

<https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.2.10>

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF INTEGRATING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS WHEN TEACHING READING

ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ НАВИЧОК КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ У НАВЧАННІ ЧИТАННЯ: УЯВЛЕННЯ ТА ПРАКТИКА ВЧИТЕЛІВ

Received: 28/07/2024

Accepted: 28/08/2024

**Michael Amale KIRKO¹, &
Abebe Gebretsadik WOLDEAREGAWI²**



¹ Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, College of Social Sciences, Hawassa University, Sidama, Ethiopia.

✉ E-Mail: mikuye1219@gmail.com

🆔 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6629-4537>



² Department of Foreign Language and Literature, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

✉ E-Mail: hiwoteabebe9@gmail.com

🆔 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3431-094X>

How to Cite (APA Style):

Kirko, M. A., & Woldearegawi, A. G. (2024). Teachers' perceptions and practices of integrating critical thinking skills when teaching reading. *Educational Challenges*, 29(2), 151-165. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.2.10>

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions and practices of instilling critical thinking skills in reading instruction, to enhance students' reading comprehension. It also identifies perceived challenges that hinder the

Мета дослідження – вивчити уявлення та практику вчителів щодо впровадження навичок критичного мислення в навчання читанню для покращення розуміння прочитаного учнями. Воно також визначило гіпотетичні проблеми, які

© Michael Amale KIRKO, & Abebe Gebretsadik WOLDEAREGAWI, 2024

Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Integrating Critical Thinking Skills when Teaching Reading © 2024 by Michael Amale KIRKO, & Abebe Gebretsadik WOLDEAREGAWI is licensed under **Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International**. To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

practice of critical thinking skills in reading classes.

Methodology. The research was carried out at Hawassa University in Ethiopia, using a descriptive survey design and an explanatory mixed-methods approach to collecting data. Forty out of a total of fifty-two English educators and three reading teachers participated in this study. The questions were randomly selected. Texts used in quizzes, mid-term exams and final exams were chosen, to evaluate the texts in which teachers integrated critical thinking skills into classroom reading activities and assessments. Quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires, while qualitative data was obtained through document analysis. Statistical analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24, and content analysis was used for the qualitative data.

Results. The survey results revealed that teachers had a moderate level of perception with regard to integrating critical thinking skills ($m=3.59$) and identified student-related challenges ($m= 3.76$) as significant obstacles to the practice of critical thinking skills. The results of document analysis indicated that the practice of critical thinking skills was infrequent.

It can be **concluded** that teachers' conceptual perception at moderate level was not sufficient to incorporate critical thinking skills into reading instruction in order to enhance students' reading comprehension. Therefore, it is imperative to train teachers in the integration of critical thinking skills in an interactive reading curriculum to motivate and engage students and help them comprehend reading skills in greater depth. Further research is recommended to explore the impact of teachers' perceptions of critical thinking skills on students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: critical thinking skills, incorporating thinking skills, perceptions, practices, reading comprehension.

перешкоджають розвитку навичок критичного мислення на уроках читання.

Методологія. Дослідження проводилося в Університеті Хавасса в Ефіопії з використанням описового опитування та підходу змішаних методів пояснення для зборуданих. У дослідженні брали участь 40 із 52 вчителів англійської мови, і троє вчителів читання. Питання розподілялися випадково. Крім того, тексти, які використовувалися для вікторин, проміжних іспитів і підсумкового іспиту, були спеціально зібрані для оцінки тексту, до якого вчителі інтегрували навички критичного мислення, читання в класі та оцінювання. Кількісні дані були зібрані за допомогою анкетування, а якісні – шляхом аналізу документів. Статистичний аналіз проводився за допомогою Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), версія 24, а аналіз контенту використовувався для якісних даних.

Результати. Результати опитування показали, що вчителі мали помірний рівень сприйняття інтеграції навичок критичного мислення ($m=3,59$) і визначили проблеми, пов'язані з учнями ($m=3,76$), як суттєву перешкоду для практики навичок критичного мислення. Результати аналізу документів показали, що навички критичного мислення практикуються рідко.

Можна дійти **висновку**, що концептуальне сприйняття вчителів на середньому рівні було недостатнім для того, щоб включити навички критичного мислення в навчання читання для покращення розуміння прочитаного учнями. Тому вкрай важливо навчити вчителів інтегрувати навички критичного мислення в інтерактивну навчальну програму з читання, щоб мотивувати та залучити учнів і допомогти їм глибше сформувати навички читання. Рекомендується провести подальші дослідження, щоб дослідити вплив сприйняття вчителями навичок критичного мислення на розуміння прочитаного учнями.

