

## **Promoting Critical Thinking in Junior High School: Challenges and Practices From EFL Teachers**

**Afifah Mufidati<sup>1</sup>, Pratiwi Retnaningdyah<sup>2</sup>, Him'mawan Adi Nugroho<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3</sup>State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>afifah.22020@mhs.unesa.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>pratiwiretnaningdyah@unesa.ac.id,

<sup>3</sup>himmawannugroho@unesa.ac.id

### **ABSTRACT**

*Critical thinking skills is highly encouraged by educators for their students to challenge their students to achieve critical values, the sense of creativity, and the requirement of high order thinking. The purpose of this study is to explore how English teachers as a foreign language promote critical thinking skills in junior high school and the barriers they face. This study adopts an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative research design. Barriers included student and parental attitudes, teacher and institutional issues, and cultural constraints. Participants noted a lack of cultural value for critical thinking. Recommendations emerged, such as tailored teacher training programs, a shift towards critical thinking in curricula, pedagogical support emphasizing critical thinking, and enriched textbooks with activities encouraging critical thought. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on English language teaching from the perspective of teachers' perceptions, particularly regarding the role of textbooks and the enhancement of critical thinking skills among students.*

**Keywords:** *Promoting; Critical Thinking; Junior High School; Challenges and Practices; EFL Teachers*

### **ABSTRAK**

Keterampilan berpikir kritis sangat didorong oleh pendidik untuk menantang siswa mereka agar mencapai nilai-nilai kritis, rasa kreativitas, dan kebutuhan berpikir tingkat tinggi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana guru bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing mempromosikan keterampilan berpikir kritis di sekolah menengah pertama dan hambatan yang mereka hadapi. Penelitian ini mengadopsi desain penelitian eksploratif, deskriptif, dan kualitatif. Hambatan-hambatan termasuk sikap siswa dan orang tua, masalah guru dan institusi, dan kendala budaya. Peserta mencatat kurangnya nilai budaya untuk berpikir kritis. Rekomendasi muncul, seperti program pelatihan guru yang disesuaikan, pergeseran menuju berpikir kritis dalam kurikulum, dukungan pedagogis yang menekankan berpikir kritis, dan penyusunan buku teks dengan aktivitas yang mendorong pemikiran kritis. Kebaruan dari penelitian ini terletak pada fokusnya pada pengajaran bahasa Inggris dari sudut pandang persepsi guru, terutama mengenai peran buku teks dan peningkatan keterampilan berpikir kritis di antara siswa.

**Kata kunci:** *Mempromosikan; Berpikir Kritis; Sekolah Menengah Pertama; Tantangan dan Praktik; Guru Bahasa Inggris*

## INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills and texts are two most prominent elements grounded in today 's globalized educational environment. Critical thinking skills is highly encouraged by educators for their students to challenge their students to achieve critical values, the sense of creativity, and the requirement of high order thinking (Essalih et al., 2023; Itmeizeh & Hassan, 2020). Through implementing critical thinking concept, students are expected to link their thinking and ideas with contextualized life aspects. Thus, students will acquire the concept to think critically, to act and solve the problem by considering the factors existing around them (Facione & Gittens, 2016; Paul & Elder, 2014). Such pedagogical endeavors were inherently designed to processed students to achieve more engagement in critical discourse.

The needs of critical thinking skills was later strengthened by the accelerating advancement of technology which keeps an overloading people with information (Facione & Gittens, 2016; Tim & Fung, 2021). Ease of accessing a wealth of information requires people to think critically so that they can discriminate factual from fake information; see logical connections between ideas; be open-mindedly view things from diverse perspectives: ideas; be open-mindedly view things from diverse perspectives: identify, construct, and evaluate problems and get relevant information to solve them (Guo & Li, 2023).

