Englisia
Journal of Language, Education and Humanities

ISSN:
2089-6239 (Print)
2549-0648 (Online)

Teaching critical thinking as a stand-alone course: A case study in the Indonesian ELT context

ABSTRACT - This study examines the pedagogical practice of teaching Critical Thinking (CT) as an independent course within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT). A qualitative research approach was employed to obtain in-depth, context-rich data. The research was conducted in a Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (CTPS) course within the English Education Department at a higher education institution. Data were collected through three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that students were introduced to the fundamental concepts of critical thinking and were systematically trained to become critical thinkers through explicit instructional approaches. The explicit instruction model enabled learners to develop structured reasoning skills and apply analytical frameworks to authentic problems. Students' critical thinking achievement was assessed using an argumentative writing grading rubric adapted from the Utah ELA Core Academy, which evaluates the clarity, coherence, and logical strength of written arguments. Based on these findings, this study recommends that critical thinking be offered as a stand-alone course across higher education institutions. Such an approach ensures that students receive dedicated, systematic training in higher-order thinking skills, which are essential for academic success and professional readiness. Incorporating CT as an independent component within curricula addresses a critical gap in preparing graduates to navigate complex, real-world challenges effectively.

Ajeng Inayatul Ilahiyah*
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia
*Corresponding email: ajengilahiyah@umm.ac.id

Article History
Submitted: 2 February 2026
Accepted: 27 April 2026
Published: 31 May 2026

Keywords
Case study; Critical thinking; Explicit instruction; ELT; Stand-alone course

Recommended APA Citation
Ilahiyah, A. I. (2026). Teaching critical thinking as a stand-alone course: A case study in the Indonesian ELT context. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities, 13*(2), 448-466. https://doi.org/10.22373/englisia.49

1. Introduction

Along with the rapid advancement of digital technology, critical thinking (CT) remains the prima donna of all desired skills to be installed in the students' minds, much like a processor in a computer, within the educational realm. There has been, recently, a growing interest in conducting studies on CT in the field of English language education (Amale & Gebretsadik, 2024; Bağ & Gürsoy, 2021, 2021; Cosgun & Atay, 2021; Ilyas et al., 2025; Liang, 2023; Moghadam et al., 2023; Muthmainnah et al., 2022; Susyla & Jaya, 2024). Having seen CT as the most essential skill, many researchers and practitioners believe that the goal of education is to teach students to be good at critical thinking skills (Brookfield et al., 2023; Elder & Paul, 2010; Janssen et al., 2019; Shabrina et al., 2025; Spector & Ma, 2019; Willingham, 2019; Yuan et al., 2022). Developing students' critical thinking has been the priority in Indonesian education (Emilia, 2010; Ilyas, 2023; Ilyas et al., 2025). However, all of the sample literature deals with integrating critical thinking skills into English Language Teaching (ELT) in an embedded course, not as an independent course, with an exception of that of Cosgun & Atay (2021). In their project, Cosgun and Atay attempt to see the effectiveness of teaching CT as a stand-alone course, delivered through an extracurricular program spelled the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) program. Even so, their main focus is to compare the EFL students' critical thinking achievement between those who were taught using traditional pedagogical approaches and those exposed to an experimental intervention offered as part of a supplementary learning initiative in Turkey.

To the best knowledge of the present writer, no studies on the practice of teaching CT as a standalone course have been reported in the Indonesian context. In the Indonesian setting, I am exposed to the research conducted by Ilyas et al (2025), with some degree of detail, has dealt with the pedagogical approaches implemented by Indonesian university EFL teachers. They examined how CT is conceptualised and operationalised at the instructional level. However, along with the absence of studies on the practice of teaching CT as an independent course, the research conducted by Ilyas et al focuses on exploring how EFL teachers embed CT into their teaching across the four core language skills encompassing reading, writing, listening and speaking. Therefore, despite its insightful illumination, their research has nothing to offer vis-à-vis the teaching of CT as an independent course within the ELT realm in the Indonesian context.

