EFL Teachers Critical Thinking Behaviors and the Challenges Facing them in Classrooms

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Abstract

The main aim of the present study was to investigate EFL teachers critical thinking behaviors and the kinds of challenges they meet inside English language classrooms. A two-part questionnaire with twenty seven teaching behaviors and sixteen challenges was administered to sixty one Saudi EFL teachers at the secondary and intermediate teaching stages. Results showed that they regularly perform teaching behaviors that nurture their students' critical thinking skill. The most practiced behaviors were related to creating critical thinking-based student response while the least practiced behaviors were belonging to developing students' analysis and synthesis skills. Moreover, challenges related to English language school textbooks, classroom size, training and extra-curricular activities were all significant challenges that need urgent solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is deeply rooted in the past thousands of years ago where it was referred to as, the process all philosophers rely on to reason out their theories and judge whether an argument is sound (Thayer-Bacon, 1998). Very early in the last century and mainly in 1910, Dewey introduced critical thinking as a reflective thought that was referred to as, active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds it supports and the further conclusions it tends (Sanders & Moulenbelt, 2011). Then in 1985, Ennis defined critical thinking as "A rational reflective thinking concerned with what to do or believe" and then Paul in 1995, presented critical thinking as "An intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Paul, Elder, & Bartell, 1997:4). In 2000, Pithers and Soden defined critical thinking as the ability to pursue one's questions through self-directed search

and interrogation of knowledge. Critical thinking, they mentioned, is the individual's ability to present evidence to support his arguments because knowledge is debatable (Thompson, 2011). Nowadays, critical thinking can be defined as "The mental process of actively and skillfully perception, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of collected information through observation, experience and communication that leads to a decision for action (Papathanasiou, Kleisiaris, Fradelos, & Kourkouta, 2014). Commitment to critical thinking is improbable unless societal conventions take into account the importance of its role in human beings' development and culture (Elder & Paul, 1994).

Critical thinking is described as cognitive processes that are goal directed and purpose driven. Purposes of using critical thinking may involve solving a problem, supporting a theory or statement, conducting an experiment, formulating an argument, presenting an interpretation, undertaking a critique, better understanding a topic or deciding on a course of action. Thus, skills of critical thinking are not only reflective thought but also applied and generative ones (Heard, Scoular, Duckworth, Ramalingam, & Teo, 2020). One of the viewpoints related to critical thinking skill claims that it is an innate skill that every human is born with and so no need to teach it (Sternberg and Williams, 2002) and humans including students can improve their thinking skills once they are taught how to think (Black, 2005). Other viewpoints assert this claim, but argue that people need to be taught how to think more effectively, that is more critically, coherently, and creatively (Nickerson, 1994) and when critical thinking skill is not enhanced, it might be biased, distorted, partial, uninformed and potentially prejudiced. Thus, excellence in one's thought must be cultivated (Duron, Limbach and Waugh, 2006).

At present the significance and value of critical thinking skills are thought as main skills of social empowerment, enhanced communication, employability and networking. Therefore, teachers should always try to self-assess their own beliefs and methods in the classroom in order to enhance their learners' critical thinking skills (Tuzlukova, Al Busaidi, & Burns, 2017). Therefore, teachers' assigned tasks and assignments in classrooms affect students' perceptions of the importance of the material they learn and meanwhile enhance the ways by which they can adapt the newly acquired knowledge in new contexts (Harizaj & Hajrulla, 2017). The fact that how educators conceptualize critical thinking represents one of the main reasons for the failure of education to be education for critical thinking (Radulovic & Milan, 2017). To promote students' critical thinking skills and to turn them into good critical thinkers, teachers have to prepare for their responsibilities concerning the education of the new generation within the contexts of change, fluency, and flexibility, be convinced about the importance of encouraging students' critical thinking, and be confident about their capability to do so (Lorencová, Jarošová, Avgitidou., & Dimitriadou, 2019).

