point out the paramount importance of acquiring critical thinking skills in the world of rapid changes in the 21st century (Bedir, 2016; 2013; Paul and Elder, 2001; Williams, 2003). In such a world, individuals should be able to handle and adapt new information, and also change and adjust to new situations.

To be able to overcome the challenges which the modern era has brought, individuals should be able to think clearly by getting away from "*biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced ideas*", which can be only possible with promoting critical thinking (Paul and Elder, 2001). The ability to think critically is not an academic skill to teach students for achievement, but it is also an "imperative" survival skill to prepare students for the changing life outside the classroom and "for the possibilities and probabilities of the future" (Bellance and Fogarty, 1986 cited in Williams, 2003). Moreover, as Facione (2013) asserts, when they improve their thinking and make good decisions, they will contribute to both their future and their society of which they are members.

There are still a few controversial questions raised by prominent researchers regarding the inclusion of critical thinking into the curriculum; "Should it be taught explicitly and directly in separate programmes?", or "Should it be infused into the standard courses?", or "Should the focus of teaching be over the teaching of critical thinking skills or the teaching of content?", and "Can critical thinking skills be taught?", to name some (Beyer, 1997; Ennis, 1997; Swartz and Parks, 1994). Yet, critical thinking skills usually named as survival skills or life skills have been viewed as indispensable tools of the modern classrooms. Teaching learners to become effective thinkers is increasingly recognized as an immediate goal of curriculum reforms, textbook designs, and instructional practices. Accordingly, the relationship between language and thinking has gained a renewed interest. As Bedir (2006) argues, students find better opportunities to develop their thinking ability in foreign language classrooms because they have a chance to find out about different cultures and lifestyles and points of view. The underlying assumption of incorporating critical thinking into ELT is that teachers should put their central attention on enhancing learners' language skills and their academic achievement through critical thinking exercises. Having the ultimate goal of growing autonomous learners and inquisitive minds, critical thinking must be promoted in the contexts of language teaching and learning.

On the other hand, teaching critical thinking effectively in the classrooms depends on many context-specific factors. The factors Ennis (2013a) outlines can be listed in the following:

- "teacher style, teacher interest, teacher knowledge and understanding", "the amount of time available to teachers after they have done all the other things they have to do, and teacher grasp of critical thinking"
- "class size",
- "cultural and community backgrounds and expectations",
- "student expectations and backgrounds",
- "colleagues' expectations",

- "recent local events",

As seen from the list of context-specific factors on which the inclusion of critical thinking into the educational settings, the teacher undertakes an important role in fostering critical thinking skills of learners and guide their students in order to refine and improve their thinking. As Petek and Bedir (2015) also argue, teachers will be models for students in becoming more critical thinkers and thus, they need to have an awareness of the concept of critical thinking and well-informed about ideas and implications into how to integrate critical thinking into language education. However, Johnson (2006) states that the integration of new developments and changing situations has reshaped the framework of professional development by bringing a number of challenges for second language (L2) teachers; thus critical practice may also have challenged language teachers. They may need to gain more awareness of critical thinking and develop further skills and resources to deal with critical instructional practises.

Within this line, there is a need to shed light on teachers' present perceptions and experiences of critical thinking. Therefore, this study aims at investigating whether English instructors working at university level have a true understanding of what critical thinking is, and examining their teaching practices of critical thinking.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is more than thinking, requiring a complex combination of some valuable intellectual skills. Since critical thinking is a broad term, there are so many definitions put forward by different researchers and practitioners. Richard Paul, one of the most well-known proponents of critical thinking, defines it well with his colleague, Michael Scriven as in the following:

> *"Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (1987).*

On the other hand, Ennis, another prominent figure, who contributes to understanding the concept of critical thinking and assessing it, views critical thinking as *"reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do."* (2013b). Ennis argues that deciding on what to believe or do is determined by a set of critical thinking dispositions such as questioning whether one's beliefs and decisions are justified, having a clear understanding and an honest opinion of own and others' views, and a set of critical thinking abilities such as questioning and arguing, clarifying answers and reasons, reasoning for decisions, making inferences and deductions, making generalizations and hypotheses, valuing judgments, developing definitions and criteria.

Paul and Elder also make a list of seven main characteristics which a critical thinker is expected to acquire or bear: intellectual humility, intellectual courage, intellectual empathy, intellectual integrity, intellectual perseverance, confidence in reason and fairmindness (Paul and Elder, 2001). These traits are the key skills for students to improve the quality of their thinking, to become autonomous learners and raise their academic achievement, and ultimately get ready for the outside world. In order to be able to achieve these goals, teachers of English as a foreign or second language need to foster the development of these critical thinking skills in students.

Some researchers or practitioners may think that each individual already gets involved in thinking since it is a natural process of human life, and thus it is no need to allocate time for and teach it as a skill in the classroom (E.g. see Sternberg and Williams, 2002). On the other hand, as Choy and Cheah (2009) stress out, students have a natural tendency to think critically, but they need some assistance by their teachers to refine their thinking. They should be able to avoid "biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced ideas" (Paul and Elder, 2001). If one's thinking is not cultivated, he or she may have a distorted view of the world.

Significance of the Study

There is a rich variety of studies examining various aspects of critical thinking in the field of education in Turkey. However, most of those studies have been conducted to investigate the critical thinking abilities or dispositions or perceptions of either pre-service teachers or students in various disciplines in the field of education (e.g. see Maltepe, 2016; Arsal, 2015; Petek and Bedir, 2015; Bedir, 2013; Çetinkaya, 2011; Beşoluk and Önder, 2010; Narin, 2009; Genç, 2008, and so many on.)