Ключові слова: навички критичного мислення, розвиток навичок мислення, сприйняття, практика, розуміння прочитаного.

INTRODUCTION

Improving students' critical thinking skills has become a key focus in higher education institutions in the 21st century. Critical thinking is often regarded as a highly valued skill in the realm of higher education due to its positive impact on students' learning outcomes (Ennis, 2008). In addition, these days, society requires individuals to possess a

new set of competencies, including the ability to arrange, analyze, evaluate, and transfer an increasingly large wealth of information. Conversely, several researchers have found that students tend to adopt a surface-level approach to reading at university. This could be due to teaching methods employed by educators, wherein they present the concepts and then evaluate the ideas they have addressed during a lecture (Wendling, 2008; Hobson, 2004).

In this respect, it is important to find alternative instructional approaches to improve students' deep-level reading comprehension skills. Different studies suggest that the use of critical thinking (CT) skills improves students' reading comprehension. For example, Jasim and Yahya (2023) suggest that the use of CT skills in reading instruction enhances students' ability to become independent thinkers, thereby promoting self-directed learning and autonomy, both of which are essential components of higher education. Fahim and Sa'eepour (2011) also demonstrated that the instruction of CT skills has the potential to enhance students' language learning within the framework of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Ennis (2008) states that CT skills are highly valued in higher education due to the positive impact they have on students' academic achievements.

Facione (2013) divides fundamental CT skills into cognitive and disposition categories. Cognitive skills are the foundation of critical thinking and include interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 1990). This expert defines each of these skills as follows:

Interpretation is the process of understanding and explaining the significance of different experiences, data, beliefs, or rules. *Analysis* involves identifying relationships between statements and concepts. *Evaluation* refers to examining the coherence and logical strength of statements and evidence. *Inference* is about drawing logical conclusions and forming assumptions. *Explanation* is the ability to articulate concepts clearly and logically. *Self-regulation* involves monitoring and correcting one's own cognitive activities.

Studies reveal that incorporating the aforementioned skills offer a number of benefits in the contemporary education system. Critical thinking skills are essential for developing language skills, particularly with regard to reading and writing (Elder & Paul, 2006; Shaharom & Abdullah, 2004; Seung-Ryul Shin, 2002; Stapleton, 2001; Moore, 1995). These skills involve identifying positions, evaluating evidence, weighing opposing arguments, reading between the lines, recognising techniques, reflecting structurally, and drawing conclusions (Cottrell, 2005). By incorporating CT skills into reading lessons and assessments, educators can enhance students' comprehension. Huynh & Nguyen (2023) found that students with high critical thinking skills also had high reading comprehension, and vice versa. Studies have revealed that using these skills in the EFL classroom during reading classes is highly advantageous (Kabilan, 2000; Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Karmi & Veisi, 2016).

Teaching reading at a higher education institute prioritises the ability of students to understand the content of the text. Reading comprehension is one of the pillars of the act of reading (Ennis 1989). According to Kruidenier (2002), comprehension is an active process, and the reader must interact and be engaged with the text in order for this to function properly. This is not an easy task for students to achieve, and can be described

as understanding a reading text, or the process of constructing meaning from a text (Huynh & Nguyen, 2023). According to Yu-hui et al. (2010), cited in Aloqaili (2011), CT is the process the reader uses to comprehend the text, and it can determine the level of comprehension of each student. In other words, the use of CT skills in reading instruction improves students' reading comprehension.

However, there is some debate among academics as to whether CT skills are inherent or learned. Some argue that CT cannot be taught and see it as an innate ability that is influenced by the individual's social and cultural background (Atkinson, 1997). However, others believe that CT skills can indeed be cultivated through practice and are not naturally ingrained in each individual (Yen & Halili, 2015; Pucha, 2012; Marzano, 1993; and Rajendran, 2000). This may influence the teachers' uses of CT skills in the classroom.

Previous studies suggest that there is a lack of awareness among teachers about the integration of thinking skills in reading instruction. For example, Rosnani and Suhailah (2003) concluded that the majority of teachers are ill-prepared to teach thinking skills and lacked the necessary self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills in this area. This sentiment is further supported by Rahil et al. (2004), who argue that many teachers struggle to incorporate CT skills into their teaching methodologies. Despite efforts to promote CT in the classroom, teachers often prioritise comprehension of the subject matter above the development of CT skills (Choy & Cheah, 2009; Lauer, 2005).