Critical thinking skill, on the other hand, is a human thinking skill supported by trustworthy arguments. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to improve students' critical thinking skills in thematic learning (Kusuma, Gunarhadi, & Riyadi, 2018).When thinking of critical thinking inside classrooms, teachers might be found unable to help their students think critically. They might think they are helping students to think critically while in fact they help them to comprehend the teaching

materials. Therefore, it is very important to be sure of their teaching methods and beliefs before looking for whether they incorporate critical thinking in their lessons (Choy & Cheah, 2009). Deep and meaningful learning that requires critical understanding of the learning material yields critical thinking, which is enhanced by the learner's active engagement in different social contexts (Hằng, 2019). People's ability to think critically is due to personal and emotional reasons that cause their inability to realize that there is more than one way of looking at the same issue. Hence, teachers have to encourage their students to pay sufficient focus and attention to details (Smetanová, Drbalová, & Vitáková, 2015). To help students develop their critical thinking skills teachers, not only, should have adequate knowledge and understanding about critical thinking, but they also have to look at critical thinking as a systematic process that involves questioning an issue objectively from multiple perspectives. They should train students to make reasoned judgments, synthesize, apply information and make appraisal (Kavanoz & Akbaş, 2017).

At early stages of learning pupils may not need to develop their critical thinking skills. Route learning is enough to help them acquire the basic knowledge by listening, watching, repeating and doing. In contrast, mature students need critical thinking because at higher education levels, they have to experience personalization, investigation and problem-solving (Hughes, 2014). Conley in 2008 stressed the importance of activating the individual's main habits of mind claiming that students' ability in analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning, which are believed to be the main mind habits, is considered as important as content knowledge students have to acquire while being at educational institutions. Thus, developing these skills is vital for success in the learning materials or courses (Changwong, Sukkamart, & Sisan. 2018).

Critical thinking skills should be regarded as important as other learning and innovation skills for students at high school and at the labor market. Development of these skills should take place from primary education and extends to higher education for the sake of developing students' problem-solving abilities (Susilo, Darhim & Prabawanto, 2019). However, assessments of students' academic achievement based on knowledge rote retention usually lead to undesirable learning outcomes and dissatisfaction of teaching to develop students' critical thinking. Therefore, good assessment techniques to measure students' critical thinking skills are deemed so important (Haynes, Lisic, Goltz, Stein, & Harris, 2016). To develop students' critical thinking skills, teachers are required to train them how to express their opinions; to assess, observe and communicate; to perform analysis and evaluate; to assess a reason correctly and to identify wrong opinions; agree or disagree with introduced information; judge to determine the truth; and change misinformation to create new ideas (Saputra, Joyoatmojo, Wardani, & Sangka, 2018). At advanced stages of learning, students should be autonomous and able to judge things reflectively so teachers need to make the critical thinking skills explicit, ask students to think about their learning from different perspectives, and present them with different structured opportunities (Thomas, 2011). More importantly, critical thinking is assumed to play a significant role in determining students' success in learning and level of achievement (Mahanal, Tendrita, Ramadhan, Ismirawati & Zubaidah, 2017). To distinguish between strong critical thinkers, weak critical

thinkers, and those who are on the borderline, figure 1 shows the core critical thinking skills that should be considered when trying to assess the human's cognitive skills or mental abilities involved in critical thinking.

Figure 1: Core Critical Thinking Skills

Figure 2 shows that ***Interpretation***, which means "To comprehend and express the meaning or significance of a wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures, or criteria", is the first core skill in critical thinking. ***Analysis*** representing the second skill is referred to as "The identification of the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other forms of representation". The third skill is **Evaluation**, i.e. "Assessing the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions of a person's perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion". **Inference** is the fourth skill meaning "To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to reduce the consequences flowing from all forms of representation". **Explanation** is "Being able to present in a cogent and coherent way the results of one's reasoning". **Self-regulation,** in the last place, means "self-consciously to monitor one's cognitive activities" (Facione, 2020). In short, for the individual to become a critical thinker, he has to recognize the importance of reason as the filter for his beliefs and actions. Once he has done so, he will be in the right frame of mind to start learning about logic and identify what tools of logic are at his disposal (Hardy, Foster, & Postigo, 2015). Figure 2 shows the elements of thought that should be taken into consideration when developing students' critical thinking skills (Paul & Elder, 2006).
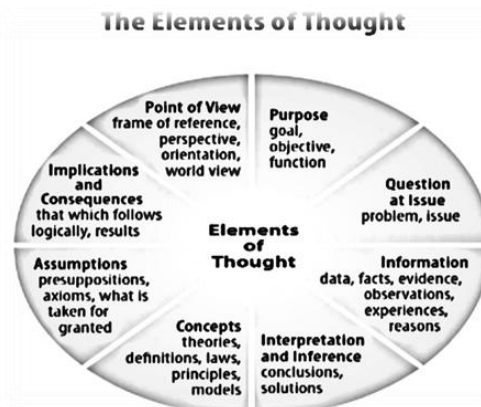
Figure 2: Elements of Thought