Critical thinking has been highlighted in language learning as a critical element. However, research in critical thinking in English foreign language is scant. Among the limited studies, sufficient evidence suggests that integrating critical thinking in the curriculum is beneficial. For example, teaching critical thinking in writing and reading class facilitates the production of more critical ideas to become productive (Atayeva, 2019; J. Li & Ren, 2020). Evidence suggests that students with higher critical thinking skills significantly out- performed their counterparts with lower critical thinking skills. . However, positive research evidence does not guarantee the implementation of critical thinking skills in practice. As research points out, teachers play a significant role in implementing any innovation.

The unsatisfactory of development of critical thinking skills in junior high school not meet teacher expectation. Students sometimes get distracted and marginalized This is especially true in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education where English is learned but not used in everyday life, as is the case in many countries around the world. On the one hand, students generally do not have a chance to use English in face-to-face communication outside classrooms (L. Li, 2023). It is well argued that in the literature teacher might find challenging in promoting critical thinking skills in foreign language instruction, and one of the reason highlighted in the literature is teachers insufficient knowledge about the concept (J. Li & Ren, 2020). The evidence then leads to an important argument such as; if we went to educate students to be equipped with 21st century skills, teachers need to be able to integrate such skills into teaching. However, we do not sufficiently understand teacher cognition about critical thinking (L. Li, 2023; Zhang et al., 2020).

Therefore, what teachers know, understand how to promote critical thinking skills became primary issues of investigation.

Previous research investigate how students perceived critical thinking from teachers though problem solving, decision making, autonomous learning, metacognition, and emotion (Atayeva, 2019; Darmayanti et al., 2022; Tathahira, 2020). The factors influencing critical thinking among Indonesian students include language proficiency, assessment methods, motivation, home support, prior linguistic knowledge, learning environment, teaching strategies, comprehensible input, student personality, age, and country of residence (Atayeva, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, there are very few studies that focus on teacher cognition about thinking skills within an English as a foreign language context. In particular, there is a lack of research on how teachers conceptualise critical thinking and promote it in their classrooms (Atayeva, 2019; L. Li, 2023). In terms of promoting critical thinking, research suggests several obstacles and dilemmas.

Furthermore, a second influential factor concerns training and professional development. highlighted professional learning opportunities as a critical factor in implementing critical thinking. In a similar vein, Erdogan (2019) and L.Li (2023) pointed out an inadequacy in teacher education programmers, particularly in offering student teachers opportunities to engage in systemically conceptualising and actualising critical thinking in practice. In that regard, challenges in practical work and multi- cultural experience might have a positive influence on fostering (student) teachers' critical thinking skills and awareness. However, young learners should begin with the preparation of thinking critically. Analogical reasoning, which uses students' past knowledge to enhance critical thinking abilities, has an advantage in critical thinking (Vacide Erdoğan, 2019). This research also will dug deeper in practices and challenges of efl teachers promoting critical thinking in junior high school especially in Indonesia. This study examined the perceived of how do critical thinking being promoted by EFL Teachers (Facione & Gittens, 2016) to provide students critics.

In conclusion, although critical thinking has been promoted more than decades, the barriers and opportunities will changed prominently. Previous research has explored general way critical thinking being promoted in adult learner with much concern and aspect within, but there is need for further research to understand the barriers and opportunities when taught young learner in junior high school about critical thinking skills. Therefore, this aims to figure out EFL teachers promoting critical thinking skills in junior high school and he barrier among them.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Type**

The purpose of this study is to explore how English teachers as a foreign language promote critical thinking skills in junior high school and the barriers they face. This study adopts an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative research design.

The primary objective is to "present an accurate picture of a particular phenomenon or situation" (Robert 1988).