When all these cited studies have been examined, it is obvious that there's a scarcity of literature on the perspectives and experiences of in-service English language teachers regarding teaching critical thinking in their field. However, in-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of critical thinking within a Turkish context should be examined since they have a crucial role in helping their students gain critical thinking skills. As Petek and Bedir (2015) both argue, teachers' lack of awareness of what critical thinking involves and of how it can be infused into the teaching of English might result in teachers' inability to develop students' thinking. In line with this, teachers' perceptions must be queried and understood well. Thus, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of English language instructors on the definition of critical thinking and on its integration into language teaching and their experiences with critical thinking practices. Shedding light on how practitioners think about the integration of critical thinking will help us make better sense of teacher practices about the application of critical thinking in the language classrooms.

Research Questions

The basic purpose of this study is to find out whether English language instructors have become aware of critical thinking, to investigate their perceptions of critical thinking and their instructional practices for integrating critical teaching into foreign language programs. However, the ultimate goal of the paper is to attempt to increase teachers' awareness of critical thinking by providing some theoretical and practical implications introduced by the interviewees.

In line with these purposes, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. Are instructors aware of what critical thinking involves?
2. How do instructors perceive the role of critical thinking in ELT?
3. To what extent do instructors get involved in instructional practices allowing critical thinking?
4. How do instructors think teaching critical thinking could be integrated into the ELT curriculum?
5. What barriers to teaching critical thinking do instructors think exist?

Methodology

Participants and Context

A total of 15 instructors who presently work at Schools of Foreign Languages at two different universities (a state and a private one) in Konya were randomly chosen for the study. All of these instructors agreed to complete the questionnaire. Some demographic (e.g. gender and age), educational (e. g. undergraduate program they graduated and degree they hold) and occupational information (e.g. teaching experience, program they are currently teaching at and also their workload) was collected through the questionnaire. Fourteen participants were female and only one was male. Their ages range between 27 and 45. All the participants have some teaching experience as an English instructor ranging in duration from 3 years to 20 years.

As for the information about their educational background, nine instructors graduated from the ELT departments; four of the participants graduated from English Language and Literature (ELIT); and one from English Linguistics and the other from American Language and Literature. Four teachers hold a BA degree while six of them are presently studying for an MA degree in various departments such as Philosophy, ELT and ELIT, and five instructors are currently following a PhD course in ELT or Educational Sciences. As for the occupational information collected from the questionnaire, four participants teach only at the Departmental English programme and four also teach only at the English Preparatory programme whereas the other seven participants teach at both preparatory and departmental programmes. Their workload ranges between 18 and 26 hours in a week.

Through purposive sampling, four of the participants were chosen to be interviewed. In order to select the interview participants, these criteria were taken into serious consideration: (a) they all agreed to be interviewed; (b) their questionnaires produced some striking findings; (c) they were from different contexts and from different educational background. The information about these participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewees

No	Age	Gender	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Institution
1	27	Female	ELT	MA in Philosophy	State university
2	32	Female	ELT	PhD in Educational Sciences	State university
3	30	Female	American Language and Literature	MA in ELT	Private university
4	26	Female	English Language and Literature	MA in ELT	Private university

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The first purpose of the study was to reveal some insights into instructors' existing perceptions and experiences of critical thinking within a Turkish context. As mentioned earlier, there are few studies regarding how Turkish instructors of English perceive critical thinking in language teaching and to what extent they encourage critical thinking with their instructional practices. In this sense, this study aimed to focus on gaining

insights into and familiarity with the present issue and provide a preliminary stage for further investigation of the issue. Taking into account of the purpose and focus of the research, an exploratory design was deemed appropriate for the study.

The research questions and the nature of this research design required to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to collect data. All the participants were supposed to complete a questionnaire which produced both qualitative and quantitative data (See Appendix A). The questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part includes 3 open-ended questions designed by the researcher herself in order to investigate teachers' awareness of what critical thinking is. The second and third parts of the questionnaire contain a total of 30 Likert type items with 5 points in which the participants were asked to rank the statements from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* in the second part and from *very often* to *never* in the third part.

The second part of the questionnaire concerns teachers' perceptions of critical thinking whereas the third part regards teachers' experiences of critical thinking. Several items in both these parts were taken and adapted from some previous studies conducted outside the Turkish settings (See Choy and Cheah, 2009; Ketabi *et.al*, 2012) and the researcher also benefitted from the resources offered by the Critical Thinking Community website to develop more questionnaire items. The questionnaire was designed carefully to seek answers to the first three research questions of the study.

Following the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews in English were carried out with four instructors chosen purposefully with the aim of both shedding more light on some striking points revealed by the analysis of questionnaire and seeking answers to the last two research questions of the study. Following the same way of preparing questionnaire items, the researcher benefitted from the previous studies (See Choy and Cheah, 2009; Ketabi *et.al*, 2012) and the resources on the website of the Critical Thinking Community in order to develop interview questions.

Both the questionnaire and interview questions were piloted with and revised by two people before the study was conducted. One of them was the researcher's lecturer who works as an assistant professor and the other was her colleague who is currently a PhD candidate and works as a research assistant in the institution in which the researcher works. They provided some valuable suggestions on the content, organization and wording of the items and questions. After piloting and adjusting the instruments, the researcher set out to conduct the study.

The researcher first conducted the questionnaire and then held face-to-face interviews with four participants. Each interview lasted almost 8 minutes. They were recorded through a voice-recorder, and some notes were also taken by the interviewer. The conversations were fully transcribed for coding and data analysis. These in-depth interviews elaborated on teachers' perceptions and instructional practises in relation to critical thinking. During the interviews, ways of encouraging and integrating critical thinking into language teaching and barriers to achieving this were specifically addressed in order to seek possible answers to the fourth and fifth research questions.