Depending on the above overview of literature related to the importance of critical thinking skills, the present study aims to determine the most frequent behaviors that Saudi EFL teachers usually implement to enhance their students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, it aims to identify the kinds and sources of challenges that impede the effective practice of critical thinking skills inside EFL classrooms. Mainly, it seeks to provide somehow satisfactory, and logical answers to these questions:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers implement teaching behaviors that encourage students' critical thinking?
2. What are the most prominent teaching behaviors EFL teachers adopt to nurture students higher order thinking skills, namely analysis, evaluation and synthesis?
3. What are the most prominent teaching behaviors EFL teachers adopt to create critical thinking-based classroom environment?
4. What are the most prominent teaching behaviors EFL teachers adopt to create critical thinking-based student response?
5. What are the most prominent teaching behaviors EFL teachers adopt to create critical thinking-based modeling?
6. What challenges do EFL teachers face when incorporating critical thinking skills in their classrooms?

METHOD
Participants
Sixty EFL teachers at the General Education Directorate in Najran in Saudi Arabia took part in the present study through replying to the whole questionnaire items. They were all teaching in either secondary or intermediate schools. Table 1 show the demographic information of participant teachers. They all came from public schools. The emphasis was placed on selecting teachers in the secondary and intermediate stages because of the kinds of activities that should be implemented in these classes.

Table 1: Demographic information of participant teachers

Teaching stage	Experience	N.	%
Intermediate stage	1-5 years	9	15
	6-10 years	18	30
	More than 10 years	13	21
Total		**40**	**66**
Secondary stage	1-5 years	3	5
	6-10 years	10	16
	More than 10 years	8	13
Total		**21**	**34**

The Questionnaire
A two-part questionnaire of (43) items was used as the main instrument to gather data. The first part consisted of (6) main aspects aiming to assess Saudi EFL teachers' behaviors that are assumed to encourage students' critical thinking skill. The first aspect (5 items) sought to assess the teachers' behaviors to promote students'

skill in analysis. The second aspect (3 items) looked for assessing teachers behaviors to enhance students' skill in evaluation. The third aspect (3 items) aimed to assess teachers' behaviors to promote students' skill in synthesis. The fourth aspect (6 items) was introduced to assess teachers' behaviors to create critical thinking-based classroom environment. The fifth aspect (7 items) tried to assess teachers' behaviors to create critical thinking-based student response and the sixth aspect (3 items) tended to assess teachers' behaviors to create critical thinking-based modeling.

The second part of the questionnaire involved (4) main aspects to identify challenges impeding EFL teachers' practice of critical thinking skill inside classrooms. The first aspect (4 items) aimed to identify challenges related to English language textbooks. The second aspect (3 items) was meant to identify challenges related to extra-curricular activities. Meanwhile, the third aspect (4 items) looked for challenges related to classroom size, whereas the last aspect (5 items) was set to identify challenges related to teacher training. All the questionnaire items were concluded by Al-Kindi & Al-Mekhlafi (2017) as results of (62) classroom observations of the behaviors of (30) EFL teachers.