Teachers' varying opinions on CT skills influence the implementation of strategies to enhance students' deep reading skills in the classroom (Abrhami et al., 2015). Dickerson (2005) found that the teachers' personal views and values may be a preventive factor in integrating CT skills within the reading classroom. Without a clear understanding of CT, educators may mistakenly believe they are fostering CT skills in their students (Rhoades et al., 2008). In the research setting, the experienced EFL teachers have been delivering various reading courses at university, but students' reading comprehension level is below their grade. Besides, the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (MoE, 2018) also highlights that university students in Ethiopia struggle with English proficiency, which serves as the primary medium of instruction in higher education institutions.

Despite some existing studies on this topic, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of integrating CT skills into teaching reading and assessment. Besides, examining teachers' perceptions of CT skills is deemed an important focus of investigation because the role of teacher is decisive in implementing any strategy in the classroom.

Thus, the **aim** of this study is to fill a research gap by exploring EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of integrating CT skills into teaching reading and in assessments, as well as the challenges they face in incorporating CT skills into reading activities and tests.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to focus on teachers' perceptions and practices of integrating critical thinking skills in reading instruction to improve second-year university students' reading comprehension at Hawassa University. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions with regard to incorporating critical thinking in teaching reading skills?

2. To what extent do teachers incorporate critical thinking skills in classroom activities and when assessing their students' reading comprehension?
3. What are the potential challenges that hinder the practice of critical thinking skills in reading classes?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to describe problems and offer solutions (Kothari, 2004). To this end, the researchers used a mixed-methods technique to gather data. While the text data was gathered through classroom observations, the quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires. The mixed-methods explanatory sequential design approach was applied. This study collected quantitative data first, then qualitative data in order to analyze it. This approach is further supported by the fact that quantitative data provides an overall picture of the research topic, while qualitative data is needed to clarify, expand, and explain it (Creswell, 2014).

– Participants of the study

The participants involved in the study were English teachers with over five years' experience of teaching English to university students. The researchers used Yamane's formula (1967), which was $n = N / [1 + N (e)^2]$ in (Amale & Gebretsadik, 2024). Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and ($e=0.05$) is the precision level. Using this formula, out of fifty-two educators, forty of them participated in the study. The remaining six participants did not complete the questionnaire and returned it unanswered. Of these, three were associate professors; twenty-nine held a Master's degree and eight had a PhD in teaching English. Eleven of the participants were women and twenty-nine were men.

– Instruments

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were used to examine EFL teachers' level of awareness of integrating CT skills into reading instruction. Perceived challenges that hinder the practice of CT skills were also examined. Fifteen five-point Likert-scale questions were used to explore teachers' general perceptions of CT skills and 11 questions identified challenges hindering the practice of CT tasks in class, adapted from relevant sources of literature (Costa, 2001; Facione, 2020; Petek & Bedir, 2015; Nicole, Stedman, & Adams, 2012). Its reliability indicated a satisfactory level of internal consistency: Cronbach's Alpha analysis revealed that the questionnaire teachers answered was estimated to be $\alpha \approx 0.85$.

– Document Analysis

Content analysis is a methodological approach used to examine and analyze the textual content of written materials, such as books, periodicals, newspapers, and any other kind of written or printed communication (Kothari, 2004). This tool assessed how the EFL teachers integrated CT skills into reading activities to promote students' learning process in a Reading Skills (Enla 216) course and evaluate students' reading comprehension. To do this, the researchers chose six reading texts that the teachers had used to ask comprehension questions in classroom activities, then a further three reading texts with comprehension questions, at random. The reading exam papers were also purposely chosen.

Then, the researchers conducted an analysis of the reading questions used in classroom activities and assessments, such as quizzes, mid-term exams, and final exams. The purpose of analyzing these questions was to examine the extent to which teachers integrated CT skills, specifically those related to analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation, in order to foster and then evaluate undergraduate students' reading comprehension. To analyze these activities and questions, the checklist was adapted by making minor modifications to the framework proposed by (Facione, 2020).

– **Data collection and analysis procedure**

The quantitative data gathered from the teacher questionnaire. To analyze the quantitative data, the descriptive statistics such as frequency, percent, mean, standard deviation and correlation were employed using SPSS version 24. The results were analyzed descriptively. The researcher also adapted the cut-off point from literature (Ustün, 2011; as cited in Amale & Gebretsadik, 2024) that determines the range of *strongly disagree* =1.00-1.80, *disagree* =1.81-2.60, *neutral* =2.61-3.40, *agree* =3.41-4.20 and *strongly agree* =4.21-5.00.

