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Pedagogies of Thought: Unpacking Indonesian EFL Teachers' Approaches to Critical Thinking in Language Skills Instruction

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Abstract: Integrating critical thinking (CT) into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has become a pedagogical imperative in higher education, particularly in contexts striving to foster 21st-century competencies. While existing research has largely focused on intervention programs and theoretical models, there is a limited qualitative understanding of how EFL instructors embed CT within the actual teaching of language skills. This study investigates the pedagogical approaches employed by Indonesian university instructors to promote CT in reading, writing, listening, and speaking courses. Guided by the research question: What pedagogical approaches do Indonesian university EFL teachers use to promote CT in the teaching of the four language skills?, the study employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight EFL instructors (two per skill) from three private universities in Jakarta. Thematic analysis revealed four core themes: conceptualizing CT, skill-specific instructional strategies, challenges in implementation, and perceived student development. Findings indicate that while instructors share a strong commitment to CT, its integration is shaped by skill type, student proficiency, and institutional constraints. The study contributes novel qualitative insight into classroom-based CT pedagogy and offers practical implications for teacher education and curriculum design. Limitations include a small, urban-focused sample. Future research should consider broader, comparative contexts and incorporate student perspectives to deepen understanding and applicability.

Keywords: *Critical thinking, EFL instruction, higher education, language skills, qualitative research.*

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Introduction

In recent decades, the integration of critical thinking (CT) into higher education has emerged as a global imperative (Rivas et al., 2023; Ruano-Borbalan, 2023), driven by the demand for graduates who can engage in analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and reflective judgment (Araújo et al., 2024). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in university settings, is increasingly positioned as a key medium through which students develop such 21st-century competencies. Within this pedagogical shift, the teaching of language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—is no longer limited to linguistic accuracy but is expected to nurture cognitive depth, argumentative rigor, and evaluative discernment. This global orientation is echoed in national policy frameworks, including those of Indonesia, emphasizing the enhancement of CT as an essential graduate attribute. However, the translation of this aspiration into everyday classroom practice remains uneven, especially in EFL contexts.

Despite the policy emphasis, a persistent disjunction exists between institutional expectations and instructional realities (Coleman et al., 2023). While CT has been formally incorporated into Indonesia's higher education curricula, there is limited empirical evidence on how EFL educators embed CT into their pedagogical approaches across the four core language skills (Muhsin et al., 2023). Most existing research focuses on theoretical models or student outcomes (e.g., Le & Chong, 2024) with insufficient attention paid to the lived experiences and teaching strategies of instructors themselves. This gap is particularly significant in skill-specific contexts, where CT may manifest differently depending on whether students are reading critically, articulating arguments in writing, engaging with spoken discourse, or evaluating auditory input. Understanding how instructors conceptualize and implement CT in each domain is crucial to bridging the policy-practice divide.

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The present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the pedagogical approaches employed by Indonesian university EFL teachers in fostering CT through the instruction of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Grounded in a qualitative research design, the study investigates the lived experiences of eight instructors from three universities in Jakarta, aiming to capture the strategies, beliefs, and challenges that shape their classroom practices. By examining how CT is conceptualized and operationalized at the instructional level, this study offers theoretical contributions to critical pedagogy and practical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policy stakeholders. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: *What pedagogical approaches do Indonesian university EFL teachers use to promote CT in the teaching of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills?*

Literature Review

EFL in Indonesian Higher Education

In the context of Indonesian higher education, EFL instruction plays a pivotal role in preparing students for both academic and professional engagement in globalized environments (Gayatri et al., 2023; Zein et al., 2020). National curriculum frameworks increasingly mandate the integration of CT and communicative competence as core learning outcomes within English education programs. EFL courses are expected not only to develop students' linguistic proficiency across reading, writing, listening, and speaking but also to foster higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis (Andoko et al., 2020; Tyas et al., 2020). These expectations reflect broader educational reforms aimed at aligning Indonesia's higher education standards with international benchmarks. However, the ambitious nature of such curricular goals often outpaces the infrastructural and pedagogical support available at the institutional level, leading to disparities in how effectively these competencies are embedded into actual classroom practice.

One of the key challenges lies in the preparedness of EFL instructors and the institutional structures supporting their professional growth. While some universities offer training workshops or professional development programs, many lecturers are left to interpret and implement curriculum directives autonomously, often without clear guidance or access to pedagogical resources tailored to CT instruction. Moreover, large class sizes, rigid assessment systems, and limited instructional time further constrain teachers' capacity to innovate or experiment with CT pedagogies (Rear, 2019). These systemic factors contribute to a gap between curriculum design and classroom realities, wherein the infusion of CT remains inconsistent and heavily dependent on individual teachers' initiatives, beliefs, and experiences. As such, exploring how EFL instructors navigate these complexities is essential to understanding the dynamics of curriculum enactment in Indonesian higher education.