Data analysis

Teachers' responses to the questionnaires provided raw data sources that were later assessed using SPSS software. Results were studied carefully to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning in terms of EFL teachers' behaviors that can enhance the critical thinking skill of their students and in terms of the challenges they face inside classrooms. Mean scores, standard deviations and frequencies were used to coherently interpret the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result
Results Related to the First Question

In order to determine to what extent EFL teachers practice teaching behaviors that can promote students' critical thinking skill, mean scores and standard deviations of their responses to all items in the first part of the questionnaire were extracted. The average mean score was (M=3.48). In other words, they think that they regularly allow their students the chance to think critically while learning English.

Results related to the second question

The second question aimed to identify the most frequent teaching behaviors that EFL teachers often practice to nurture their students' higher-order thinking skills namely, analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Thus, mean scores and standard deviations of respondents' replies to items included in the first, second and third aspects of the first part were calculated. Results are shown in tables 2, 3 and 4.

With regard to EFL teachers' behaviors that can enhance students' analysis skill, Table 2 presents the results of collected data analysis related to this aspect.

Table 2: EFL teachers' behaviors to develop students' analysis skill

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I encourage students to recognize inferences.	3.61	1.173	Regularly
2. I encourage students to distinguish between facts and opinions.	3.59	1.465	Regularly
3. I encourage students to look for evidence for the stated claims by asking them to clarify and justify their responses.	3.13	1.271	Often
4. I encourage students to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant evidence.	3.02	1.408	Often
5. I encourage students to recognize insufficient evidence.	2.66	1.353	Often
Average mean score	**3.20**		**Often**

Results in Table 2 indicate that EFL teachers do not highly but often encourage their students to practice activating their analysis skill during English classes (average mean score =3.20). Mean scores of their behaviors practice degree range between M= 3.61 and M=2.66. Encouraging students to recognize inferences (M=3.61) and distinguish facts and opinions (M=3.59) were the only teaching behaviors that they regularly practice while teaching to develop the analysis skill of students. However, they often encourage students to justify and clarify their responses to stated claims (M=3.13) and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant evidence (M=3.02). Encouraging students to recognize insufficient evidence (M=2.66) was the least practiced teaching behavior by EFL teachers to enhance students' analysis skill. In brief, it can be argued that encouragement with which EFL teachers' provide their students to help them develop their analysis skill was insufficient and unsatisfactory.

Concerning the behaviors EFL teachers practice to enhance students' evaluation skill, Table 3 presents the results of collected data analysis related to this aspect.

Table 3: EFL teachers' behaviors to develop students' evaluation skill

Teaching behaviors	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I encourage students to transfer/ relate cognitive input/ skills to everyday life/ social context.	3.62	1.240	Regularly
2. I encourage students to judge accuracy, adequacy, clarity, credibility and validity.	3.33	1.363	Often
3. I encourage students to reflect on their thought process and work orally and in writing.	3.31	1.232	Often
Average mean score	**3.42**		**Regularly**

Results in Table 3 show that unlike their teaching behaviors to enhance students' analysis skills, EFL teachers' teaching behaviors to nurture students evaluation skill were to some extent satisfactory and regularly practiced (average mean score=3.42). Encouraging students to transfer and/or relate cognitive input and skills with their daily lives and social contexts (M=3.62) was the teaching behavior that EFL teachers regularly practice to help students develop their evaluation skill. Other teaching behaviors like encouraging students to reflect on their thought process

and work orally or in writing (M=3.31) and judge accuracy, adequacy, clarity, credibility, and validity (M=3.33) were often practiced. In other words, EFL teachers' level of encouragement to develop students' skill in evaluation as a high-order thinking skill was not as well as desired.

With respect to EFL teachers behaviors that can enhance students' synthesis skill, table 4 presents the results of collected data analysis related to this aspect.

Table 4: EFL teachers' behaviors to promote students' synthesis skill

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I encourage students to apply previous knowledge to new situations to create something new.	3.49	1.164	Regularly
2. I encourage students to think hypothetically and creatively	3.49	1.299	Regularly
3. I encourage students to formulate designs, conclusions, stories, assumptions, etc.	2.98	1.384	Often
Average mean score	**3.32**		**Often**

Results in table 4 show that, like their teaching behaviors to enhance students' analysis skill, EFL teachers' teaching behaviors to promote students synthesis skill were not practiced as good as hoped (average mean score=3.32). Teaching behaviors like encouraging students to apply their previous knowledge to new situations to create something new (M=3.49) and think hypothetically and creatively were the most practiced behaviors EFL teachers regularly practiced whilst encouraging students to formulate designs, conclusions, stories and assumptions (M=2.98) were not highly adopted by teachers in English classes.

