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Original Research

English Language Teachers' Practice and Challenges of Critical Thinking Strategy in Reading Skills

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Abstract

This study investigated EFL teachers' practice, challenges, and perceptions of critical thinking strategies in teaching reading skills at Ambo University. A descriptive research design was used in this study. All of (N = 33) the instructors were included in the study. Ambo University was chosen using a convenience sampling technique. All the instructors were included in the study using comprehensive sampling techniques. Six of them who were teaching English major students participated in the interview by using purposive sampling. The study indicated English teachers provided opportunities for reflection and revision promoted questioning, incorporated cooperative learning and collaboration, and fostered a supportive classroom climate. However, their practice of analysing and evaluating sources and fostering creativity, providing real-world examples, integrating technology and information literacy, and fostering curiosity and inquiry was low. The study also identified limited resources, existing curriculum constraints, limited access to technology, and lack of training as challenges in implementing critical thinking strategies in the reading classroom. The result also showed that all instructors perceived critical thinking as developing students' critical thinking skills. They believed critical thinking enhanced students' comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation abilities. Therefore, Ambo University and other concerned bodies should take necessary measures to minimise the challenges of implementing critical thinking strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is important in education in this rapidly changing world (Shambo'll). It enables individuals to analyse and evaluate information, make informed decisions, and solve complex problems (Zali). It is also a foundational skill for individuals in the 21st century. It enables individuals to navigate information overload, adapt to change, engage

- with digital media critically, make ethical decisions, and embrace lifelong learning. Cultivating and promoting critical thinking skills equips individuals with the tools necessary to thrive in the dynamic and interconnected world of the 21st century (Heliwati). Critical thinking is also correlated

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Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,
with students' learning engagement in the
classroom ([Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011](#)).

In Ethiopian higher education, most students face difficulties in learning in general and in learning English specifically ([Mitiku, 2023](#)). This might be because they lack critical thinking skills, which in turn leads to weaknesses in critical thinking skills, independent work after school, and work ethics ([Al-Naba Hini, 2010](#)). Critical thinking is better taught by critical thinking strategies. Critical thinking strategies are specific approaches or techniques that individuals can employ to enhance their critical thinking skills. These strategies help individuals analyse, evaluate, and interpret information effectively, enabling them to make reasoned judgments and decisions ([Elkayam](#)).

Teachers play a crucial role in modelling and applying critical thinking in the classroom. By applying critical thinking in their teaching practices, teachers can create a classroom environment that nurtures students' critical thinking skills, fosters intellectual growth, and prepares them for success in the 21st century. Therefore, this study focused on the EFL Teachers' Practice and Challenges of Critical Thinking Strategies in Teaching Critical Thinking.

Critical thinking is crucial in the context of globalisation as it enables individuals to navigate complex global challenges, recognise biases, evaluate information, engage in dialogue, adapt to change, make ethical decisions, and promote global citizenship. It equips individuals with the skills necessary to understand and actively participate in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world ([Zali](#)). Teachers can develop students' critical thinking in reading skills by engaging students in various

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10
instructional strategies and activities such as questioning techniques, guiding students in analysing the structure, organization, and language features of texts, teaching students to support their interpretations and arguments with evidence from the text, engaging students in activities that require them to compare and contrast different texts, perspectives, or arguments, encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives while reading, introducing reading tasks that involve solving problems or addressing real-life scenarios, teaching metacognitive strategies that promote critical thinking during reading, engaging students in Socratic dialogue, where they engage in a rigorous and structured discussion about a text, utilizing authentic texts from various genres and sources to expose students to real-world reading materials, and incorporating reflection and metacognitive journaling activities where students can record their thoughts, insights, and questions about the texts they read ([Abrami et al., 2008](#); [Tsui, 2009](#)).

There are some international studies conducted on critical thinking areas. For instance, [Abrami et al. \(2008\)](#). This meta-analysis examined the effects of instructional interventions on students' critical thinking skills and dispositions. The study found that instructional approaches that explicitly teach critical thinking skills, such as problem-solving activities, inquiry-based learning, and Socratic questioning, have a positive impact on students' critical thinking abilities. The findings suggest that deliberate instruction in critical thinking can enhance students' thinking skills and dispositions. In a similar way, the [Hananiah et al. \(2015\)](#) study suggested that critical thinking involves a combination of dispositions, such as open-

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L., mindedness, intellectual curiosity, and fair-mindedness, along with cognitive abilities, including analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving. The study emphasises the importance of both dispositional and cognitive aspects in developing and accessing critical thinking skills.