The qualitative data, obtained from document analysis were analyzed descriptively. This data analysis underwent coding, counting, tabulating, and categorizing them into the six key CT skills, in order to draw conclusions. To do so, the researchers employed the summative content analysis methodology, which involves first identification and quantification of certain words or phrases inside a text, with the objective of comprehending the contextual utilization of these words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Based on this, the researchers described the extent to which educators integrated questions that required interpretation, analysis, explanation, inference, evaluation and self-regulation skills to answer the reading activities and tests.

RESULTS

– **Results of the teacher questionnaire**

Teachers' general perception of critical thinking

Table 1

Teachers' general perceptions about CT skills

	Items	Percentage of response (%)						SD
		SD	D	N	A	SA	M	
1	Incorporating CT skills into my classroom lessons is straightforward, but it is difficult to use them in assignments and tests.	0%	2.5	7.5	37.5	52.5	2.55	.959
2	Readable texts are difficult to find in the reading skills module, so it is not easy to incorporate CT tasks into reading activities.	12.5	42.5	20	25	0	2.58	1.010
3	When people grow older, they naturally become critical thinkers.	7.5	27.5	32.5	32.5	0	2.90	.955
4	Integrating CT skills requires more time, so there are fewer opportunities	7.5	30	25	32.5	5	2.98	1.074

	for students to practise them in the reading skills course.							
5	English teachers have to practise critical thinking skills in the reading classroom.	5	25	17.5	50	2.5	3.20	1.018
6	It takes time to design questions that help to test students' higher-level of understanding in classroom reading activities and exams.	5	25	10	55	5	3.30	1.067
7	It is not the job of an English teacher to incorporate CT activities in reading lessons.	10	15	7.5	32.5	35	3.68	1.366
8	It is not necessary to focus on the role of critical thinking skills in a reading course/lesson.	5	15	10	35	35	3.80	1.224
9	It requires too much time to integrate higher-order learning tasks and give feedback in class, so I rarely practice it.	0	15	12.5	47.5	25	3.83	.984
10	If necessary, I could incorporate critical thinking skills into my reading lessons	0	2.5	7.5	82.5	7.5	3.95	.504
11	Practising critical thinking skills is an important part of my job as an English teacher	2.5	20	0	52.5	25	4.00	.751
12	CT is a method of thinking which would promote students' learning process.	0	2.5	7.5	62.5	27.5	4.15	.662
13	How to integrate CT skills into ELT should be taught during pre-service English teacher education.	0	2.5	7.5	47.5	42.5	4.30	.723
14	There should be a balance between practicing CT skills and completing lower-level thinking tasks in reading activities and exams.	0	0	7.5	55	37.5	4.30	.608
15	The role of critical thinking skills in the ELT curriculum should be given greater importance.	0	2.5	7.5	37.5	52.5	4.40	.744
Overall mean		3.7	15.2	12	45.6	23.5	3.59	

SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

The mean of EFL teachers' general perceptions of critical thinking is 3.59 (Table 1). This indicates that participants had a moderate level of perception about CT skills in general. Even though the mean indicates teachers had a moderate level of perception, there was a difference in scores between different questions. For those with a mean score greater than four, the items exhibited mostly preferred thought. Using this criterion, five questions have a mean score of above four.

For instance, Q 15 got a mean score of 4.40. Here, 90% of respondents agreed that the role of critical thinking in the ELT curriculum should be given greater importance. The questions with the next highest scores were Q 13 & Q 14 with a mean score of 4.30. In Q 13, the majority of the respondents agreed (47.5%) or strongly agreed (42.5%) on the

importance of integrating CT skills into ELT during pre-service English teacher education and in Q 14, 55% of the respondents agreed and 37.5% strongly agreed that there should be a balance between practicing CT skills and completing lower-level thinking tasks in reading activities and exams. Thirdly, Q 12 got a mean score of 4.15. In this question, 62.5% of the participants agreed and 27.5% strongly agreed that CT is a method that helps promote the learning process.

47.5% of the respondents agreed and 25% strongly agreed that integrating CT skills and giving feedback in class takes more time, and they rarely practise it; 35% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that it is not necessary to give greater importance to the role of critical thinking skills in the reading course/lesson.

Table 1 also revealed a contrasting perception in Q 4 (integrating CT skills requires more time, so there are fewer opportunities for students to practise CT tasks in the reading skills course). In this question, 7.5% strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed, 32.5% agreed and only 5% strongly agreed with it. Lastly, 37.5% of the educators agreed and 52.5% of them strongly agreed that incorporating CT tasks into their classroom lessons is straightforward, but it is difficult to use them in assignments and tests.