Results related to the third question

To understand the teaching behaviors of EFL teachers with regard to creating critical thinking-based classroom environment, mean scores and standard deviations of all responses to items in the fourth aspect of the first part of the questionnaire were extracted. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: EFL teachers' behaviors to create critical thinking-based classroom environment

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I encourage students to interact and cooperate to solve a problem or complete a task.	3.75	1.206	Regularly
2. I encourage students to answer peers' questions.	3.67	1.469	Regularly
3. I use a variety of visual media (e.g., charts, chalkboard, maps, pictures, gestures) to develop cognitive strategies.	3.59	1.419	Regularly
4. I encourage students to ask each other thought provoking questions.	3.56	1.385	Regularly
5. I use different class groupings for different activities to solve a problem or complete a task.	3.26	1.401	Often
6. I display the creative works of students all around the classroom.	3.03	1.460	Often
Average mean score	**3.48**		**Regularly**

Mean scores in Table 5 reveal that EFL teachers are keen to improve their students' critical thinking skill via improving their classroom environment. They regularly encourage students to interact and cooperate to solve a problem or complete a task (M=3.75) and answer peers' questions (M=3.67). They also regularly use a variety of visual media (e.g., charts, chalkboard, maps, pictures, gestures) to develop students' cognitive strategies (M=3.59) and encourage them to ask each other thoughtful and provoking questions (M=3.59). Using different class groupings for different activities to solve a problem or complete a task and displaying the creative works of students all around the classroom were not practiced sufficiently and to a satisfactory degree. Mean scores were (3.26) and (3.03) respectively. That is, EFL teachers understand that enhancing their students' critical thinking skill begins from the creation of critical thinking-based classroom environment, though this understanding is not highly reflected in their classroom teaching behaviors.

Results related to the fourth question

To understand the teaching behaviors of EFL teachers that might contribute to creating critical thinking-based student response, mean scores and standard deviations of EFL teachers to items in the fifth aspect of the first part of the questionnaire were analyzed. Results are shown in table 6.

Table 6: EFL teachers' behaviors that contribute to creating critical thinking-based student response

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I praise students' incorrect responses with supportive comments/behavior.	4.05	1.271	Regularly
2. I accept students' responses (reflections, opinions, thoughts, etc.) without judgment to encourage exploring possibilities.	3.98	1.133	Regularly
3. I encourage students to respond to open-ended questions.	3.87	1.147	Regularly
4. I allow students time to expand on answers.	3.70	1.334	Regularly
5. I encourage more than one student to give points of view/solutions/ evidence.	3.61	1.382	Regularly
6. I allow students time (at least 10 seconds) to answer or respond before restating or redirecting the question.	3.57	1.231	Regularly
7. I allow students time to consider/think about alternatives/points of view.	3.34	1.209	Often
Average mean score	**3.73**		**Regularly**

Mean scores in Table 6 indicate that EFL teachers' awareness of the teaching behaviors that lead to students' critical thinking-based responses is somehow high. The average mean score of teachers' responses was (M=3.73). that is, they regularly practice behaviors like praising students' incorrect responses with supportive comments/behavior (M=4.05), accepting their responses (reflections, opinions, thoughts, etc.) without judgment to encourage exploring possibilities (M=3.98) and encouraging them to respond to open-ended questions (M=3.87). In addition, they regularly allow students time to expand on answers (M=3.70), encourage more than one student to give points of view/solutions/ evidence (M=3.61) and allow students

more time (at least 10 seconds) to answer or respond before restating or redirecting the question (M=3.57). Nevertheless, allowing students time to consider/think about alternatives/points of view (M=3.34) level of practice was not sufficient. To put it another way, EFL teachers were aware of the teaching behaviors that enhance their students' response leading to developing critical thinking skill.