## **Sample**

In qualitative research, sample size is usually determined by the richness of the data until data saturation is achieved, which occurs when no new information is obtained from participants (Polit and Beck 2017). In this study, data saturation was reached with 11 participants, prompting the addition of two more to confirm saturation. The study group comprised 13 junior high school English teachers randomly selected from schools with medium socioeconomic levels. The participants included six men and seven women, encompassing one female and one male English teacher from grades one to three, and two female and one male English teacher from grade three of junior high school. All participants held bachelor's degrees in English, had over ten years of teaching experience, and were between 35 and 60 years old. They had not received training in teaching critical thinking after graduating from university. Each participant worked approximately 30 hours per week and taught three to four courses. Sampling continued until data saturation was confirmed, defined as the point where additional data collection and analysis revealed no new themes, with consecutive focus groups providing little to no new information.

## **Instrument**

The interview process involved answering two main questions: (1) How do English teachers of a foreign language promote critical thinking in junior high school? and (2) What challenges do these teachers face in fostering critical thinking skills using narratives in junior high school? To maintain consistency, interviews were conducted separately (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011). All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English; an additional translator reviewed the translations for accuracy. The results were analyzed to derive meaningful conclusions. Field notes, including observations of facial expressions and body movements, were taken during the interviews to help understand and validate participants' responses (Phillippi and Lauderdale 2017). Participants were given the transcripts of their interviews for verification before analysis, and no objections or comments were received.

## **Data Analysis**

All discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the author. The research team verified the accuracy of all transcripts by listening to recordings while reading transcripts. Data were imported into NVIVO 12 for analysis. Each question was analyzed thematically, adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of reading and becoming familiar, coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report.

## **Reliability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four aspects to assess the reliability of qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To ensure the credibility and accuracy of participants' responses, interviews were recorded. Additionally, field notes were taken. Subsequently, all researchers involved in this study examined the interview transcripts. Dependability was established through clear verification tests of the study's objectives, design, data collection and analysis methodology, as well as the presentation of results (Thomas and Magilvy 2011). Confirmability was ensured through collaborative data analysis efforts among researchers to reduce researcher bias. Finally, interviews were conducted with a representative sample. Data saturation was ensured in the data collection process, guaranteeing the transferability of the study.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This work builds upon the previous study on critical thinking (Essalih, Ourahay, and Khzami 2022). It examines teachers' perceptions of their approaches to helping students develop critical thinking and the consistency of their classroom practices with those perceptions. The findings of this study reveal that English teachers have diverse definitions of critical thinking emerging in English language education. These diverse definitions have been categorized into three common approaches in defining critical thinking: (1) as a problem-solving process; (2) as a generative cognitive process, i.e., rational and creative thinking; and (3) critical thinking as an evaluative process (Essalih, Ourahay, and Khzami 2022).

After reviewing the applied methodology and instruments used to collect data, this section presents the obtained results of the study and highlights the importance of these findings. The collected data are utilized to address the following research questions: How do English teachers as a foreign language promote critical thinking in junior high school? What challenges do English teachers as a foreign language face in promoting critical thinking skills using narratives in junior high school?

### **Promote Critical Thinking Skills Using Narratives in Junior High School**

Promoting critical thinking in junior high school is essential for developing students' cognitive abilities beyond basic comprehension. The teacher underscores the importance of critical thinking skills, which involve interpreting and analyzing content in English and relating it to their first language. This skill is crucial for students as it allows them to think beyond the text and apply their understanding to various contexts, enhancing their overall cognitive development.

Critical thinking can be effectively integrated with other English language skills such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening. The teacher points out that narratives provide an accessible and engaging way to introduce these skills to junior high school students. By using narratives, students can practice interpreting,

analyzing, and evaluating texts, which are fundamental components of critical thinking. This integration helps students to see the relevance of critical thinking in their everyday learning.

The teacher emphasizes that critical thinking is a vital skill in the 21st century, necessary for students to navigate and succeed in a complex world. Developing this skill enables students to approach problems with a critical and analytical mindset, allowing them to find efficient and effective solutions. Furthermore, critical thinking skills help students to filter information critically, discerning between reliable and unreliable sources, which is increasingly important in the information age.