There was another contrasting result in Q 8 (it is not necessary to focus on the role of critical thinking skills in a reading course/lesson). Here, 28 respondents, or 35%, agreed and 35% strongly agreed. Lastly, 35% strongly agreed and 32.5% agreed that integrating critical thinking activities into reading lessons is not the job of an English teacher.

Teachers' perceptions about barriers hindering the implementation of CT

Table 2

Challenges hindering the incorporation of CT

Student-related challenges	Percentage of response (%)						
	mean	SDV	SD	D	N	A	SA
Q16 Students get impatient when critical thinking activities are difficult.	3.50	.961	2.5	12.5	30	42.5	12.5
Q17 Students prefer reading activities with simple factual questions and answers.	3.73	.905	0	10	5	57.5	27.5
Q 18 Students lack the prior knowledge they need to practise higher-level learning tasks.	3.75	.927	2.5	10	12.5	60	15
Q 19 Students put up barriers to thinking critically, regardless of the strategies I use.	3.78	.920	0	7.5	32.5	35	25
Q 21 Students are more concerned about getting a good grade than in learning.	4.05	.876	0	5	20	40	35
Grand mean	3.76						
Teacher-related challenges							
Q20 Only certain students can complete higher-order thinking tasks.	3.85	.864	0	12.5	7.5	62.5	17.5
Q 22 I rarely use questions with no clear answers in reading classes.	3.05	1.154	7.5	30	22.5	30	10
Q 23 I rarely incorporate higher-order thinking exercises in my reading lessons.	3.45	1.037	5	15	20	50	10

Q 24 To fully implement critical thinking into my courses, I would need extra support.	3.88	.853	0	10	12.5	57.5	20
Q 25 I need more training on how to incorporate CT tasks into reading lessons	4.00	.716	0	2.5	17.5	57.5	22.5
Grand mean	3.64						
Overall mean	3.70						

Table 2 shows participants perception of student and teacher-related barriers. The grand mean for student-related factors is 3.76. This shows that student-related factors are a barrier to teaching critical thinking skills. The questions here revealed how teachers perceive their students in reading class. The majority of the participants agreed (57.5%) or strongly agreed (27.5%) that students prefer reading activities with simple factual questions and answers and 62.5% agreed and 17.5% strongly agreed that only certain students can complete higher-order thinking tasks. Of the participants, 60% agreed and 15% strongly agreed that students lack the prior knowledge they need to practise CT skills and 40% and 15% respectively that students' are more concerned about getting a good grade than in learning.

Table 2 also shows participants' perception of teacher-related factors. The mean score is 3.64. This depicts teacher-related challenges as a barrier to integrating critical thinking skills in the EFL reading classroom. The majority of the respondents agreed (57.5%) or strongly agreed (22.5%) that they need more training on how to incorporate CT tasks into reading lessons. In Q 24, 57.5% agreed and 20% strongly agreed that they would need extra support to fully implement CT into their courses. Additionally, 40% agreed that they rarely use questions with no clear answers in reading classes; 37.5% disagreed with this statement and the other 22.5% didn't agree or disagree.

– **Content analysis**

Practice of critical thinking skills in reading class

This section analyzes to what extent each of the questions in the reading tasks and tests encompasses the six key CT skills satisfactorily. To do this, criteria proposed by Facione (2020) was used to identify the reading exercises designed by the teachers and answered by the students as lower- thinking or incorporating CT skills.

Table 3

Reading questions teachers asked

No	Title of the Text	Text type	Lower-order thinking question			Critical thinking skills					
			Recall	Com	App	Ana	Inf	Inter	Exp	Eva	SR
1	Saving	expository	0	1	0	2	2	6	0	0	0
2	Hero of Africa	narrative	15	10	0	0	10	8	0	0	0
3	Teaching Reading	expository	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Total			17	12	0	2	12	15	1	0	0

Table 3 presents how teachers incorporated CT skills into reading tasks in the classroom. The teachers asked 11 questions based on the first text. The majority of the questions required students to analyse the text (2), such as *What are the advantages of saving money at a depository institution?* or *Why should people save money?* use inference (2), such as what does the method **pay-yourself-first** mean? or interpretation skills (6). These are questions such as *What is the main idea in each paragraph, in Part 2?* Only one question requires students' comprehension skills. For example, *Setting goals helps a person choose to _____.*