Tsui (2009) examined the relationship between effective pedagogical practices and the development of critical thinking skills in higher education. The findings suggest that student-centered instructional approaches, such as problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and reflective writing, promote the development of critical thinking skills. The study highlights the importance of creating an active learning environment that encourages students to engage in critical thinking activities.

The findings suggest that certain learning behaviours, such as engagement in self-regulated learning strategies and active participation in discussions, were positively associated with improvements in critical thinking abilities. The study highlights the potential of leveraging learning analytics to identify and support students' development of critical thinking skills. The dispositional factors that predict Chinese students' performance in critical thinking tasks. The findings suggest that various dispositional factors, such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, and self-efficacy, are positively associated with students' critical thinking abilities. The study highlights the role of individual differences in predicting students' critical thinking performance. In general, the above studies provide insights into the importance of critical thinking skills, effective instructional strategies, misconceptions, and individual factors related

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10 to students' development of critical thinking abilities. Further exploration of these and other studies in the field can contribute to a deeper understanding of the research conducted on students' critical thinking skills.

In local contexts, Nondamaging (2022) conducted a study and found that nurses had low to moderate critical thinking skills. Yohannes (2019) also conducted a study on preparatory school learners' level of critical thinking proficiency and its correlation with their academic achievement in Ethiopia. He found that students' critical thinking proficiency was weak, and there was no difference in gender. Roomy (2022) carried out a study on the effects of critical reading skills on students' reading comprehension. He found that students' critical reading performance was unsatisfactory owing to insignificant emphasis given to intellectual standards of critical thinking. In addition to this, the researcher's personal experience as a student and as a teacher at different levels of education revealed that the student's critical thinking was unsatisfactory. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate EFL teachers' practice and challenges of critical thinking strategies in teaching reading skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive research design was used in this study. A descriptive research design is used to assess EFL teachers' practice and challenges of critical thinking strategies in teaching critical thinking at Ambo University. By giving a thorough overview, this design provides insights that can direct real-world applications while laying the foundation for

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,
more research and analysis (Creswell &
Creswell, 2018).

Subjects of the study

The subjects of this study were instructors of English Language and Literature at Ambo University. All 33 instructors were participants in this study. The advantage of including all of them was to collect thorough data, improve validity, and increase reliability frequently of data (Middleton, 2024).

Sampling techniques

The study site, Ambo University, was chosen using convenience sampling techniques. This sampling technique provides useful benefits when time, money, or accessibility is limited, and the setting is geographically near to the researcher (Creswell, 2018). All the instructors were included in the study using comprehensive sampling techniques since they were manageable to include in the study. Out of the 33 instructors, 6 of them participated in the interview by using purposive sampling, i.e., those who are teaching English major students.

Data gathering instruments

Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data and to achieve the objectives of this study: Questionnaires in this study were used to collect data about critical thinking strategies and challenges of critical thinking strategies. 20 items of critical thinking strategies and 18 items of challenges of critical thinking strategies practice survey were prepared and distributed to instructors. To collect data about instructors' perceptions about the implementation of critical thinking strategies, a semi-structured interview was conducted with six instructors.

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10

Methods of data analyses

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to achieve the purposes of this study using questionnaires and interviews. SPSS 20 version was used to analyse quantitative data, which were collected by the questionnaires and interviews and analysed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, instructors strongly agreed they provided opportunities for reflection and revision and promoted questioning, with mean scores of 4.65 and 3.78, respectively, and they agreed that they practised, incorporated cooperative learning and collaboration (4.06), fostered a supportive classroom climate (3.96), provided opportunities for debate and argumentation (3.80), and encouraged self-directed learning (3.80), assessed and provided feedback (3.70), and encouraged reflection (3.67). They were neutral about critical thinking strategies like teaching cognitive strategies (2.76), encouraging open-mindedness (3.10), connecting critical thinking to real-world applications (3.43), and using Socratic questioning (3.0). However, they strongly disagreed that their use of analyse and evaluation sources (1.43) and foster creativity (1.16). They also disagreed on their use of providing real-world examples (2.06), integrating technology and information literacy (2.40), integrating different disciplines (1.86), and fostering curiosity and inquiry (2.16) as critical thinking strategies in the reading classroom. This implies that instructors did not use most of the critical thinking strategies in the reading classroom.