The teacher identifies several subskills of critical thinking that are particularly relevant for junior high school students: developing ideas, interpreting information, analyzing content, explaining results, and drawing conclusions. These subskills provide a comprehensive framework for students to engage with texts critically. Additionally, understanding language features such as tenses is essential for students to fully grasp the narrative structure and meaning.

The teacher integrates critical thinking subskills into classroom activities, often implicitly rather than explicitly. Methods such as interpreting texts, generating ideas, analyzing content, and creating narratives are used to promote these skills. By embedding these activities within regular lessons, the teacher ensures that students develop critical thinking skills organically as part of their language learning process.

Folklore and fairy tales are the primary narrative genres used in the classroom. These texts are chosen for their complexity and the rich imaginative content they offer, which resonate well with junior high school students. The familiarity and cultural relevance of these stories allow students to connect the narrative content to their own lives, fostering deeper engagement and critical analysis.

The teacher employs various strategies to promote critical thinking through narratives. Project-based learning, group focus discussions, and peer feedback are the main methods used. These strategies encourage active participation and collaboration among students, which are crucial for developing critical thinking. Reading aloud, paraphrasing, and discussing the main ideas of texts also help students to engage more deeply with the content and develop their analytical skills.

To support the promotion of critical thinking, the teacher utilizes trusted websites for sourcing texts and employs media such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, online games, and quizzes. These tools make the learning process more dynamic and enjoyable, thereby increasing student engagement and motivation. Visual aids and interactive media help to illustrate concepts more clearly and facilitate better understanding and retention of information.

The teacher carefully selects texts from reliable sources such as the British Council and the Jakarta Globe, often opting for shorter versions to maintain student interest and avoid overwhelming them. This curation process ensures that the content is appropriate, engaging, and conducive to promoting critical thinking. By

providing a variety of texts, the teacher can cater to different interests and learning styles, making the lessons more inclusive and effective.

Promoting critical thinking through narratives in junior high school is a multifaceted approach that requires careful planning and execution. By integrating critical thinking subskills with English language learning, using engaging narrative texts, and employing diverse teaching strategies and media, the teacher effectively fosters an environment conducive to developing critical thinking. This holistic approach not only enhances students' language abilities but also equips them with essential cognitive skills needed for their future academic and personal success.

## **Barriers to Advancing Critical Thinking**

The significant challenges faced by the teacher when promoting critical thinking using narratives in a junior high school setting. The teacher mentions that students often struggle to focus due to various distractions, including peers, smartphones, and the content of the stories themselves. This is a critical insight as it underscores the multifaceted nature of classroom distractions that can impede the development of critical thinking skills. Junior high school students, being at a prime developmental age, are naturally curious and eager to explore. However, this curiosity can be a double-edged sword, leading to a lack of focus and self-discipline. Additionally, the teacher notes that students frequently feel shy and confused when attempting to ask questions, which can further hinder their engagement and critical thinking development.

The teacher identifies two primary causes for these challenges. Firstly, there is a lack of exposure to English, as students are learning it as a foreign language. This creates a significant barrier as students must navigate from their native language, Javanese, through Indonesian, and finally to English. This linguistic journey can be arduous and can impede their ability to think critically in English. The second cause, though incomplete in the response, likely pertains to either systemic issues within the educational framework or additional external factors influencing student learning. Understanding these root causes is crucial for developing targeted interventions to support students better.

The teacher outlines several advantages of using narratives to promote critical thinking. Narratives come in various genres, primarily fiction, which can stimulate students' imagination and encourage them to critique and analyze stories creatively. Moreover, narratives often use the past tense, which provides an opportunity for students to practice and reinforce their understanding of English tenses. Reading aloud together is highlighted as a particularly enjoyable activity for students, fostering a sense of community and engagement, even if some students are merely mimicking their peers. However, the teacher does not explicitly mention the disadvantages, which could include potential difficulties in managing diverse student reactions to different genres and the challenge of ensuring all students engage meaningfully with the narratives.