Data Analysis

Following a mixed-methods approach to investigating language instructors' perspectives and experiences of teaching critical thinking, the study produced both quantitative and qualitative data by means of the questionnaire and interviews. The quantitative data taken from the interview were statistically analysed and frequencies of the responses were described. As for the qualitative data gathered from the first part of the questionnaire, the responses were examined through content analysis.

The second set of qualitative data was produced by 8-minute interviews conducted with four participants and recorded through a voice-recorder. The interview provided some interpretive data, so all the conversations were fully transcribed and content analysis was conducted for in-depth examination of the data. After carefully reviewing these transcriptions and outlining the responses of the interviewees under the light of the research questions, salient points and recurring themes were identified, and labels were assigned to them. A variety of codes regarding each interview question were generated and the codes that seemed to be connected with each other were categorized (Saldana, 2009). The labels assigned to the data and their categorisations were checked by another researcher to ensure consistency in the categorization of the data. Later the transcriptions were reviewed again and a few more excerpts were though relevant to the codes and categorized.

Treating the participants and data in accordance with the interview protocol, the researcher gave a code number to each interviewee (as Int1, Int2, Int3 and Int4) and presented the findings by referring to these code numbers in order to guarantee their anonymity.

Briefly, this content analysis process involved a set of steps as such; repeated reading of the data, detailed interpretation of responses, identification of common themes emerging from the data, coding these themes, and categorising these codes and testing the applicability of codes to interpret the data, and revising codes and categories throughout the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings drawn from the questionnaire and interviews are provided following the order of the research questions of the study. In line with this, it is useful to look over the research questions presented earlier.

Findings of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire which was designed to investigate instructors' awareness and perceptions of critical thinking and their teaching experiences in relation to critical thinking included four parts and, the questionnaire yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. The reliability of the scale estimated by Cronbach alpha was 0.613. The part regarding information about the participant's demographics, educational and professional background was elaborated in the previous chapter of the paper. Here the findings regarding the other parts in the questionnaire are presented.

The first part in the questionnaire was designed to seek an answer to the first research question *"Are instructors aware of what critical thinking is and involves*?. This part

included three main items and a few open-ended questions within each item, so it produced both quantitative and qualitative data.

The findings taken from the quantitative data here are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequencies of Responses Regarding Teachers' Awareness of What Critical Thinking is and Involves

Statement	Yes	No	Unsure
1. I have a clear understanding of what critical thinking actually involves.	13	-	2
2. I know exactly what critical thinking skills are.	10	-	5
3. I know exactly what traits a critical thinker should have.	6	1	8

As seen from the table, 13 of the participants think that they are aware of what critical thinking is. To reach further information regarding the first item, the participants were asked to define what critical thinking is and what it involves. The participants' definitions were examined through content analysis. The summary of their definitions is provided in Table 3, along with the frequencies of the codes.

Table 3. Participants' Definitions of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is	Frequency
a) analysing	9
b) developing the ability to think	3
c) problem solving	5
d) reasoning	8
e) interpreting	2
f) evaluating	3
g) inferring	1
h) questioning	4
i) relating new info with the previous one	2
j) looking from different perspectives	4
k) not having prejudices	1
l) thinking independently	2
m) thinking creatively	2
n) making connections	2

As Table 3 shows, the participants seem to be clear with the definition of critical thinking. They describe it as a process of developing the ability to think that involves analysing, problem solving, reasoning, interpreting and evaluating, inferring, questioning, establishing relations and connections, thinking creatively and independently, and having different perspectives without making prejudices.

The participants were also asked how they came to learn about critical thinking. Their responses vary in sources ranging from attending undergraduate or postgraduate

courses, seminars and conferences to reading some published materials such as articles, essays and ELT books.

As for the responses on what the critical thinking skills are, 10 participants report that they know what critical thinking skills are. They were also asked to write these skills down in the questionnaire. The participants' descriptions were examined through content analysis. The list of critical thinking skills reported by the participants is provided in Table 4, along with the frequencies of the codes.

Table 4. List of Critical Thinking Skills Reported by Instructors

Critical thinking skills are	Frequency
a) predicting	1
b) asking questions	1
c) making arguments	1
d) analysing	4
e) interpreting	1
f) making inferences	2
g) reasoning	2
c) problem solving	4
h) evaluating	3
i) questioning/inquiring	2
j) criticizing	1
k) drawing conclusions	1
l) judging	1

As seen from the table, the instructors point out the variety of critical thinking skills, and skills of analysing, problem solving and evaluating are most frequently reported among them. On the other hand, the participants were also asked whether they know what traits a critical thinker should have. It was necessary to ask this question to elicit the teachers' perceptions of whether their students bear traits of a critical thinker. Only six participants said that they knew what traits a critical thinker should have while eight instructors reported that they were unsure. When a further explanation was sought from these six respondents, in relation to what these traits are, 3 of them failed to write the traits down. The traits reported by the other three respondents suggested that a critical thinker should be practical, creative, organized, goal-oriented, curious, rational, open-minded, and intellectual.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to be able to answer the second research question, *How do instructors perceive the role of critical thinking in ELT?*. In line with this aim, the teachers' perceptions of critical thinking were investigated with a total of 15 items, which required the participants to range their opinions of different aspects concerning critical thinking from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. This part produced quantitative data, and so the frequencies drawn from the quantitative data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequencies of Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Thinking