Table 1*Critical thinking strategies in teaching reading skills*

S. No	Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Promote questioning in the reading classroom.	4.78	1.137
2	Provide real-world examples in the reading classroom.	2.06	.520
3	Encourage reflection in the reading classroom.	3.67	.819
4	Incorporate cooperative learning and collaboration in the reading classroom.	4.06	.639
5	Teach cognitive strategies in the reading classroom.	2.68	.894
6	Assess and provide feedback in the reading classroom.	3.70	.952
7	Foster a supportive classroom climate in the reading classroom.	3.96	.490
8	Integrate technology and information literacy in the reading classroom.	2.40	.813
9	Encourage open-mindedness in the reading classroom.	3.10	.711
10	Use Socratic Questioning in the reading classroom.	3.00	1.017
11	Analyze and evaluate sources in the reading classroom.	1.43	.504
12	Engage in problem-based learning in the reading classroom.	3.53	.819
13	Foster creativity in the reading classroom.	1.16	.379
14	Integrate different disciplines in the reading classroom.	1.86	1.166
15	Provide opportunities for debate and argumentation in the reading classroom.	3.80	.610
16	Connect critical thinking to real-world applications in the reading classroom.	3.43	1.072
17	Foster curiosity and inquiry in the reading classroom.	2.16	1.205
18	Provide opportunities for reflection and revision in the reading classroom.	4.56	.504
19	Encourage metacognitive strategies and reflection in the reading classroom.	3.46	.819
20	Encourage self-directed learning in the reading classroom.	3.80	.610

Where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree

Analyses of challenges of using critical thinking in reading classrooms

It can be seen in [Table 2](#) that instructors strongly agreed that large class sizes (4.73) and time constraints (4.22), limited resources (4.80), existing curriculum constraints (4.03), limited time for reflection (4.40), limited access to technology (3.96), lack of training (4.23), and language and cultural barriers (3.96) were challenges of practicing critical

thinking strategies in EFL reading classrooms. Respondents of this study were neutral on whether shifting pedagogical approaches, lack of clear frameworks, lack of parental understanding or support, continuous professional development, and resistance from students were challenges in practicing critical thinking in the reading classroom. On the contrary, they strongly disagreed that assessment bias is a challenge in practicing

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,
critical thinking. Finally, they disagreed that
teacher confidence and assessment alignment

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10
were challenges in practicing critical thinking
strategies in an EFL reading classroom.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of challenges of using critical thinking in reading classroom.

S. No	Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Time constraints	4.2221	.83045
2	Limited resources	4.8000	.48423
3	Shifting pedagogical approaches	2.9667	.49013
4	Teacher confidence	1.9667	.76489
5	Existing curriculum constraints	4.0333	.96431
6	Lack of clear frameworks	2.9333	.73968
7	Limited professional collaboration	2.4667	.81931
8	Student resistance and unfamiliarity	3.5000	.50855
9	Assessment alignment	1.7000	.46609
10	Limited time for reflection	4.4000	.62146
11	Lack of parental understanding or support	3.2333	.77385
12	Limited access to technology	3.9667	.80872
13	Continuous professional development	2.7000	.59596
14	Lack of training	4.2333	.81720
15	Large class sizes	4.7333	.69149
16	Language and cultural barriers	3.9667	.85029
17	Resistance from students	2.7333	1.38796
18	Assessment bias	1.2667	.44978

Where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree

Analyses of teachers' perceptions about critical thinking in reading classrooms

The third objective of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in using reading classrooms. To achieve this objective, an interview was carried out with six EFL teachers who taught reading skills. Interview results indicated that all instructors perceived that critical thinking develops students' critical thinking skills within reading classrooms. They believed that critical thinking enhances students' comprehension, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation abilities. For instance, Instructor 4

said, "If we develop critical thinking in students, they get many advantages from it." Instructor 6 said, "It cultivates students' higher-order thinking skills." They were also asked how they could develop their students' critical thinking skills. Some of them reported that they used questioning. One of the interviewees reported that he also used to make connections between things. Making connections between new knowledge and prior experiences can be seen as metacognition skills. Co (2024) argues that teachers are expected to integrate activities and strategies that promote critical thinking, such as questioning techniques and inquiry-

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,

based discussions, to deepen students' engagement with texts.

Most of them appreciated it, for it fosters students' problem-solving skills. One of the interviewees, instructor 3, said, 'I believe that critical thinking strategies help students to think critically and become active participants in classroom discussions.' He also used the 'explore new idea' strategy to develop his students' critical thinking skills. Above all, all of them replied that the curriculum lacks critical thinking strategies and aspects of it. This may affect the development of student's metacognitive abilities,' problem-solving abilities, and decision-making skills.