When asked about the use of media or visual aids to address challenges in promoting critical thinking, the teacher refers to previous interviews, indicating no change in approach. This response suggests a reliance on established methods and possibly a need for innovative strategies to enhance student engagement. Visual aids and multimedia can be powerful tools to captivate students' attention and facilitate deeper understanding, but the teacher's response indicates that this area may not be fully leveraged.

The teacher employs several strategies to overcome hardships when promoting critical thinking. These include pausing to regain student focus, randomly calling on students to ensure participation, and using humor and engaging questions to create a fun and relaxed atmosphere. For instance, asking students about their opinion on a monkey riding a one-wheeled bicycle introduces a playful element that can stimulate thinking without creating a tense environment. Additionally, when students struggle with vocabulary or understanding the storyline, the teacher uses analogies and premises to simplify concepts, rather than resorting to direct translation. This approach encourages students to think critically and independently.

The teacher notes significant progress in promoting critical thinking, despite the absence of a dedicated narratives class in the curriculum. This progress is evident in students' worksheets and classroom interactions, indicating that the strategies employed are effective to some extent. Continuous observation and adaptation to student needs are essential to sustain and further this progress.

According to research by Essalih et al (2023) revealed that teachers identify barriers to developing critical thinking skills that are related to learners, parents, schools, and teachers themselves. The primary barrier involves the teachers. All teachers (100%) acknowledged that teachers' attitudes hinder the development of critical thinking. This includes teachers suppressing students, lacking necessary skills, and relying on traditional teaching methods. One participant stated that "excessive authority over learners can be a barrier to the development of critical thinking." Some participants mentioned that "teachers lack the ability or pedagogy to motivate learners and develop critical thinking skills." Another participant remarked, "there is an issue with the teachers themselves; even though they have been trained, the dominant transmission method means they only provide ready-made information to learners, which prevents the development of critical thinking.

The second barrier is related to the school environment. According to 77% of the teachers interviewed the school and classroom environment obstruct the development of critical thinking due to a lack of resources, time constraints, and a weak curriculum. One participant noted that "institutions do not provide opportunities for learners to reflect and criticize because the necessary tools and materials are often absent." Similarly, "the lack of time and adherence to schedules does not allow the development of any skills to be prioritized." (Essalih et al, 2023)

## **Discussion**

The study presents a comprehensive view of the challenges English teachers face in promoting critical thinking skills among junior high school students. It's interesting to see the multifaceted nature of these barriers, ranging from teacher attitudes to cultural influences from both schools and families. These findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to fostering critical thinking in educational settings. One notable aspect is the suggestion to revise the curriculum and provide freedom of expression for learners. This resonates with the idea that critical thinking thrives in environments where students feel empowered to express their opinions and engage in open dialogue. Integrating real-life situations into the curriculum seems promising, as it encourages students to apply critical thinking skills to practical scenarios.

Moreover, the call for teacher training is crucial. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' cognitive development, and providing them with the necessary tools and techniques to promote critical thinking is essential. Continuous professional development could help educators adapt their teaching methods to better facilitate critical thinking skills among their students. Creating activities that stimulate critical thinking is another valuable suggestion. By offering diverse learning experiences, teachers can cater to different learning styles and encourage students to think creatively and analytically. Incorporating such activities into daily lessons can cultivate a culture of inquiry and problem-solving in the classroom. Overall, addressing the identified barriers and implementing the suggested strategies could lead to significant improvements in fostering critical thinking skills among students. It's encouraging to see such proactive efforts aimed at enhancing the quality of education and preparing students for success in an increasingly complex world.