Results related to the fifth question

To distinguish the teaching behaviors of EFL teachers that might play significant roles in creating critical thinking-based modeling, mean scores and standard deviations of all participant EFL teachers to items in the sixth aspect of the first part of the questionnaire were analyzed. Results are shown in table 7.

Table 7: EFL teachers' behaviors that contribute to creating critical thinking-based modeling

Teaching behaviors	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I use clear/real examples/models to facilitate/explain/teach logical thoughts.	3.90	1.193	Regularly
2. I show enthusiasm for challenges and complex tasks requiring higher order thinking skills.	3.42	1.310	Regularly
3. I use cognitive languages (e.g., compare, analyze, classify, predict, and create).	3.34	1.315	Often
Average mean score	**3.55**		**Regularly**

Modeling as a teaching behavior is important in EFL classrooms. Teachers' responses prove that they regularly practice it in teaching (average mean score=3.55). They for example regularly, though not always, practice using clear/real examples/models to facilitate/explain/teach logical thoughts (M=3.90) and showing enthusiasm for challenges and complex tasks requiring higher order thinking skills (M=3.42). However, using cognitive languages (e.g., compare, analyze, classify, predict, create) was not highly practiced (M=3.34).

In order to have a clear picture of participant EFL teachers' practice extent of all aspects leading to encouraging students to think critically inside and outside English classes, mean scores of all aspects are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: EFL teachers' practice degree of all critical thinking aspects

Critical thinking related aspects	M	Practice extent
Aspect 5: Behaviors to create critical thinking-based student response	3.73	Regularly
Aspect 6: Behaviors to create critical thinking-based modeling	3.55	Regularly
Aspect 4: Behaviors to create critical thinking-based classroom environment	3.48	Regularly
Aspect 2: Behaviors to develop students' evaluation skill	3.42	Regularly
Aspect 3: Behaviors to develop students' synthesis skill	3.32	Often
Aspect 1: Behaviors to develop students' analysis skill	3.20	Often

Mean scores in Table 8 illustrate that EFL teachers are mostly keen to encourage their students to always think critically before responding to any question or request. Moreover, they try to use modeling in a way that urges students' thinking about what they learn. In addition, mean scores demonstrate EFL teachers' attention to create classroom atmosphere that encourages thinking critically. Nevertheless, results point to EFL teachers' shortage of behaviors that can develop students' synthesis and analysis skills. To put it another way, EFL teachers failed to develop their students higher order thinking skills that are accounted for as the core critical thinking skills.

Results related to the sixth question
Challenges impeding effective practice of critical thinking in EFL classrooms

A set of (16) challenges was administered to participants to assess their impact towards the hindrance of practicing critical thinking in their EFL classrooms. The average mean score of all challenges was (M=3.15). That is, participant EFL teachers were unable to decide how impactful these challenges are on their practice levels of the skill of critical thinking inside their classrooms. Mean score and standard deviations of their responses are presented in tables 9, 10 and 11.

Table 9: Challenges related to English Language textbooks

Teaching behaviors	M	SD	Agreement extent
1. The teacher's guide provides enough guidance of how to teach critical thinking skills.	3.25	1.178	Can't decide
2. The textbook includes acceptable amount of tasks that enhance critical thinking skills.	3.25	1.120	Can't decide
3. I am satisfied with the critical thinking tasks provided by the curriculum.	3.25	1.220	Can't decide
4. The textbook includes suitable tasks that enhance critical thinking skills.	3.03	1.125	Can't decide
Average mean score	**3.20**		**Can't decide**

Results in Table 9 emphasize EFL teachers' inability to determine whether the English textbooks they teach, help them improve their students' critical thinking skill. In particular, they were unable to determine whether the teacher's guide provide them with enough directions on how to nurture students thinking skill. They were also unable to decide whether the textbooks, they teach, help them carry out tasks that can develop their students' critical thinking.