Statement	Agreeing	Being Unsure	Disagreeing
1. It is necessary to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum.	14	1	-
2. Teaching critical thinking in the classroom is one of the responsibilities of the teacher.	14	-	1
3. Critical thinking exercises improve students' abilities to think.	15	-	-
4. Language content becomes more meaningful with critical thinking exercises.	12	2	1
5. Critical thinking is especially important in teaching students reading skills.	15	-	-
6. Critical thinking motivates students to get involved in classroom activities and tasks.	13	2	-
7. Integrating critical thinking exercises into language teaching creates a more student-centred environment.	13	2	-
8. Teaching critical thinking helps students improve their problem solving skills.	15	-	-
9. Acquiring critical thinking skills enables students to identify and evaluate arguments.	14	1	-
10. Acquiring critical thinking skills contributes to students' academic achievement.	14	1	-
11. Acquiring critical thinking skills helps students become autonomous learners.	14	-	1
12. Students' having core language skills is a prerequisite for teaching critical thinking skills.	13	2	-
13. It is a demanding job to integrate critical thinking exercises into teaching a foreign language.	11	3	1
14. Language teachers need training about how to teach critical thinking skills.	13	1	1
15. Schools should have a shared approach to teaching of critical thinking.	10	3	2

As Table 5 indicates, most of the participants seem to have a shared opinion on various aspects of critical thinking. 14 participants agree on the need to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum. Accordingly, they also think that teaching critical thinking in the classroom is one of the responsibilities of the teacher. On the other hand, 11 of the participants believe that integrating critical thinking into teaching a foreign language is a demanding job, and 13 teachers agree that language teachers need training about how to teach critical thinking skills.

As for teachers' perceptions of some purported advantages of critical thinking in language teaching, all the participants admit the role of critical thinking in improving students'

ability to think and their problem solving skills, and in teaching students reading skills. 14 instructors also show an agreement on such purported benefits of critical thinking as helping students identify and evaluate arguments, and increasing students' achievement and learner autonomy. A total of 13 participants also support integrating critical thinking into language teaching since it contributes to increasing student motivation and creating more student-centered environment. Furthermore, 12 participants think that language content becomes more meaningful with critical thinking exercises.

In this part of the questionnaire, as well as seeking agreement or disagreement about some benefits of critical thinking in a language classroom, other aspects regarding critical thinking have been explored. One of these aspects is about whether students' having core language skills is a prerequisite for teaching critical thinking skills. 13 instructors think that having a basic proficiency level is required to teach critical thinking skills in a language classroom. Moreover, 10 instructors agree that schools should have a shared approach to teaching of critical thinking whereas three participants are not sure about and two teachers are not in favour for such an approach.

As understood from all these findings in Table 5, the majority of language instructors show optimism for teaching critical thinking at the same time while teaching a foreign language. However, only two teachers who do not fully show agreement on both the idea of adopting critical thinking and admitting its benefits have been identified. One of these instructors was asked to be interviewed, and the teacher agreed to be interviewed. The findings of this interview will be shared in the following part.

The third part of the questionnaire attempted to explore instructors' teaching practices and experiences of critical thinking in their classrooms. A total of 15 items were designed to seek a possible answer to the third research question of the study "*To what extent do instructors get involved in instructional practices allowing critical thinking?*" . The participants were asked to range the frequency of some teaching practices concerning critical thinking from *very often* to *never.* Here at this point, it is useful to remember what instructional practises or exercises can allow to integrate critical thinking. As mentioned earlier, the relevant literature shows that critical thinking practises usually encompass use of cognitive tasks, presenting the rationale behind tasks and activities, clarifying issues and matters in class, setting goals, discussion activities, preparing questions in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy, use of visual materials and graphic organizers, appealing to different learner styles and activating various learning strategies, preparing higher-order thinking questions and so on. The questionnaire aimed to shed light on the extent of which teachers adopt these instructional practices allowing critical thinking and whether they act in accordance with their perceptions of teaching critical thinking in a language learning process.

This part also produced quantitative data, and the findings drawn from these quantitative data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequencies of Teachers' Practises of Critical Thinking in Teaching English

Statement	Very often /Often	Some times	Rarely	Never
1. I encourage critical thinking in the learning process of students.	13	1	1	-
2. I keep my students actively involved in cognitive tasks such as brainstorming, guessing and so on.	14	1	-	-
3. I make clear the reason why students are doing what they are doing. (e.g. the purpose of the assignment, activity, task, test, etc…)	10	5	-	-
4. I clearly describe the question or issue during my instruction.	13	2	-	-
5. I encourage my students to set goals for themselves.	12	3	-	-
6. I conduct a variety of critical thinking exercises into my lessons to stimulate my students.	10	4	1	-
7. The assignments I give require my students to use cognitive skills.	12	2	1	-
8. I take into account of critical thinking while identifying my instructional objectives.	10	4	-	1
9. I integrate discussion activities into my lessons (such as think-share work, debates, or etc.)	9	5	1	-
10. I take into account of Bloom's taxonomy while preparing my questions to ask in the class.	5	2	6	2
11. I adjust my teaching in order to appeal different learning styles.	13	2	-	-
12. I help organize students' thinking through visual materials. (such as graphic organizers, Venn diagrams, charts, or etc.)	10	4	1	-
13. I adjust my teaching in a way to allow students to use different language learning strategies.	12	3	-	-
14. The exams which I prepare include higher-order thinking questions.	6	5	4	-
15. Teaching critical thinking skills is an important part of my job as a language teacher.	13	1	-	1

As Table 6 shows, most of the participants (n,13) seem to encourage critical thinking in the learning process of their students whereas only one participant reports that she or he rarely encourages critical thinking in his or her classroom. When the responses were reviewed again, it was found out that this response belongs to the same teacher who does not show a full agreement on the role of critical thinking and thus has been chosen for the interview for a further exploration of her/his perceptions and experiences. It is also seen that 13 teachers view teaching critical thinking skills as an important part of their job as a language teacher.