Because they lacked knowledge and the curriculum neglected many of the critical thinking strategies, their practice was low. However, most of them sometimes engaged their students in dialogue and engaged them to articulate their thoughts. Similarly, [Grigg and Lewis, \(2019\)](#) studies suggest that visible thinking routines and practices can significantly enhance students' critical thinking abilities.

In short, instructors had good perceptions of critical thinking strategies and recognised their importance in promoting deep learning and higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, all of them were asked what critical thinking strategies they needed to use in their reading classroom. Almost all of them said they used questioning methods as critical thinking strategies they use in their reading classroom. Only one of them reported he used making connections as another strategy. One of them also used the 'explore new idea' strategy as a critical thinking strategy. This implies that they lack awareness about critical thinking strategies.

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10

Discussions

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' practice and challenges of critical thinking strategies in teaching reading skills to Ambo University English Language Major Instructors. The study also explored instructors' perceptions of critical thinking in the reading classroom. The results of the study indicated that instructors practiced some of the critical thinking strategies. They were also not sure whether they used some strategies. On the other hand, they reported that they did not practice some critical thinking strategies because of several challenges that hindered them from practicing those strategies. This implies that they did not implement most of the critical thinking strategies in their reading classroom. According to the findings of the study, they believed that critical thinking enhances students' comprehension, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation abilities. However, because of lack of time, limited resources, existing curriculum constraints, limited time for reflection, limited access to technology, lack of training, large class sizes, and language and cultural barriers, their practice was low. In Saudi Arabia, a study by [Alasdair \(2022\)](#) also revealed that engaging textbooks, large classrooms, and lack of training were challenges in practicing critical thinking. The findings of this study indicated that instructors were not aware of some critical thinking strategies to be used in the reading classroom. However, scholars suggest that not alone they lack knowledge about critical thinking; they are expected to train their students to think critically (Semers). The findings of this study are in line with [Yasir and Almora's \(2020\)](#) in that teachers had good

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,
perceptions about critical thinking to facilitate
students' learning in general.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' practice and the challenges of critical thinking strategies in teaching reading skills to Ambo University English Language major instructors. This study used questionnaires and interviews to investigate teachers' practice and the challenges of critical thinking strategies in their EFL reading classroom. Future studies may include other data-gathering tools and other disciplines to study teachers' practice of critical thinking strategies, as it is considered one of the 21st-century skills. The study also explored instructors' perceptions of critical thinking in the reading classroom. A descriptive research design was used to achieve the purpose of this study. The study result showed that instructors provided opportunities for reflection and revision, promoted questioning, practiced, incorporated cooperative learning and collaboration, fostered a supportive classroom climate, provided opportunities for debate and argumentation, encouraged self-directed learning, assessed and provided feedback, and encouraged reflection in the reading classroom as critical thinking strategies. They were not sure about using critical thinking strategies like teaching cognitive strategies, encouraging open-mindedness, connecting critical thinking to real-world applications, and using Socratic questioning. However, they strongly disagreed that their use of analyses and evaluation sources fosters creativity. This was because they were not aware of these strategies. The findings of the study found that instructors' practice of providing real-world examples,

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 01-10
integrating technology and information literacy, integrating different disciplines, and fostering curiosity and inquiry as critical thinking strategies in the reading classroom is very low. This implies that instructors did not use most of the critical thinking strategies in the reading classroom.

Recommendations

The result of this study indicated that instructors were not aware of some of the critical thinking strategies to be used in reading classrooms. Therefore, instructors should have expertise in implementing critical thinking strategies in their EFL classroom.

This study found that the curriculum lacked critical thinking aspects. Therefore, all aspects of critical thinking strategies in the curriculum including its definition, assessment, and instructional strategies.

The results of this study showed that instructors were not aware of some critical thinking strategies to be used in reading classrooms. Therefore, instructors should have enough knowledge and be aware of critical thinking from different perspectives to develop their students' critical thinking skills.

This study used questionnaires and interviews to investigate teachers' practice and challenges of critical thinking strategies in their EFL reading classroom. Future studies may include other data-gathering tools and other disciplines to study teachers' practice of critical thinking strategies as it is seen as one of the 21st century skills.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Habtamu Walga: Conceptualization, writing original draft, investigation, writing, review & Editing, supervision,

Habtamu, W., & Samuel, L.,

Samuel Lykan: Validation, formal analysis, data curation methodology, visualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request

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