Table 9: Challenges related to English Language extra-curricular activities

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Agreement extent
1. The work load I do for school activities is acceptable.	3.51	1.090	Agree
2. The amount of school activities I am responsible for in the school is satisfactory.	3.08	1.201	Can't decide
3. The level of school activities facilitates teaching critical thinking skills in my Classrooms.	2.92	1.251	Can't decide
Average mean score	**3.17**		Can't decide

Concerning the challenges regarding the extra-curricular activities, mean scores in Table 9 prove a high level of EFL teachers' hesitation regarding these challenges (average mean score=3.17). They agreed on the fact that the workloads and school activities they perform are acceptable and logical and so do not represent a real challenge for their attempts to enhance students' critical thinking skill. Nevertheless, they were uncertain whether the amount of school activities they are responsible for is satisfactory and whether the level of such activities facilitates teaching critical thinking skills in their classrooms.

Table 10: Challenges related to classroom size

Teaching behaviors	M	SD	Practice extent
1. The size of my classroom helps me provide enough oral feedback to students while teaching critical thinking skills.	3.26	1.250	Can't decide
2. The size of my classroom helps me give enough written feedback to my students while teaching critical thinking skills.	3.10	1.300	Can't decide
3. The size of my classroom helps me teach critical thinking skills effectively.	3.02	1.298	Can't decide
4. I am satisfied with my class size while teaching critical thinking skills.	2.92	1.269	Can't decide
Average mean score	**3.08**		**Can't decide**

With regard to the effect of classroom size on EFL teachers' ability to perform behaviors that encourage students to practice the skill of critical thinking, mean scores of participants (average mean score=3.08) showed a clear disability to decide whether the size of classrooms is a real challenge. They cannot make up their minds if classroom size helps them provide students with immediate written or oral feedback and train them to think critically. Besides, they were unable to decide whether their classroom' size and equipment empower them to train students to think critically. In other words, teachers were unfamiliar with the required classroom structure and equipment that allow students to think critically.

Table 11: Challenges related to EFL teacher training

Teaching behaviours	M	SD	Practice extent
1. I am satisfied with the amount of follow up I received from my supervisors about how to teach critical thinking skills.	3.34	1.263	Can't decide
2. I am satisfied with the amount of training I received about how to teach critical thinking skills.	3.16	1.368	Can't decide
3. I received enough training about how to teach critical thinking skills provided by my senior teacher.	3.15	1.412	Can't decide
4. I received enough follow up and feedback from my supervisor about how to teach critical thinking skills.	3.13	1.455	Can't decide
5. I received enough training about how to teach critical thinking skills.	3.08	1.441	Can't decide
Average mean score	**3.17**		**Can't decide**

Taking into account the assumed challenges related to the effect of training on the performance of EFL teachers, mean scores of participants' responses prove their difficulty to make up their minds regarding the effectiveness of training they have received on how to help students develop their skill of critical thinking. They were unable to decide whether they have received enough training and follow-up from people in charge of their training like for instance their supervisors or senior teachers.

To have a clear and impressive image about the challenges hindering EFL teachers from implementing successful classes that help students develop their critical thinking skills, mean scores of all aspects of challenges are shown in Table 12.

Table 12: EFL teachers' perceptions of all aspects of challenges

Aspects of challenges	M	Agreement level
1. Challenges related to textbooks	3.20	Can't decide
2. Challenges related to classroom size	3.08	Can't decide
3. Challenges related to teacher training	3.17	Can't decide
4. Challenges related to extra-curricular activities	3.17	Can't decide

Table 12 shows the size of challenges facing EFL teachers in classrooms. The moderate degrees of agreement on all aspects indicate that the content of textbooks, classroom size, training and extra-curricular activities are challenging. Mean scores of responses of participant EFL teachers show that textbooks content and design do not help them practice teaching behaviors that lead to developing students' critical thinking. The size of classrooms does not allow them the possibility to train students on how to think critically. Moreover, the training provided to them by people in charge like supervisors and senior teachers was insufficient to teach them how to perform certain teaching behaviors to show how thinking critically occurs. Extra-curricular activities they have to perform in addition to teaching added extra load to their job and so impeded their usage of activities that nurture students' skill of critical thinking.