The participants also show a high frequency of getting involved in keeping their students active by engaging them with cognitive tasks like brainstorming and guessing (n, 14). 10 instructors often inform their students about the rationale behind activities, assignments or tasks she or he conducts in the classroom, while five participants sometimes get involved in such an explanation. Moreover, 13 of the participants often clarify a question or issue they meet in their classrooms. All the participants seem to encourage to their students to set goals for themselves. A total of 10 instructors often conduct a range of critical thinking exercises to stimulate students, take into consideration of critical thinking while preparing their instructional goals, and make use of such visual materials as graphic organizers and Venn diagrams to help organize students' thinking while 4 instructors sometimes get involved in these practices. It is also observed from the table that teachers often assign tasks including cognitive skills (n, 12), adjust their teaching practices in order to appeal to different learning styles (n, 13) and allow the use of different language learning strategies (n, 12). 14 instructors also make use of discussion activities in their lessons such as think-share work and debates.

On the other hand, the instructors seem to get less involved in making use of Bloom's taxonomy and higher-order thinking skills while preparing their questions for both in-class and exams. 7 participants report that they take into account of Bloom's taxonomy while preparing their questions to ask in the class whereas 11 participants prepare exams including higher-order thinking questions. The possible explanations behind these findings are later presented in the discussion part of the findings. Another striking finding here is that few participants rarely or never get involved in the critical teaching practices.

Findings of The Interview

Following the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four instructors from different institutional contexts and educational backgrounds. While selecting the interviewees, the researcher also took into account of on some striking points revealed by the analysis of questionnaire and seeking answers to the last two research questions of the study. The researcher gave a code number to these interviewees (as Int1, Int2, Int3 and Int4). Int1 was selected because her responses in the questionnaire differed from the others. While all the participants generally expressed a firm agreement on the role of critical thinking in teaching a language and its purported benefits, Int1 did not show an agreement on the idea of adopting critical thinking and some other aspects regarding critical thinking. It was also observed that Int1 rarely gets engaged in encouraging critical thinking in the class, employing critical thinking exercises, appealing to cognitive skills, and referring to Bloom's taxonomy while preparing her questions. On the other hand, the other three interviewees were selected since they had the strongest conceptions of the role of critical thinking in teaching a foreign language and made the most frequent use of critical thinking practices and exercises. All these four instructors were deemed appropriate for the interview since they were thought to be likely to yield valuable insights into answering the fourth and fifth research questions of the study, regarding the suggestions on integrating critical thinking into the ELT curriculum and barriers to teaching critical thinking.

The qualitative data produced by these 8-minute interviews were analysed through content analysis. The recurring themes and salient points in the responses of the interviewees were coded and then categorized. The findings drawn from these qualitative data are presented following the order of the interview questions.

As the first question, the interviewees were asked to reflect on the concept "critical thinking". The interview data revealed that they viewed critical thinking as an essential skill involving *approaching new information critically, reasoning, asking why questions, becoming autonomous and conscious learners, thinking creatively and independently,* brainstorming *and evaluating.* Their responses overlap with the findings of the questionnaires. One of the interviewees highlights the importance of teaching critical thinking with this statement in the following:

> "*Teaching or learning is important, of course, but being a critical thinker is the most important of all. Reasoning and asking why questions and then becoming autonomous learners or learning themselves are much more important, I think."* (Int2)

The next question was asked to find out whether the students of the interviewees are good critical thinkers. Their responses can be grouped into two. Two interviewees (Int1 and Int2) said that their students are not good at critical thinking while Int3 and Int4 stated that it depends on the level of the students. They think that some students who are sufficiently proficient at English are good critical thinkers. Following this question, the researcher asked the interviewees as a follow-up question investigating their thoughts on why their students are good or not good at critical thinking, so that the responses taken from the follow-up question can also provide some insights into barriers to teaching critical thinking. Several themes in their responses were identified and were coded as shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Reasons why teachers think language students are not good at critical thinking

Categories	Statements
1. culture	- " as a culture we have a lack of critical thinking" (Int1)
2. students' concern about academic achievement	- " just think about learning a new language" (Int1) - " memorizing the rules" (Int1) - " students want to achieve easily without any challenge" (Int4)
3. tendency for not thinking	- "students... not making analysis or generalizations" (Int1) - " not making connections or they are not comparing" (Int1) - " they think shortly" (Int4) - "they don't try to think" " (Int2)
4. background information	- " not using their background information or what they have learnt recently" (Int1) - "they have a lack of background information" (Int4)
5. lack of learner autonomy	- "not very open to be responsible for their own learning " (Int2) - "they want everything ready" (Int2)
6. enthusiasm to the lesson	-" asking open-ended questions" (Int4) - " if the topic is related with the students' interest, they can be more enthusiastic" (Int4)

| 7. proficiency level | - "they have a limited vocabulary" (Int1)
"the level of the students is getting higher and higher, they generally are more creative" (Int 3)
- "it depends on my students' level" (Int4) |
| 8. study areas of students (departments) | - "engineering students are more eager to create, think and produce ….because of their perspective of science" (Int3) |