Pertinent to the place of CT in ELT enterprise, Paul (2005) has made an effort to place CT in the higher education realm exclusively. He attempted to underline the gravity of the problem and its solution by developing a comprehensive and substantive concept of CT cultivated across the curriculum. Willingham (2019) suggests that teaching CT explicitly to university students is pivotal as the world becomes ever more augmented by artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies. It can be construed that CT is considered important not only in the area of primary and secondary schools, but also in the higher education setting as well. As a result, educational institutions have been targeted as the perfect venue to create critical graduates (Spector & Ma, 2019; Sudjatmiko, 2019; Willingham, 2019), who are encouraged to manifest their higher-order thinking skills and enhance their critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills (Shabrina et al., 2025).

English education, like any other form of education, should equip students with thinking skills that will enable them to evaluate and analyse constantly changing issues (Halvorsen, 2018; Roberts, 2015). CT is considered an essential skill in the world of language education (Daniel, 2013; Widyastuti, 2018), including in the field of English language education. Concerning this, Roberts (2015) argues that teachers of English need to develop their students for 21st-century life skills, which include Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creativity and Innovation, Collaboration, and Communication skills. That being said, critical thinking has long been emphasised in the national education system as a weapon to shield against the crashing great wave of false information (Ilyas, 2023). Along with the emphasis on communicative competence, the integration of CT is increasingly mandated by the national curriculum framework as core learning outcomes within English education programs (Ilyas et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, El Khoiri and Widiati (2017) solved the problem of weak arguments composed by their students by implementing explicit instruction in their teaching of EFL writing. Similarly, El Soufi and See (2019) show that explicit instruction enhances English language learners' CT in higher education by systematically teaching students how to analyse arguments, evaluate evidence, and identify logical fallacies through direct explanation, modelling, and guided practice that make reasoning processes clear and transferable. With regard to this matter, I found out that CT has been taught as a standalone course in the English education program at a university in Indonesia. Taking this notion into account, this paper aims to explore the teaching of CT within the ELT realm by Indonesian EFL teachers.

Due to the feasibility constraints, this study will focus on investigating the procedure of critical thinking instruction in the class of Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (CTPS) in the English language department in the Sultan Agung Islamic University (UNISSULA), Semarang, Indonesia. That being said, UNISSULA was selected as the research departure since it was the only university offering critical thinking instruction as an independent course within the ELT realm. The present study is, therefore, qualitative in nature. Despite its nascent exegesis, this study will contribute to the initiation of research endeavours pertaining to the teaching of critical thinking as a standalone course in the field of ELT in Indonesia. Therefore, germane to the foregoing discussion, the problems in this present study can be stated as follows:

1. How is critical thinking conceptualised and operationalised in the CTPS course?
2. In what ways are the students' critical thinking skills evaluated, and how well do these practices reflect the intended learning outcomes?

To answer the aforementioned problems, the exploration of the critical thinking instruction as an independent course in ELT, within the class of CTPS, will be carried out, as mildly noted above, in the light of a qualitative approach.

2. Literature review

2.1. The definition of critical thinking

Critical thinking (CT) has been conceptualised in multiple ways across disciplines, yet most definitions focus on its role as purposeful, reasoned thinking. Historically, CT is rooted in philosophical traditions inspired by Socratic inquiry, while modern understandings are shaped

by both philosophy and psychology (Lewis & Smith, 1993, as cited in (Lai, 2011; Lau, 2024; Wang & Zheng, 2016). From a cognitive perspective, CT is often described in terms of observable mental processes such as analysis, interpretation, and evaluation (Lai, 2011; List & Sun, 2023), whereas educational perspectives frequently align CT with Higher -Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) as articulated in Bloom's taxonomy (Daniel, 2013; Sternberg & Niu, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). However, equating CT solely with higher-order cognitive skills risks oversimplifying its scope. As Cottrell (2011) argues, CT involves not only cognitive operations but also dispositions and structured judgment, including the ability to evaluate assumptions, weigh evidence, and reach well-reasoned conclusions. In a more integrative view, CT is suggested not merely as a set of advanced skills but as a continuum that begins with understanding and culminates in reflective judgement about what to believe or do (Ennis, 1985, 2018). Compared to HOTS-oriented definitions, Ennis's conception foregrounds both process and purpose, making it particularly relevant for examining instructional practices.