## **CONCLUSION**

Critical thinking entails assessing knowledge or situations using one's reasoning abilities. It's a mindset applicable in daily life, involving reflection, questioning, and ongoing examination of information to maximize effectiveness and rationality based on presented reasons. It transcends mere education but faces barriers in school settings. This study aimed to explore primary school science teachers' perceptions of obstacles to fostering critical thinking and propose solutions. Barriers included student and parental attitudes, teacher and institutional issues, and cultural constraints. Participants noted a lack of cultural value for critical thinking. Recommendations emerged, such as tailored teacher training programs, a shift towards critical thinking in curricula, pedagogical support emphasizing critical thinking, and enriched textbooks with activities encouraging critical thought. Future research could incorporate quantitative methods, and parental education's positive correlation with children's critical thinking underscores the need for wider societal engagement in nurturing these skills.

# ***EduInovasi: Journal of Basic Educational Studies***

Vol 4 No 2 (2024) 1021 - 1032 P-ISSN 2774-5058 E-ISSN 2775-7269

DOI: 47467/eduinovasi.v4i2.2701

This research has limitations in several aspects: firstly, it only focuses on teachers' perceptions; it does not take into account students' perceptions or the role of textbooks in this study. Further research is needed to explore more English teachers' and students' perceptions, investigate the challenges and issues faced by English teachers in the classroom, examine how English textbooks have enhanced students' critical thinking skills in English lessons, and secondly, to determine to what extent school administration is willing to assist in eliminating barriers rather than just providing recommendations to teachers.

## REFERENCES

- Atayeveva, M.-. (2019). Cultivating Junior High School Students Critical Thinking Skills By Using Short-Videos in English Language Classroom. *JELE (Journal of English Language and Education)*, 5(1), 21. <https://doi.org/10.26486/jele.v5i1.830>
- Darmayanti, R., Sugianto, R., Baiduri, B., Choirudin, C., & Wawan, W. (2022). Digital comic learning media based on character values on students' critical thinking in solving mathematical problems in terms of learning styles. *Al-Jabar : Jurnal Pendidikan Matematika*, 13(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajpm.v13i1.11680>
- Essalih, S., Kouchou, I., Ourahay, M., & Khzami, S. eddine. (2023). Development of critical thinking: issues and challenges to overcome at the Moroccan Primary Schools. *Education* 3-13, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2023.2223544>
- Facione, P., & Gittens, C. A. (2016). *Think Critically* (Third). Pearson Education Inc.
- Guo, J., & Li, B. (2023). Improving Literacy Learning in EFL Reading Course in a Technology-Integrated Class. In *Proceedings of the 2022 2nd International Conference on Modern Educational Technology and Social Sciences (ICMETSS 2022)* (Vol. 1). Atlantis Press SARL. <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-45-9>
- Itmeizeh, M., & Hassan, A. (2020). *New Approaches to Teaching Critical Thinking Skills through a New EFL Curriculum*. May.
- Li, J., & Ren, Y. (2020). The Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability in Academic Reading Based on Questionnaires and Interviews. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 15(22), 104–120. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i22.18197>
- Li, L. (2023). Critical thinking from the ground up: teachers' conceptions and practice in EFL classrooms. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2023.2191182>
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2014). *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education Inc.
- Tathahira, T. (2020). PROMOTING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: Challenges and Strategies. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(1), 79. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v8i1.6636>
- Tim, W. L., & Fung, D. (2021). Fostering critical thinking in English-as-a-second-language classrooms: Challenges and opportunities. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 39(September 2020), 100769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100769>
- Vacide Erdoğan. (2019). Integrating 4C Skills of 21st Century into 4 Language Skills in EFL Classes. *International Journal of Education and Research* , 7(11), 113–127. [www.ijern.com](http://www.ijern.com)
- Zhang, H., Yuan, R., & He, X. (2020). Investigating University EFL Teachers '

# ***EduInovasi: Journal of Basic Educational Studies***

Vol 4 No 2 (2024) 1021 - 1032 P-ISSN 2774-5058 E-ISSN 2775-7269

DOI: 47467/eduinovasi.v4i2.2701

Perceptions of Critical Thinking and Its Teaching : Voices from China. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 29(5), 483–493.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-020-00500-6>