As Table 7 indicates, as the reasons why the interviewees think that their students are good or not good at critical thinking, they point out eight main factors. From the statements of the interviewees, presented in the table, as one of the instructors argues, students' culture might affect their nature of thinking. Moreover, students' study skills focused on academic achievement are viewed by two interviewees as reasons for students to fail to think critically. The teachers also state that their students usually tend not to think and get involved in such cognitively challenging tasks as analysis, making connections and comparing (Int1 and Int4). Another point which two interviewees touch on is about students' background information; they are complaining about either students' lack of background knowledge or the fact that students are not using what they have learnt. Here the interviewee means that students are not transferring what they already know to new situations or new information. Moreover, one of the interviewees also points out the lack of autonomy among students because they do not want to be responsible for their own learning and they just want to get things ready from the teacher. It may be thought that students are dependent on the teacher and expect everything from the teacher to do. Moreover, students' enthusiasm and interest may be an important factor in teaching critical thinking as reported by Int4. She states that if her students' interest is aroused, they can be more enthusiastic to think critically. Her statement goes in line with one asset of making learners critical thinkers; varying activities and appealing to different learner styles lead to engage students to think critically and creatively.

As also seen from the table, three of the interviewees link students' critical thinking skills to their proficiency level. Int1 thinks that her students are not good critical thinkers because of their limited vocabulary, and on the other hand Int3 and Int4 see having a level of proficiency as a prerequisite for being good critical thinkers. This finding also supports the collective agreement of the questionnaire respondents on the view that students' having core language skills is a prerequisite for teaching critical thinking skills. In this sense, low levels of language proficiency may be thought as a potential barrier to integrate critical thinking into language classes.

As a final point, Int3 argues that her engineering students are better than others in thinking critically because they are already willing to create and question, and she views students' areas of study as a factor in developing critical thinking skills.
As a next question in the interview, the instructors were asked to reflect on whether they encourage critical thinking in their classrooms. Three of the interviewees strongly admit that they are fostering critical thinking in the classroom, and again they highlight the importance of improving critical thinking skills of students. However, Int1 who seems not to have adopted the idea of integrating critical thinking and rarely gets engaged in critical thinking practices reports that she is trying to do but it is not an easy job because of the reasons in the following;

> *"it is not very easy because you need to make a good lesson plan taking critical thinking into consideration. You need some time and you have to*

> *search. So I do not say that I always use critical thinking. Sometimes we become lazy and we feel like we have lots of things to do." (Int1)*

As seen from the excerpt taken from her interview, the instructor argues that integrating critical thinking is a challenging job for her since it needs careful planning, time and research. She also views her workload as an obstacle to making use of critical thinking practices. The aspect of critical thinking relating requiring time and effort has also been reported by the questionnaire findings. Most of the participants (n,11) also accept that integrating critical thinking into teaching a foreign language is a demanding job, and accordingly they agree that language teachers need training about how to teach critical thinking skills. As a further point, Int1 added that students are lazy about using their minds. She explains what she means telling "*not laziness in terms of not doing homework or responsibilities. It is the laziness about their minds. They do not want to think about anything. I think we also have this kind of problem*" .This point can also be grouped into the category above, relating students' tendency for not thinking, among the reasons of students' failing to think critically.

As a further question, the interviewees were asked to comment on their instructional practices allowing critical thinking exercises in the classrooms with reference to some particular activities and tasks. The teachers' practices are outlined in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Instructional Practices of Interviewees Regarding Critical Thinking

Categories	Statement
1. student-centred atmosphere	- "I try to create a more student-based atmosphere first of all" (Int2) - "I want them to be responsible for their own learning rather than being teacher-oriented (Int2)
2. being a model	- "I reason everything. I try to be a good model for them"(Int2)
3. independent tasks	- "I assign them another independent task out of class " (Int3)
4. exercises for self-evaluation	- "I make them evaluate themselves from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Int3)
5. critical reading activities	- "I get them to summarize what they have read orally" (Int3) - " I make them finish the story with their own words" (Int3) - " ask inference questions about reading passages" (Int4) - " making personalisation, character analysis in reading passages (Int4) - "relating the reading topic with their own lives " (Int4)

As Table 8 makes a brief summary of teachers' practices of critical thinking, it is seen that they mostly make use of critical thinking while teaching reading skills such summarizing, altering the ending, inferring, personalizing and character analysis, and relating with students' own lives. Int4 refers to an example activity she often uses to allow critical thinking among her students, as in the following:

> *"My students read something or watch a film. There are a lot of characters. After reading passage or watching the film, I ask them to choose a character asking: What is the best or worst character for you? How would you act in that situation if you were that character? So I push them to think critically. " (Int4)*

Another striking point stated by Int2 is creating a student-centred atmosphere. Creating a more student-centred atmosphere in which they are responsible for their own learning rather than teacher-oriented can involve critical thinking practices. Both her view of student-centred teaching for critical thinking and the questionnaire respondents 'common view that integrating critical thinking exercise into language teaching creates a more student-centred environment highlight the interdependent relation between student-centred atmosphere and development of critical thinking skills. Int2 also points out the need for language teachers to be a model for their students in becoming good critical thinkers. Finally, as critical thinking practices, the third interview proposes assigning students independent tasks and creating opportunities for them to evaluate themselves.

After the researcher sought some insights into teachers' personal experiences and practices within their classrooms, she continued to deal with the issue from a broader perspective. The interviewees were asked whether teaching critical thinking should be incorporated into the ELT curriculum and how this integration could be achieved. All the interviews showed a firm agreement on the need to incorporate critical thinking exercise into foreign language teaching because they believed that critical thinking is crucial not just for ELT but also for the life itself (Int1), because critical thinking is learning to learn (Int2), because it is necessary to avoid traditional teaching and learning (Int3), because it is indispensable for English language teaching and learning (Int4). As for their views on how critical thinking could be included in the ELT curriculum, Table 9 presents a list of some suggestions.