CT in the Four Language Skills

CT, broadly defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in a reasoned and reflective manner (Spector & Ma, 2019), has become an essential component of 21st-century education, particularly in EFL settings (Riswanto et al., 2022). In language learning, CT involves not only understanding linguistic forms but also engaging cognitively with content, questioning assumptions, recognizing multiple perspectives, and constructing well-supported arguments. In the EFL context, where learners often engage with culturally and intellectually diverse materials, CT serves as a bridge between linguistic proficiency and deeper cognitive engagement. According to Facione (2000), core characteristics of CT include interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation, competencies that align well with communicative language teaching and task-based learning frameworks. EFL instruction that fosters these dispositions enables learners to move beyond rote memorization toward active meaning-making and intellectual independence.

In the reading domain, CT is developed through tasks that go beyond literal comprehension, encouraging students to engage with texts analytically and evaluatively (Yildirim & Soylemez, 2018). This includes identifying the author's purpose, analyzing arguments, detecting bias, recognizing implicit assumptions, and assessing the credibility of sources. Critical reading practices also involve making inferences, drawing connections across texts, and reflecting on the broader implications of textual content (Ilyas, 2023). In EFL classrooms, such practices are particularly valuable in helping learners interpret authentic texts that incorporate sociocultural and ideological perspectives through language use. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students through questioning techniques, annotation strategies, and scaffolded discussions that prompt deeper engagement with textual material.

Regarding writing, CT manifests in students' ability to construct coherent, well-supported arguments, synthesize information from multiple sources, and reflect critically on their viewpoints (Akib et al., 2024). EFL writing instruction that promotes CT encourages students to move beyond descriptive tasks toward persuasive, analytical, and reflective genres. Activities such as argumentative essays, position papers, and reflective journals provide platforms for learners to practice logical reasoning, incorporate evidence, and anticipate counterarguments. Moreover, peer review and revision processes can foster metacognitive awareness (Zhang & Hyland, 2023), enabling students to critically assess their writing and that of others. Through this iterative process, learners develop both linguistic competence and intellectual autonomy.

In the area of listening, CT involves more than passive reception of information; it requires learners to interpret tone, evaluate the reliability of spoken content, and distinguish between fact and opinion. EFL listening tasks that foster CT might include evaluating different speakers' perspectives in a debate, analyzing the structure of spoken arguments, or reflecting on the implications of spoken narratives (Kuhn, 2019). Critical listening is particularly important in academic and professional contexts, where learners must engage with lectures, discussions, and media that present complex viewpoints. Teachers can support this development by designing listening activities that involve prediction, note-taking, inferencing, and evaluative reflection, thereby transforming listening into an active cognitive process.

Finally, speaking provides a dynamic context for learners to articulate and defend ideas, engage in dialogue, and respond spontaneously to alternative viewpoints. Classroom speaking activities such as debates, role plays, problem-solving discussions, and oral presentations are effective means of fostering evaluative reasoning, persuasion, and rhetorical organization (Cui & Teo, 2021). In such contexts, learners are not only practicing fluency and accuracy but also developing the ability to justify opinions, challenge assumptions, and engage respectfully with diverse perspectives. Teachers can further enhance this development by providing structured prompts, facilitating peer feedback, and modeling critical questioning techniques. As such, speaking becomes both a communicative and intellectual act, deeply intertwined with learners' critical engagement with language and content.

Studies on Integrating CT into EFL Instruction

Over the past decade, a significant body of research has highlighted the importance of integrating CT into EFL instruction. The conceptualization of CT across these studies commonly includes dimensions such as analysis, evaluation, inference, and reasoning (Lan, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024). Scholars have explored various pedagogical tools and approaches to support CT, including debate (Presdyasmara & Anam, 2023), graphic organizers (Min et al., 2023), collaborative learning (Chen & Preston, 2021), and philosophical inquiry (Li et al., 2024). Although these studies present positive outcomes in enhancing students' analytical abilities, the contextual focus has often been limited to specific skills or instructional models, with an underrepresentation of comprehensive skill-specific CT integration across the four core EFL domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Several studies have employed intervention-based methods to assess the impact of specific pedagogical designs. For example, Moghadam et al. (2023) and Mohammed and Jasim (2024) employed control-experimental designs and observed statistically significant gains in CT, reading comprehension, and text interpretation. Likewise, Chen and Preston (2021) reported improved CT through organizational development interventions. Lan (2024) notably combined EFL with moral education and reported a 12-point gain in CT test scores among experimental groups. However, while these studies confirm the efficacy of specific interventions, they tend to examine CT in compartmentalized instructional contexts, often omitting how CT manifests differently across distinct language skills in natural classroom settings.