The table also shows that teachers asked 43 questions based on the second text. Most of them were vocabulary questions such as matching words to their meanings using a dictionary with 15 items. The teachers also asked 10 comprehension questions, such as question 2, which requires students to use recall from the text, such as *Mr. Mandela became a president of South Africa at the age of _____.* There are 10 reading questions that required students use of inference skills. Students had to rearrange the disorganized sentences, based on the text in Part 3. The table also shows that teachers asked 8 questions that required students' interpretation skills. Questions included *What did you learn from this story?* in Part 1, question 7, and question 1, *What is the main idea in paragraph 5?*

Finally, there were six questions in the third text. Three of these were lower-order thinking questions. For example, *What is the title of this text?* and *Is this fiction or non-fiction?* The remaining three questions required CT skills. These were *What is the text about?* (interpretation), *What is the point of reading this?* (explanation), and *Would you read this? Why or why not?*(analysis) .

Practices of integrating CT skills in reading assessments

Table 4
Reading tasks teachers used in assessments

Title of the text	Text type	Used for	Lower-order thinking			Higher-order thinking questions					
			Recal	Com	Ap	An	Inf	Int	Exp	Ev	S
Education	Exp.	test	5	3	0	0	4	5	0	0	0
How Kassa saved his brother's house	Na.	mid	3	11	0	0	6	0	0	0	0
The Secret to a Prosperous Longer Life	Exp.	final	1	6	0	0	5	2	0	0	0
Digitalisation	Exp.	final	1	1	0	2	3	4	0	0	0
Total			16	15	0	2	11	12	0	0	0

Exp= expository, Na= narrative,

Table 4 shows the results of assessment questions based on a reading text. Teachers formulated 16 questions from the reading text for a quiz. The teacher asked 5 questions that required students to use recall (questions 7-11) by asking students to identify what the pronouns refer to in the text.

For example, Q 1 *This act* (paragraph 9, line 1) ____and Q 2. *We* (paragraph 1, line 1) _____, given in rubric three. Three comprehension questions are also asked in the quiz. These

are the multiple-choice questions in rubric one, 1-3. For example, in, Q 3 *The reading text is ____*: A. A call for action on the subject; C. An account of an action or event; C. An explanation of a topic; D. A story of an event.

There were four questions that required the use of inference. These are questions 4 and 5 in rubric 1 and questions 5 and 6 in rubric 2. For example, question 4 asks students to infer the intended audience of the text and question 5 asks students to infer what the writer implied in paragraph 1. Questions 5 and 6 ask students to construct the meaning of phrases (*turning out* in paragraph 1 and *Grave risks* in paragraph 8) from the context. Lastly, for a classroom quiz, the teachers asked 5 interpretation questions based on the text. These questions asked students to explain the central idea in each paragraph.

The table shows teachers asked 15 questions based on a reading text for the mid-exam assessment. Six of the questions required students to find the significance of words/phrases and complete the meaning of the text. Question 10, for example, is *From the story, it is possible to deduce that__*. The others are in questions 11-15. The table showed that teachers asked 3 questions requiring recall and 11 comprehension questions.

For the final exam, teachers chose two texts and asked 25 questions. There were 14 questions about the first text and 11 about the second text. In the first text, 1 question tested recall, 6 tested comprehension, 5 required inference, and 2 required interpretation skills in order for the students to respond satisfactorily.

Students were asked a range of questions during the final exam to determine their level of reading proficiency. Many of the assessment's questions required lower-order thinking skills, such as memory and understanding. There were noticeably few questions that required the application of knowledge. However, the assessment also included some components of CT skills like analysis, inference, and interpretation. Unfortunately, there were no questions that required students to explain, evaluate or demonstrate self-regulation skills. In conclusion, there were 31 questions in total requiring recall, comprehension and application in the final exam, compared to 25 questions for CT skills. This disparity in the type of question could affect how students' reading abilities were evaluated overall.

DISCUSSIONS

The survey results reveal that teachers had divided perceptions on integrating CT skills into reading lessons (Gembaruk, 2023; Veretiuk & Chetveryk, 2024). Some teachers believe they can incorporate these skills, while others find it time-consuming and struggle with CT skills (Wendaferew, Berlie, 2024). This result is in line with the findings of (Fenyi & Jones-Mensah, 2022) which states that the majority of teachers integrate CT skills in reading lessons only rarely. This may be due to the lack of necessary tools to integrate CT skills into their courses (Lauer, 2005). According to Adams and Stedman (2012), this is because teachers may not have had formal education themselves in critical thinking. When teachers do not understand critical thinking, it can be quite challenging for them to effectively instill CT skills in their students. This suggests that the majority of teachers lack the necessary knowledge regarding the use of CT skills in reading lessons.