Table 9. Ideas of Interviewees Regarding Integrating Critical Thinking into the ELT Curriculum

Categories	Statements
1. integrating all language skills	- "If I do not integrate listening, speaking, reading into my lesson, so they cannot make any connections. So it is important to use different skills (Int1) - "it can be incorporated by teaching skills-reading, writing, listening, speaking" (Int4)
2. appealing to student interest	- "the first thing to make them think....is thinking about their interest (Int1)
3. appealing to different learner styles	- "students learn differently, so if we use different kinds of activities- maybe for visual learners some graphics- or speaking activities for others, with their partners or working alone..." (Int1)
4. motivating students	-"if you make a friendly classroom atmosphere, they will be more motivated ....to think" (Int1) - "making them feel that they can do this(think critically)" (Int1) - "overcome language barriers" (Int1) - "they feel free themselves in class environment, they think creatively" (Int3)
5. direct instruction	- "cognitive or metacognitive can be taught directly...through lessons or a course" (Int2)

	- " the teacher should encourage them always and tell them the ways how to think critically" (Int4)
6. student-centred atmosphere	- "the most basic step, I guess, is to have a student centred system, teaching method, not teacher-based one" (Int3) - "the students should be in the centre of learning" (Int4)

As Table 9 indicates, the teachers offer six main ideas of incorporating critical thinking into teaching a foreign language. These ideas involve an integration of all language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, taking into account of student interests, appealing to different learner styles, and motivating students by creating a friendly atmosphere, helping them feel a sense of achievement or free, teaching critical thinking skills directly in class, and also creating a student-centred atmosphere.
The teachers' responses on both what their own practices of teaching critical thinking are and what else can be done to integrate critical thinking into the curriculum will provide some valuable insight into the fourth research questions of the study, and these insights are handled in the part of discussion of the findings.

Finally, the interview attempted to investigate whether there are barriers to teaching critical thinking and what these barriers are, with the aim of seeking answer to the last research question of the study, and the teachers were asked to comment on possible barriers. Actually they already dealt with some of them when they were commenting on the reasons why their students failed to be good critical thinkers. However, a few more barriers are reported by the interviewees and listed as in Table 10.

Table 10. Barriers to Teach Critical Thinking Reported by Instructors

Categories	Statements
1. students' lack of evaluation skill	- "they are not good at evaluation" (Int1) - "they just ignore what others say" (Int1) - " they do not read the essays critically" (Int1) - not evaluating his or her "mistakes or weaknesses " (Int1)
2. student s' lack of motivation	- "they do not want to learn" (Int1) - "the problem is all about motivation" (Int1) - "students do not want to be a part of the learning process" (Int3)
3. student's previous experiences of traditional learning	- "they are not open to the new, modern way of learning; they are used to traditional teaching" (Int2) - "the students memorize the rules" (Int3) - "use of one-to-one translation, or teacher-centred methods" (Int3
4. teacher attitudes	- "barriers cannot be an obstacle for you unless you want it (Int2)
5. student attitudes	- most of the students do not like thinking on a topic for a long time so short-term thinking is one of the barriers I think" (Int4)
6. students' lack of background information	- students' lack of background information can be a barrier (Int4)
7. mental disorders	- "some students may have mental problems like dyslexia-and they can have lack of comprehension skill" (ınt4)

As understood from Table 10, there are some potential barriers which can hinder language teachers from integrating critical thinking or lead to failure in such practices. The main barriers faced by the interviewees are students' inability to evaluate, their lack of motivation and background information, their attitudes and previous experiences and also teacher attitudes. As clearly seen from this list, most of the barriers to teaching critical thinking arise from students themselves. All the respondents have a shared view that there are student-based barriers while only one interviewee notes that teachers' willingness or unwillingness to teach critical thinking might be a factor in integrating critical thinking practises.

All the conclusions drawn from both the questionnaires and interviews are discussed under the light of the research questions in the following.

Discussion of the findings in line with the research questions

1) Are instructors aware of what critical thinking is and involves?: As understood from the descriptions and definitions the participants provided for the first part of the questionnaire, and from the further explanations by the interviewees, most language instructors working at university level seem to be highly aware of what critical thinking is and what it involves.
There is a notable consensus among instructors regarding the definition of critical thinking. As they report, critical thinking involves the component cognitive and metacognitive skills of analysing arguments, making inferences, using reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or problem solving.

2) How do instructors perceive the role of critical thinking in ELT?: The findings taken from the questionnaires provide enough support for instructors' shared opinion of the importance of critical thinking in the field of language teaching and learning. The findings also show valuable insights into teacher' attitudes towards various aspects of teaching of critical thinking skills .They think that it is necessary to incorporate critical thinking into the ELT curriculum, and view it as an important aspect of their job.

3) To what extent do instructors get involved in instructional practices allowing critical thinking?: In the classrooms of the 21st century, it is of great importance to equip students with the basic skills of critical thinking by integrating a variety of activities and tasks that engage them actively in critical thinking. From the findings relating teacher experiences of critical thinking, it is seen that many teachers advocate the teaching of critical thinking skills and get involved in critical thinking practises such as conducting cognitive tasks, questioning students, student based activities like discussion, appealing to different learning styles and learner strategies, and making use of visual materials. The teachers also seem to help their students set goals for themselves, employ cognitive skills, organize their thinking, and make use of different language learning strategies.

These findings show optimism for effective language teaching practices since such thought-provoking activities as debates, critical reading tasks, and discussions should be integrated into language teaching environments. The teacher should ask students open-ended or higher-order thinking questions with multiple possible answers and allow their ideas to spread in the classrooms so that they can gain courage to express and share their opinions, argue, and give reasons for what they think, and accept or refuse another point of view.