Moreover, teacher-focused studies, such as those by Li (2023), Ullah et al. (2022), and Lu and Zheng (2024), have underscored the importance of educators' roles in conceptualizing and promoting CT in EFL classrooms. Li (2023) employed a funneling method to explore how teachers implement CT across subjects, with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity and instructional alignment. Ullah et al. (2022) highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in integrating CT in writing instruction for low-proficient students, while Lu and Zheng (2024) observed that critical questions represented only a small portion of teachers' classroom interactions. Despite their contributions, these studies often treat teachers' strategies generically rather than examining them in the context of skill-specific pedagogy, an important gap that limits the transferability of insights into practical curriculum development.

Other studies have explored contextual, technological, and sociocultural factors that affect CT integration. Wei and Li (2024) reviewed the application of digital tools such as WebQuest and digital mapping to foster CT, while Algouzi et al. (2023) used Telegram-based self-study modules to promote CT for employability purposes. Meanwhile, Koukpossi et al. (2024) and El-Asri and El Karfa (2024) explored critical pedagogy in Benin and Morocco, respectively, emphasizing inquiry-based learning and curriculum-aligned CT activities. Despite the geographic diversity, these studies typically focus on either a single skill or a technology-mediated approach, often without a deep investigation into how CT is pedagogically infused across all core language skills. This leaves unresolved questions about how context, method, and language domain interact in the context of CT integration.

Furthermore, learner-centered investigations, including those by Widyastuti (2018), Mehta and Al Mahrooqi (2024), and Yüce (2023), provide valuable insights into students' CT development and dispositions. Widyastuti (2018) analyzed argumentative essays and found deficiencies in reasoning and refutation skills, while Mehta and Al Mahrooqi (2024) demonstrated that inclusive, process-driven instruction fosters CT, especially when learners engage with personally relevant content. Yüce linked CT with autonomous learning and academic grit among preservice teachers, suggesting that CT enhances broader academic resilience. These studies, however, largely examine outcomes or student perceptions rather than tracing how CT is operationalized pedagogically by instructors in real classroom practice.

This current study addresses three critical gaps in the literature. First, it investigates how university-level EFL instructors integrate CT pedagogically across all four core language skills, filling the void left by prior studies that focused predominantly on writing or reading alone (e.g., Ullah et al., 2022; Widyastuti, 2018). Second, it contributes new

knowledge by analyzing skill-specific strategies in authentic university classroom contexts, as opposed to experimental settings or decontextualized teacher perceptions (e.g., Lan, 2024; Li, 2023). Third, by drawing from teacher narratives in Indonesia, a region underrepresented in recent CT-in-EFL literature, the study adds to the geographical diversity of CT research, complementing findings from China (Chen & Preston, 2021; Wei & Li, 2024), the Middle East (Mehta & Al Mahrooqi, 2024; Mohammed & Jasim, 2024), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Koukpossi et al., 2024).

In so doing, this research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. It enriches the theoretical understanding of how CT is conceptualized and implemented differently across reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction. Practically, it offers insight into the pedagogical decision-making of EFL instructors in higher education, highlighting how they adapt, scaffold, and assess CT development in skill-specific ways. These contributions aim to inform teacher education, curriculum design, and institutional policy by providing a holistic, grounded, and context-sensitive account of CT integration in EFL classrooms, an area that, as shown, remains underexplored despite broad consensus on its importance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate the pedagogical approaches employed by Indonesian university EFL instructors in integrating CT into the teaching of the four core language skills. Qualitative inquiry is particularly well-suited to this research focus, as it enables the examination of the complex, context-dependent, and often tacit practices through which educators construct and enact their instructional strategies. Rather than seeking to quantify the frequency of particular techniques, this design prioritizes understanding the how and why behind teachers' pedagogical decisions - how they interpret CT in relation to language skills, and why they choose specific methods to promote it. An exploratory orientation is necessary, given the relative paucity of research in this area within the Indonesian context, which allows for the emergence of rich, grounded insights that reflect the complex interplay between individual teacher beliefs, institutional expectations, and classroom realities.