Discussion

The present study investigates the effect of two main aspects on the development of students' critical thinking skill, i.e. EFL teachers' behaviors in classroom and challenges they face. Results related to the first aspect showed that EFL teachers were not fully aware of the teaching behaviors that can help students be critical thinkers. The mean score of their responses (M=3.48) is an evidence about this conclusion showing that they regularly perform behaviors, which can improve students' critical thinking skill. Their practice levels of behaviors like for instance, praising students' incorrect responses with supportive comments/behavior; accepting students' responses (reflections, opinions, thoughts, etc.) without judgment to encourage exploring possibilities; using clear/real examples/models to facilitate/explain/teach logical thoughts; encouraging students to respond to open-

ended questions and interact and cooperate to solve a problem or complete a task; and allowing students time to expand on answers were the highest of all. On the opposite, their practice levels of behaviors like encouraging students to recognize insufficient evidence; formulate designs, conclusions, stories, and assumptions; distinguish between relevant and irrelevant evidence; look for evidence for the stated claims by asking them to clarify and justify their responses, and displaying the creative works of students all around the classroom were the lowest of all.

Looking thoroughly at the challenges participant teachers have pointed to can highlight the reason why they do not perform teaching behaviors that nurture critical thinking among their students. The content of school textbooks is one main source of this inefficacy. Their responses showed that the teacher's guide does not provide enough guidance on how to teach critical thinking skills and textbooks themselves lack the inclusion of enough tasks that enhance critical thinking. Moreover, Classroom size where there are many students does not help them give each student oral or written feedback that lead to urge him to think critically. Other challenges connected to teacher training programs and content play a significant role in EFL teachers' practices inside classrooms. Mean scores of their responses showed their dissatisfaction with the amount of training and follow up they received from supervisors about how to teach critical thinking skills. Challenges regarding extra-curricular activities they carry out are not less important than other aspects. Participants' responses revealed that the workload they have and the amount and level of school activities they are responsible for impede their efforts to activate critical thinking skill of their students.

These results can be explained in light of teachers' reluctance to carry out teaching behaviors that nurture students' critical thinking skill and empower them to think critically because of their insistence on implementing traditional practices (Noula, 2018). Thus, language educational programs must not focus only on teaching the linguistic component but they should help teachers change their conventions about immortalizing traditional teaching ways (Enciso, Enciso & Daza, 2017). These results corroborate the fact that critical thinking is more than generic and context-independent reasoning skills. It is the ability to distinguish between matter of facts and matter of values, and the mentality of not taking for granted what others claim to be realistic and feasible (Mok & Yuen, 2016). Moreover, they point to an urgent need to revise the existing curricula and design more adequate ones which would include a greater number of activities fostering critical thinking skills (Bećirović, Hodžić, & Brdarević-Čeljo, 2019). Teachers must first be committed to critical thinking and its philosophy in order to be able to implement critical thinking into their classrooms (Karakoç, 2016). Therefore, some serious steps should be taken to enhance students' critical thinking skill. Teachers' tendency to over-teach every specific element to arrive at one correct answer should be modified. Textbooks must be organized to provide optimal learning situations. Activities should be varied to allow flexibility in student behaviors and open to unconventional classroom settings. Teaching subjects should be multidisciplinary instead of discrete ones that limit creativity. Moreover, product-oriented methods-based assessment should be replaced by process-based curricula (Leen, Hong, Kwan & Ying, 2014).

CONCLUSION

EFL teachers, in the present study, were keen to show that their teaching behaviors reflect their attention to train students to think critically. Most of them indicated that they regularly perform teaching behaviors that can nurture their critical thinking skill. However, significant challenges were found to work as barriers in front of their success to make students critical thinkers. The lack of training, the content of textbooks and classroom size were the most important challenges. Therefore, apart from training pre or in-service teachers on certain topics like open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, and maturity, teacher preparation programs should account for specific factors like dispositions of truth seeking, confidence and inquisitiveness. Dispositions associated with openness to experience, such as intellectual curiosity and flexibility are essential for the process of making sound judgments and decisions. To get rid of classroom size difficulty, teachers can encourage students to take critical actions through using democratic processes inside and outside classroom. In addition, they can provide them with inquiry opportunities by giving students time for planning, processing, and debriefing in order to overcome difficulties related to the content of textbooks.

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