4) How do instructors think teaching critical thinking could be integrated into the ELT curriculum?: The instructors have suggested several ways of integrating critical thinking exercises into the ELT curriculum. One of these ways is the use of a variety of reading activities. It has been found that the interviewees are in favour for such reading activities as summarizing a passage, altering the ending of the passage, making inferences from what students have read, analysing text characters and personalizing and relating with their own lives. The findings drawn from the questionnaire have also shown that critical thinking has an important role in teaching students reading skills. In line with these findings, it can be concluded that reading skills and critical thinking skills are interdependent. When the literature is also reviewed, it is noticed that integrating a variety of reading exercises might be a good idea to teach critical thinking since the relationship between critical thinking and reading is well established in the relevant literature (Aloqaili, 2012). Such pre-reading activities as brainstorming and guessing and post-reading activities like summarizing can promote the development of cognitive skills. Two interviewees assert that students should be taught thinking skills directly through a lesson or a course. In line with this, Nickerson (1994) also noted that students should be taught critical thinking skills overtly. If students are aware of what thinking skills are and evaluate how they think, they can be more analytic and critical.

5) What barriers to teaching critical thinking do instructors think exist?: Especially as institutions of higher education, universities usually have a mission to foster learners' higher order thinking skills, expand their horizon, and enrich their perspectives. In line with this mission, language teaching programs at universities should make effort to incorporate critical thinking into their curriculum. However, achieving this mission may not be quite an easy job as reported by the interviewees. The respondents also view that integrating critical thinking into the ELT curriculum is a demanding job.

The interviewees also think that there are some barriers set by both students and teachers, but largely by students. For example, two teachers reported that students are used to learning and being taught in a traditional way. That's to say they used to have traditional lessons, in which teachers are active agents and students are passive recipients. Thus, they are not open to thinking critically, which is one of the 21st century's innovative skills. However, such a traditional approach might fail to meet the need to encourage critical thinking skills. Students' potential to think and their role in their own learning might be neglected in a traditional language teaching environment.

As for student-sourced barriers, their lack of evaluation ability can be mentioned first. Critical thinking requires students to evaluate but not to accept anything for granted. Students should be able to face and question different points of view objectively and fairly even if they have previous bias or no clear idea about them. Critical learners are expected "not to accept passively and uncritically what they have learned" (Paul and Elder, 2001).

Student's lack of motivation to think and their attitudes toward thinking critically are also important obstacles for teachers. The teacher are complaining about their students since they are not motivated to think, search, find out necessary information, but rather they tend to make use of ready materials such as the teacher himself and herself. Therefore, they fail to get involved in their learning process and fostering their critical thinking skills such as reasoning and problem solving. Paul and Elder (2001) also claim that student motivation appears to be a crucial condition for critical thinking in that unmotivated learners are unlikely to display critical thinking. Similarly, Ordem (2017) found that use of activities related to critical thinking skills may develop learners' certain critical thinking dispositions and motivate their learning considerably.

Finally, students' lack of background knowledge is seen as a barrier by the teachers. It might be as a potential handicap for students to get involved in critical thinking skills since the prior knowledge serves as a base for critical thinking and inferring (Aloqaili, 2012). According to many other researchers, background knowledge is also necessary to demonstrate their critical thinking skills such as transferring to new contexts and situations and making connections between what they already know and what they are learning. (Willingham, 2007).

Limitations and Implications

Most studies have a few limitations, and this study is no exception. The first constraint was the number of the participants. It encompassed a small sample of the instructors. Therefore, the findings of the study are not intended to be representative of other contexts. However, the study has been an exploratory one, so it has just attempted to clarify the issue under scrutiny for a more systematic future investigation and the issue can be elaborated through a larger sample.

Even though this study was conducted on a very small scale, the study shows the optimism for conducting effective critical thinking practices within the curriculum of English language teaching. The main conclusion drawn from the research is that learning how to overcome the barriers and achieve to integrate critical thinking into instructional practises should be an essential component of professional and personal development for teachers. In this sense, in-service or pre-service training can be employed to provide teachers with necessary knowledge, skills and best practices in order to help them cultivate critical thinkers in the society.

Conclusion

Having the aim of exploring language instructors' awareness and perceptions of critical thinking and their experiences of teaching English in relation to critical thinking, this study followed a mixed-methods approach integrating a questionnaire and interviews with the participation of 15 instructors working at School of Foreign Languages at two different universities in Konya, Turkey. These instruments yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. The main conclusions drawn from all these data uncover teachers' optimism for integrating critical thinking into the ELT curriculum. Language instructors adopt critical thinking pedagogies, and in line with their perceptions of critical thinking, they get involved in practices allowing critical thinking in the classroom.

Taking into account of teachers' comments and perceptions of some purported benefits of critical thinking in teaching a second language, it can be stated that critical thinking needs to be incorporated into the ELT curriculum and taught as a skill -maybe as the fifth language skill- in the classrooms. On the other hand, instructors need further training and help to incorporate critical thinking because the findings also reveal that despite widespread recognition of its importance they find it a demanding and hard job to achieve. Moreover, there are several barriers to teaching critical thinking, mostly set by their learners. Thus, instructors should explore or should be given opportunities to explore how critical thinking develops and how they can encourage the development of critical thinking skills in their students, and what best practices exist in fostering critical thinking skills. In the light of these conclusions, a follow-up study or further research can be conducted to train these instructors on these aspects of integrating critical thinking and examine their developmental processes of instructional practices and decisions.

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