Research Context

The research was conducted at three private universities located in distinct regions of Jakarta - West, East, and South Jakarta - each offering undergraduate programs in English Education that explicitly include the instruction of the four core language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These institutions were purposefully selected due to their curricular commitment to skill-based EFL instruction and their alignment with the study's objective of exploring how CT is embedded within language teaching. Situated in Jakarta, the capital city and educational hub of Indonesia, these universities represent an urban academic environment where institutional resources, pedagogical innovation, and exposure to global educational discourses are more readily accessible.

Access to the research sites was facilitated by the researchers' professional networks, as colleagues employed at these universities expressed a willingness to participate, provided that their identities and institutional affiliations remained confidential. This collegial access not only enabled logistical feasibility but also fostered trust and openness among participants, enriching the quality of data collected. Moreover, initial communication with prospective participants confirmed that each had already been making deliberate efforts to integrate CT into their classroom instruction. Their willingness to share insights and practices offered a valuable entry point into understanding how CT is operationalized across different language skills in diverse yet comparable higher education contexts within the same metropolitan area.

Participants

The study involved eight EFL instructors, each specializing in one of the four core language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Two instructors represented each skill area, ensuring a balanced distribution across the language instruction domains. All participants were teaching at the undergraduate level within English programs, where the development of CT is increasingly emphasized as a curricular goal. The decision to focus on instructors with skill-specific expertise allowed the study to explore the detailed and potentially differentiated ways in which CT is conceptualized and integrated into the instruction of each language skill.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the participants consisted of five females and three males, with ages ranging from 30 to 43 years. Each had accumulated a minimum of two years of teaching experience in university-level English programs, with several having taught for significantly longer periods. Their professional background ensured that they were not only familiar with the institutional and curricular expectations surrounding CT but also had sufficient practical experience to reflect meaningfully on their pedagogical strategies. Their varying ages and years of service also contributed to a richer diversity of perspectives, shaped by individual teaching philosophies and exposure to differing student cohorts.

The selection of participants was guided by purposive sampling, aimed at identifying instructors with relevant expertise and demonstrable engagement with CT pedagogy. Before inclusion, each participant confirmed their active efforts to incorporate CT into their language instruction, thereby aligning with the study's focus on intentional pedagogical

practice. This sampling strategy ensured that the data collected would be both relevant and substantive, allowing the research to uncover how CT is embedded within EFL instruction, not as a theoretical ideal but as a lived, context-specific classroom practice. The clarity of the inclusion criteria also enhanced the study's credibility and transferability, key considerations for qualitative research seeking to make meaningful contributions to broader pedagogical discourse.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews, which provided a flexible yet focused framework for eliciting in-depth insights into participants' pedagogical approaches. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing platforms, depending on the participants' availability and logistical considerations. The interview questions were developed collaboratively by the research team, drawing on established frameworks of CT in EFL pedagogy to ensure both theoretical grounding and contextual relevance. The final set consisted of ten guiding questions that addressed teachers' conceptualizations of CT, instructional strategies, classroom practices, and perceived challenges. To enhance content validity, the interview protocol was reviewed by two external experts in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Following this review, minor adjustments were made to enhance clarity and ensure alignment with the study's objectives. The interviews were conducted in mutually convenient settings chosen by the participants, most often at their respective schools or in quiet meeting rooms, to provide a comfortable and non-disruptive environment for data collection.

The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to guide the conversation using a prepared set of open-ended questions, while also allowing for the freedom to pursue emergent topics and probe for clarification or elaboration. This method was particularly well-suited to the study's exploratory nature, as it enabled participants to articulate their teaching philosophies, classroom strategies, and experiences with integrating CT in a manner that was both reflective and contextually grounded.

The interview questions were designed to explore several core themes: participants' conceptions of CT, the specific instructional strategies they employed in their respective language skills courses, and the challenges and successes they encountered in fostering CT among students. These focus areas were informed by existing literature on CT in EFL instruction and refined through expert consultation to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. This approach ensured the collection of rich, in-depth data capable of capturing both the shared and divergent pedagogical practices employed by EFL instructors across the four language skills. The use of a single, in-depth method was a deliberate choice to prioritize depth over breadth, enabling a comprehensive understanding of teacher beliefs and the classroom enactment of CT.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which provides a systematic yet flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The process began with familiarization, during which the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed interview data to develop a deep understanding of the content. This stage also involved noting initial observations and reflections related to emerging ideas about CT practices across different language skills. The recursive nature of this phase allowed for immersion in the data and laid the foundation for a more rigorous and insightful coding process.

Following familiarization, the next phase involved generating initial codes by systematically organizing the data into meaningful features relevant to the research question. Coding was done manually, with particular attention paid to recurring phrases, pedagogical descriptions, metaphors, and reflections that illuminated how participants conceptualized and operationalized CT. These codes were developed using both deductive and inductive approaches: some codes were informed by established theoretical indicators of CT (e.g., reasoning, inference, argumentation), while others emerged organically from the participants' language and contextual experiences. This hybrid coding strategy ensured that the analysis remained both theoretically grounded and open to context-specific insights.