Based on the result of content analysis, the teachers' use of CT skills in the reading activities and tests was disproportional and more questions were asked about the

content. The teachers are expected to integrate each of the six skills in the reading comprehension. However, this study revealed that the level of CT skills they incorporated in the reading activities and tests was inconsistent.

It showed that inference and interpretation skills were used at a higher level; analysis and explanation skills were integrated the least and evaluation and self-regulation skills were not used at all. This finding is consistent with the findings of (Al-Kindi & AL-Mekhlafi, 2017) and Al-Balushi and Osman (2013), which revealed that teachers make rare use of CT skills. This implies that the integration of CT skills into reading comprehension provided by teachers is directly impacted by the amount of training they received.

The study found that students preferred getting a good grade above understanding the material and favoured reading activities with simple factual questions. The lack the necessary prior knowledge to practice CT skills was perceived as a major barrier hindering the integration of CT skills into reading comprehension activities. This finding is in line with the findings of (Kowalczyk et al, 2012).

It also identified teacher-related factors also hinder the integration of CT skills into reading instruction. This result suggests that EFL teachers may not possess the necessary understanding of CT concepts and skills to effectively integrate them into their teaching practices (Lauer, 2005). Additionally, Kowalczyk, et al. (2012) argue that teachers' poor knowledge of CT skills could impede their ability to foster CT among their students. The challenges associated with integrating CT skills stem from the need for educators to possess the necessary skills and training to effectively incorporate higher-order thinking into their teaching practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrating critical thinking skills into reading instructions enhances students' reading comprehension skills. Teachers' perceptions about CT skills play an important role in incorporating them into reading activities and assessments. Besides, CT integration is essential for students to effectively employ CT skills such as interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation and self-regulation, all of which can be developed through EFL reading comprehension. The cultivation of critical thinking is a fundamental cognitive skill that should be integrated into the curriculum. It is important to recognise that CT skills do not exist in isolation, and therefore should be incorporated into language skills, particularly in the context of reading.

The moderate level of teachers' perceptions of CT skills towards this integration, as demonstrated by the current study influenced the practices of them found to be insufficient. Factors influencing the execution of CT skills in university reading classes include students' preference for obtaining good grades above learning, which they can achieve in reading activities with simple factual questions; a poor prior language level and insufficient training of teachers. Therefore, providing teachers with the necessary training to incorporate CT skills into interactive reading courses is essential. Further research is recommended to explore the impact of CT skills on students' reading comprehension.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the English language instructors at Hawassa University for helping me collect relevant data for the study.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

FUNDING

The authors declare that this study received no specific financial support.

REFERENCES

- Abrami, P. C., Bernard, R. M., Borokhovski, E., Waddington, D. I., Wade, C. A., & Persson, T. (2015). Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 85(2), 275–314. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314551063>
- Al Barwani, T., & Osman, M. (2011). Extending the Learning Landscape: A Framework for Nurturing Critical Thinking through School Improvement in Oman. In *ICET 55th World Assembly*. Glasgow, Scotland.
- Aliakbari, M., & Sadeghdaghighi, A. (2013). Teachers' Perception of the Barriers to Critical Thinking. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.031>
- Al-Kindi, N. S., & AL-Mekhlafi, A. M. (2017). The Practice and Challenges of Implementing Critical Thinking Skills in Omani Post-basic EFL Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 10(12), 116–133. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n12p116>
- Alsaleh, N. J. (2020). Teaching Critical Thinking Skills: Literature Review. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 19(1), 21–39. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1239945>
- Alwehaibi, H. (2013). The impact of using YouTube in EFL. In *Proceedings of the Clute International Academic Conference, Paris, France*.
- Amale, M., & Gebretsadik, A. (2024). Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs for Teaching Critical Thinking Skills and Practices of Its Strategies. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal/LET*, 14(1), 98–120. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v14i1.12657>
- Atkinson, D. (1997). A critical approach to critical thinking'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 71–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587975>
- Choy, S.E., & Cheah, P.K. (2009). Teacher perceptions of critical thinking among students and its influence on higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 20(2), 198–206. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ864337>
- Costa, A. L. (2001). Teaching for, of and about thinking. In A. L. Costa (Ed.), *Developing minds* (pp. 354–358). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cottrell, S. (2005). *Critical thinking skills*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. SAGE.
- Ennis, R. H. (1989). Critical Thinking and Subject Specificity: Clarification and Needed Research. *Educational Researcher*, 18(3), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X018003004>

- Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical thinking—The Delphi report: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction*. California Academic Press.
- Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Insight Assessment. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251303244_Critical_Thinking_What_It_Is_and_Why_It_Counts
- Facione, P.A. (2020). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Retrieved from www.insightassessment.com
- Fahim, M., & Sa'eepour, M. (2011). The Impact of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 867–874. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.4.867-874>
- Fenyi, D. A., & Jones-Mensah, I. (2022). Higher Order Thinking Skills in English Language Teaching: The Case of Colleges of Education in Ghana. *Linguistics Initiative*, 2(1), 13–32. <https://doi.org/10.53696/27753719.2124>
- Gembaruk, A. (2023). The Development of Thinking Skills in English as a Second Language Methodology Classroom. *Educational Challenges*, 28(2), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2023.28.2.04>
- Harizaj, M., & Hajrulla, V. (2017). Fostering Learner's Critical Thinking Skills in EFL: Some Practical Activities. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 13(29), 126–133. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n29p126>
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Jasim, B., & Yahya, S. (2023). Integrating critical thinking skills in teaching English language receptive skills. *College Of Basic Education Research Journal*, 19(1), 904–925. <https://doi.org/10.33899/berj.2023.178147>
- Kabilan, M.K. (2013). A phenomenological study of an international teaching practicum: Preservice teachers' experiences of professional development. *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*, 36, 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.07.013>
- Kamali, Z., & Fahim, M. (2011). The Relationship between Critical Thinking Ability of Iranian EFL Learners and Their Resilience Level Facing Unfamiliar Vocabulary Items in Reading. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(1), 104–111. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.1.104-111>
- Karimi, L., & Veisi, F. (2016). The Impact of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills on Reading Comprehension of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(9), 1869–1876. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0609.21>
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International.
- Kowalczyk, N., Hackworth, R., & Case-Smith, J. (2012). Perceptions of the use of critical thinking teaching methods. *Radiologic technology*, 83(3), 226–236. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22267692/>

- Lauer, T. (2005). Teaching critical-thinking skills using course content material. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 34(6), 34–44.
- Mahyuddin, R., Lope Pihie, Z. A., Elias, H., & Konting, M. M. (2004). The incorporation of thinking skills in the school curriculum. *Kajian Malaysia*, XXII(2), 23–33. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:55035410>
- Marzano, R. J. (1993). How classroom teachers approach the teaching of thinking. *Theory into practice*, 32(3), 154–160.
- Mirzai, (2008). The relationship between Critical Thinking and Lexical Inferencing of Iranian EFL Learners [Unpublished master's thesis]. *Azad University of Science and Research, Tehran, Iran*.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *Critical Thinking: Learn the Tools the Best Thinkers Use*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Puchta, H. (2012). *Developing thinking skills in the young learners' classroom*. Cambridge University Press. http://www.herbertpuchta.com/wp-content/files_mf/1337014114YL_Thinking_booklet.pdf
- Rhoades, E. B., Ricketts, J. C., & Friedel, C. R. (2008). Major comparison of cognitive potential: Are agriculture students different? In *Proceedings of the 2008 American Association of Agricultural Education National Conference*.
- Rosnani H., & Suhailah, H. (2003). *The teaching of thinking in Malaysia*. International Islamic University Malaysia.
- Sodoma, B., & Else, D. (2009). Job satisfaction of Iowa public school principals. *Rural Educator*, 31(1), 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v31i1.438>
- Stedman, N. R., & Adams, B. L. (2012). Identifying faculty's knowledge of critical thinking concepts and perceptions of critical thinking instruction in higher education. *NACTA Journal*, 56(2), 9–14.
- Veretiuk, T., & Chetveryk, V. (2024). Developing critical thinking in language and literary education. In *Scientific exploration: Bridging theory and practice: Collection of scientific papers with the proceedings of the 1st International Scientific and Practical Conference* (pp. 138–141). Berlin, Germany. <https://dSPACE.hnpu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/16506>
- Wendaferew, D., & Berlie, A. D. (2024). The Impact of Learning Strategies on English as a Foreign Language Learners' Reading Comprehension Skills Development. *Educational Challenges*, 29(1), 226–240. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.1.16>
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis*.
- Yusuf, N., & Shah, P. (2018). Teachers' perception on barriers of teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom: A survey. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Language, Education and Innovation (ICLEI)* (pp. 66–80).