After initial coding, the researcher engaged in theme development, whereby codes were clustered into broader categories that captured recurring patterns and pedagogical constructs. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure internal coherence and meaningful distinction. Each theme was examined in relation to the entire dataset, allowing the researcher to validate its relevance and ensure that it authentically represented the participants' narratives. The final themes were named to reflect both the essence of the participants' experiences and their implications for EFL pedagogy. This interpretive process resulted in the identification of several key themes that illuminated the diverse yet interconnected ways in which Indonesian university EFL instructors integrate critical thinking into their language skills instruction.

Findings

The thematic analysis of interview data revealed four major themes that capture how CT is conceptualized and operationalized across the four language skills by Indonesian EFL instructors. These themes include: (a) conceptualizing

CT in EFL instruction, (b) skill-specific strategies for promoting CT, (c) challenges in implementation, and (d) perceived student engagement and development.

Conceptualizing CT in EFL Instruction

The participants in this study unanimously recognized CT as a vital component of university-level English language education, associating it with learners' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information rather than merely reproduce content. However, their understandings of CT were not monolithic; instead, they were differentiated and shaped by the specific language skills they taught. For instance, participant 1, a reading instructor, emphasized the importance of interpretive depth: *"For me, CT means my students can question what they read, not just summarize. They need to see the intention behind the text."* This view reflects an analytical engagement with texts, encouraging students to critically examine authorial intentions and textual implications. In contrast, participant 2, a speaking instructor, associated CT with oral argumentation and reasoning: *"In speaking, it's not only about fluency. I ask them to support their opinions with reasons. That is where CT starts."* These differences reveal how instructors operationalize CT in ways that are closely aligned with the cognitive demands of each language skill.

In addition to these skill-specific interpretations, participants agreed that CT should not be treated as a stand-alone topic, but rather as an embedded pedagogical orientation within language instruction. They viewed it as an intellectual habit that needed to be consistently fostered through curriculum design, classroom interaction, and reflective learning. Participant 3, who teaches writing, articulated this integration clearly: *"I tell my students that writing is about presenting arguments, and arguments must be based on logic and evidence. That's what CT is for me."* This view aligns with pedagogical approaches that view language learning not simply as the acquisition of linguistic forms but as a vehicle for engaging with ideas critically and expressively. Teachers in this study intentionally designed learning tasks that enabled students to practice CT in context, thereby promoting cognitive development alongside language proficiency.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that students' ability to engage in CT was both teachable and developmental. Rather than expecting immediate mastery, instructors viewed the development of CT as a gradual process that required sustained support, modeling, and feedback. Several participants shared that they often began the semester with simple questioning techniques and built toward more complex tasks such as peer evaluations, debates, and text analysis. This progressive scaffolding allowed students to internalize CT strategies in a manageable and meaningful way. The instructors' shared belief in the transformative potential of CT underscores their pedagogical commitment to fostering learners who are not only linguistically competent but also intellectually empowered.

Skill-Specific Strategies for Promoting CT

Participants reported implementing a range of strategies tailored to their specific language skills to foster CT. In reading, both instructors emphasized interpretive tasks such as guided questioning, textual annotation, and comparative analysis to engage students beyond surface-level comprehension. Participant 1 explained, *"I often give two articles with different perspectives on a topic. Then I ask students to identify the bias or assumptions in each one."* This technique helped students learn to critically evaluate an author's intent and rhetorical stance. Participant 4, the second reading instructor, highlighted the use of reflective questioning and pre-reading debates to stimulate analytical engagement: *"Before reading, I ask them what they expect to find, and after reading, we compare their expectations with the actual content. It helps them see the text as part of a larger discourse."* Both instructors employed questioning frameworks that encouraged students to challenge textual authority, recognize implicit ideologies, and make intertextual connections, thereby positioning reading as an intellectually active process rather than a passive one.

In writing classes, the two instructors integrated CT through structured essay assignments, peer review workshops, and metacognitive writing tasks. Participant 3 remarked, *"I ask students to take a position on a social issue and support it with sources. They also review each other's work, which helps them think critically not only about their own ideas but others' too."* She emphasized the importance of thesis clarity, evidence-based argumentation, and counterargument anticipation. Participant 5, the second writing instructor, added, *"I always tell my students that writing is a conversation, not a monologue. They must engage with different perspectives and show why their argument matters."* He incorporated synthesis activities that required students to merge multiple viewpoints into a cohesive narrative, encouraging deeper reflection and critical judgment. Both instructors viewed writing as a medium through which students refine their reasoning, assess the credibility of sources, and express ideas with logical coherence.

The instructors teaching listening utilized authentic materials, critical reflection, and post-listening evaluations to move beyond comprehension and promote deeper engagement. Participant 6 explained, *"After listening, I ask them, Do you agree with the speaker? Why or why not? It makes them process what they hear more deeply."* His use of TED Talks and news commentaries enabled students to critique real-world discourse and assess the effectiveness of spoken arguments. Similarly, participant 7 shared, *"I often pause the audio and ask students to predict what the speaker might say next or to identify emotional tones. Then we reflect on how those elements shape meaning."* Her emphasis on affective and inferential listening sharpened students' ability to decode implied meaning and assess the speaker's purpose. Both instructors

structured listening tasks that encouraged students to actively interrogate auditory input, question assumptions, and reflect on the broader implications of spoken content.

In speaking classes, instructors facilitated debates, role-plays, and structured oral presentations as platforms for developing CT through verbal expression. Participant 2 stated, *"Every week, students prepare short talks and get questions from peers. They must justify their answers. It pushes them to think fast and support their ideas."* He prioritized spontaneous speech tasks and peer feedback to simulate real-world argumentation. Participant 8, the second speaking instructor, employed thematic group discussions and reflective speaking journals: *"I ask students to reflect on what they said after the discussion: what they could have added, what was missing. It helps them become more aware of their thought process."* Both instructors emphasized articulation, justification, and evaluative dialogue, using speaking tasks not only to develop fluency but also to train learners in logical reasoning, audience awareness, and intellectual responsiveness —key elements of spoken communication.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the instructors' strong commitment to embedding CT in their EFL instruction, several challenges emerged that impeded the full realization of their pedagogical goals. One of the most frequently cited barriers was the variation in students' English language proficiency, which significantly influenced their ability to articulate complex thoughts. Participants across all skill areas noted that while many students demonstrated a capacity for CT in their native language, they often struggled to express those ideas in English. Participant 7, a listening instructor, remarked, *"Some students can think critically in their native language, but they struggle to say it in English. So, the ideas are there, but not the words."* Similarly, participant 5, who teaches writing, noted that, *"Sometimes the students have great ideas, but they give up trying to explain them because they can't find the words or structures."* This linguistic limitation frequently led to student frustration and occasionally to disengagement from cognitively demanding tasks.

In addition to language proficiency issues, instructors pointed to institutional constraints such as rigid syllabi, limited instructional time, and large class sizes, all of which made it difficult to incorporate sustained CT activities. These structural conditions often compelled teachers to prioritize content coverage and examination preparation over more in-depth analytical engagement. Participant 6, a listening instructor, noted, *"We are expected to finish the whole module. There's no room for extended reflection or discussions, which are crucial for CT."* Participant 8, who teaches speaking, echoed this concern: *"When you have 30 students in one class, it's hard to give each of them the space to explain and defend their ideas."* Such institutional pressures often resulted in a surface-level treatment of CT, limiting its integration to isolated tasks rather than embedding it as a consistent pedagogical orientation.

Another significant challenge identified by participants was students' initial unfamiliarity with CT as an academic expectation, especially among first-year university students. Teachers across all four skill areas reported that students tended to approach language learning as a process of memorizing rules or reproducing textbook content, rather than engaging with texts or tasks analytically. Participant 4, a reading instructor, commented, *"At the beginning, students just want to find the right answer. They don't know how to question or challenge what they read."* Similarly, participant 1 noted that *"students often hesitate to give their own opinions because they are afraid of being wrong."* To address this, instructors described the need for gradual scaffolding - introducing CT incrementally through guided questions, modeling, and repeated practice. This developmental approach aimed not only to build students' confidence but also to shift their perceptions of what it means to learn a language at the university level.

Perceived Student Engagement and Development

Despite the challenges posed by linguistic limitations, institutional constraints, and students' initial unfamiliarity with CT, participants observed noticeable improvement in students' critical engagement over the semester. Repetitive exposure to CT tasks, such as argumentative writing, reflective listening, and structured classroom debates, supported the internalization of analytical habits. Participant 3, who teaches writing, remarked, *"By the end of the term, my students' essays were much better. They started using evidence properly and developed stronger arguments."* Her observations were echoed by participant 5, who noted increased coherence and critical stance in student writing as the semester progressed. These gradual improvements suggested that, when scaffolded effectively, CT can be developed even among students with initially limited proficiency or exposure to analytical discourse. Specifically, instructors fostered CT development by designing sequenced tasks that transitioned from guided questioning to independent analysis, integrating debates and problem-solving activities into class sessions, and encouraging students to maintain reflective journals that required them to justify their reasoning in English. In addition, teachers frequently modeled argument structures, provided feedback on students' use of evidence, and gradually reduced support throughout the semester, allowing learners to assume greater responsibility for critical inquiry.

Similar patterns of development were observed in listening and speaking courses, where students began to demonstrate more confidence, spontaneity, and evaluative reasoning in verbal tasks. Participant 6 explained, *"At first, students were hesitant to speak, especially when asked to give opinions. But after repeated activities, they started analyzing what they heard and responding thoughtfully."* Participant 8 described how group discussions evolved from superficial exchanges

to more reasoned dialogues: *"Students used to just agree with their friends, but now they're starting to respectfully challenge each other and explain why they disagree."* These shifts indicated that with consistent practice, learners could progress from passive consumption of input to active, reflective participation in meaning-making, one of the primary goals of critical pedagogy in EFL settings.

Participants expressed a strong sense of professional fulfillment upon witnessing students' intellectual growth, particularly as learners moved from rote responses to more autonomous thinking. Participant 2, a speaking instructor, described this transformation vividly: *"The best part is seeing students who used to just memorize, now they ask me difficult questions. That's when I know they're thinking critically."* Participant 1, who teaches reading, shared a similar sentiment: *"It's rewarding when students start questioning the author's perspective or pointing out biased language. It means they're not just reading; they're engaging."* Although the pace and depth of development varied across classes and individuals, instructors viewed these changes as tangible evidence that their pedagogical approaches were fostering deeper, more independent learners. Such reflections underscore the transformative potential of integrating CT into EFL instruction, even in contexts characterized by structural and linguistic challenges.

Discussion

The findings of this study directly address the core research question concerning the pedagogical approaches Indonesian EFL instructors employ to integrate CT into their teaching of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Across all four skills, teachers articulated a consistent view of CT as a process of inquiry, reasoning, and reflection. They operationalized it through skill-specific methods such as debates, textual analysis, argumentative writing, reflective listening, and peer review, often scaffolded progressively over the semester. Importantly, CT was not treated as an add-on but embedded into instructional practices and tasks. The study also uncovered challenges related to students' linguistic limitations, rigid curricula, and limited CT awareness; yet, it noted signs of learner development in confidence and autonomy, affirming the pedagogical impact of intentionally integrating CT.

These findings align with previous literature that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of CT and its benefits in language education. Studies by Li (2023) and Tosuncuoglu (2018) similarly highlighted EFL teachers' belief in CT's centrality, although this study adds granularity by mapping CT integration across all four skills. Consistent with Ullah et al. (2022), the current findings underscore the value of argumentative writing and the difficulties low-proficiency students face when articulating complex ideas. Likewise, Lan (2024) and Li et al. (2024) demonstrated that CT instruction improves student performance when structured around explicit pedagogical strategies, echoing the scaffolding practices observed in the current study. Moreover, this finding aligns with Yin et al. (2024), who reported increased CT when students had greater autonomy in topic selection, paralleling how this study's instructors fostered independent thinking through student-led discussions and peer questioning.

However, divergences from previous research are also evident. Many existing studies employed experimental or intervention-based designs (e.g., Lan, 2024; Moghadam et al., 2023; Mohammed & Jasim, 2024), focusing on measurable gains in CT scores following specific treatments. In contrast, this study employed a naturalistic, qualitative lens to explore how CT is integrated into day-to-day classroom instruction, revealing details often overlooked by controlled trials. Furthermore, while Min et al. (2023) and Wei and Li (2024) emphasized the role of digital tools and graphic organizers in fostering CT, participants in this study relied more on teacher-led discussions and reflective practices rather than technology-based interventions. This contrast suggests that pedagogical context and available resources significantly shape how CT is delivered in different instructional settings.

Additionally, while the integration of CT through debate has been widely recognized (e.g., Presdyasmara & Anam, 2023), this study offers a more diversified account of how speaking instructors use questioning, peer interaction, and self-reflection to build CT, especially in low-stakes, non-competitive environments. It also extends the findings of Widyastuti (2018), who focused solely on writing, by showing that CT skills are developed through listening and speaking as well, domains often overlooked in earlier research. Notably, unlike the teacher education-focused studies such as Hastuti et al. (2022) and Yüce (2023), which emphasized pre-service teachers' CT disposition and its relationship with academic grit, this study focuses on in-service instructors actively mediating CT development within real classrooms, contributing deeper insights into pedagogical enactment.

These results suggest that integrating CT across language skills is not only feasible but also transformative, particularly when instructors view CT as a developmental process that requires modeling, practice, and contextual adaptation. Similar to findings by El-Asri and El Karfa (2024) and Mehta and Al Mahrooqi (2024), teachers in this study believed that CT can flourish without disrupting existing curricular structures if it is embedded through reflective dialogue, purposeful task design, and iterative feedback. Additionally, while Lu and Zheng (2024) reported a lack of CT-oriented questions in classroom discourse, this study's participants demonstrated purposeful questioning and evaluation strategies, suggesting that teaching experience, institutional culture, or training may play a critical role in shaping CT pedagogy.

The present study makes three distinct contributions to the literature. First, it offers a comprehensive, skill-specific exploration of CT pedagogy, filling a gap left by prior research that often isolated writing or reading. Second, it contextualizes CT integration within Indonesian higher education, enriching the geographic and cultural scope of existing

scholarship. Third, by focusing on teacher agency and reflective practice, this study sheds light on how EFL instructors navigate curriculum constraints, student limitations, and institutional pressures to implement CT instruction. Such findings provide a valuable lens for rethinking EFL pedagogy not only as language transmission but as a means of nurturing independent, critically engaged learners.

Implications for EFL Pedagogy

The implications of this study are multifaceted. For teacher education and professional development, it underscores the need for training programs that explicitly prepare instructors to conceptualize CT scientifically and integrate CT in skill-specific ways, rather than through generalized methods. At the curricular level, institutions should provide flexibility in syllabi and class size management to allow for more evidence-based activities and practices, as well as deeper reflection and dialogue. Finally, the study advocates for learner-centered approaches that treat students as active meaning-makers, gradually building their confidence and capacity for critical engagement through scaffolded instruction. In summary, this study confirms the value of CT as a pedagogical cornerstone in EFL education and provides a practical model for integrating it across language skills in diverse instructional contexts.

Conclusion

This study investigated how Indonesian university EFL instructors integrate CT into the instruction of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, revealing a complex interplay between pedagogical intent, contextual constraints, and student readiness. The findings demonstrate that CT is not perceived as a discrete competency, but rather as a pedagogical disposition embedded in classroom practices, task design, and student interactions. Instructors implemented skill-specific strategies, such as debates, argumentative writing, reflective listening, and textual analysis, tailored to the cognitive demands of each language domain. Despite facing institutional limitations and varied student proficiency, instructors demonstrated pedagogical creativity and commitment to fostering CT through progressive scaffolding and reflective dialogue. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on CT in EFL by emphasizing its contextual enactment in real-world classrooms and by foregrounding teacher agency in transforming language instruction into a platform for intellectual empowerment.

Recommendations

Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative designs to investigate how CT evolves over time and across diverse educational contexts, including public universities, rural institutions, and vocational settings. Including student perspectives would offer a more holistic view of CT implementation, shedding light on how learners perceive, engage with, and internalize CT through language tasks. Additionally, mixed-methods studies incorporating classroom observations and student artifacts could provide a richer triangulation of data, enabling researchers to trace the alignment between pedagogical intent and learning outcomes. Exploring the role of digital technologies, teacher education programs, and institutional policies in mediating CT integration would also enhance the understanding of systemic factors that support or inhibit critical pedagogy in EFL instruction.

Limitations

While offering valuable insights into the pedagogical enactment of CT in Indonesian EFL classrooms, this study is constrained by its small sample size and exclusive focus on private universities in urban Jakarta, limiting the generalizability of its findings. The reliance on self-reported data through interviews may have introduced bias, as participants might have portrayed idealized versions of their instructional practices. The absence of direct classroom observation and student input further narrows the interpretive scope, as the study primarily captures teacher perceptions rather than triangulated instructional realities. Future studies should address these limitations by expanding the participant pool, diversifying institutional settings, and incorporating multiple data sources to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of CT integration in EFL contexts.

Ethics Statements

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the study. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights as research subjects. Participants were assured of their confidentiality, with all identifying information anonymized through the use of pseudonyms and data stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any form of penalty or obligation to justify. These measures were implemented in accordance with internationally recognized ethical standards for qualitative research, thereby ensuring a respectful and trustworthy research environment.

Generative AI Statement

This manuscript involved the use of AI tools to enhance language clarity and expression. Specifically, Quillbot and DeepL were employed to revise sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, and overall clarity during the writing process. These tools were used under the author's supervision and did not influence the intellectual content, analysis, or interpretation of the study.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Solihati: Supervision, data analysis, writing. Hikmat: Data analysis

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