From a pedagogical perspective, CT is also closely linked to constructivist learning theories, which position learners as active constructors of knowledge. Within this framework, CT emerges as learners engage in problem-solving, discussion, and reflection (Glassersfeld, 1995, as cited in Williams & Burden, 1997). Thus, CT in ELT is not limited to linguistic competence but involves the ability to engage critically with meaning, evaluate perspectives, and construct arguments. Given these perspectives, this study adopts Ennis's (2018) conception of CT as reflective and reasoned thinking focused on decision-making, as it provides a comprehensive framework that integrates cognitive processes, dispositions, and purposeful judgment. This definition also aligns with the demands of language learning, where students are expected not only to understand language but to use it critically and meaningfully.

2.2. Teachers' approaches to critical thinking in ELT

2.2.1. The state of critical thinking

In the English Language Teaching (ELT) context, critical thinking is noted as a transferable skill that should be comprehended carefully and cautiously (Atkinson, 1997). Therefore, students who seem critical in ELT classrooms are expected to demonstrate similar abilities in other contexts. Furthermore, attempts to teach critical thinking are closely related to two major conceptions of the critical thinking movement, namely the general and the specific (Emilia, 2010). The former assumes that critical thinking is generalisable, in which once someone learns it, they are able to apply it across contexts and subject areas (Paul, 1993; Nosich, 2001; Moore, 1995 as cited in Emilia, 2010). In contrast, the latter argues that critical thinking is context-specific, dependent on background knowledge, and therefore may not transfer easily across domains (McPeck, 1981, 1990, 1992 as cited in Emilia, 2010). In this regard, Willingham (2019) supports the view that critical thinking can be developed as a transferable skill, while Ennis (2018) emphasises the importance of explicitly teaching students how to transfer this ability.

From this perspective, how critical thinking is defined has direct implications for how it is taught and assessed. When CT is understood as a set of general cognitive skills, instruction

tends to emphasise explicit teaching of reasoning processes that can be applied across contexts. Conversely, when CT is viewed as subject-specific, teaching is more likely to be embedded within particular disciplinary or linguistic contexts. In practice, these positions are not mutually exclusive; rather, effective CT instruction in ELT often combines explicit guidance with context-based application, allowing students to learn thinking procedures while engaging with language tasks. This distinction also shapes approaches to assessment. If CT is treated as transferable, assessment may focus on general reasoning abilities such as argumentation and evaluation. However, if CT is seen as context-dependent, assessment must also consider how students apply these skills within specific linguistic and communicative tasks.

As we have been living in the age of digital data and AI, where the pursuit of information has become our daily consumption, knowing enough is never enough. It is a truism that cultivating students' critical thinking has become the central part of educational outcomes, more accurately, as there has been a burgeoning interest in AI education practices. Research on CT in Indonesian EFL settings highlights the pivotal role of teachers in this process. Studies show that teachers generally recognise the importance of CT, but vary in how they interpret and implement it in practice. For instance, Anggraeny and Khongput (2022) found that Indonesian EFL teachers tend to conceptualise CT in terms of cognitive skills, dispositions, and background knowledge, and often employ active learning strategies such as discussions and problem-based tasks. Similarly, Ilyas et al. (2025) report a strong commitment to CT among university instructors, although their instructional strategies are shaped by contextual constraints, including students' proficiency and institutional expectations.

However, these approaches are not without limitations. While student-centred methods promote engagement, they do not always guarantee the development of critical thinking unless supported by explicit instructional guidance. Research synthesised by El Soufi and See (2019) shows that explicit instruction – where teachers model thinking processes, articulate clear objectives, and provide guided practice – has stronger empirical support compared to implicit or discovery-based approaches alone (Sajidin, 2026). This suggests that effective CT instruction requires a balance between explicit teaching of thinking processes and opportunities for active engagement. In the Indonesian context, a persistent gap exists between policy and practice. Although CT is emphasised in curricula, studies indicate that classroom practices often remain traditional due to exam-oriented systems and limited teacher training (Wilson & Defianty, 2024). This highlights the need to examine not only what teachers believe about CT, but how it is actually enacted in classroom settings.

2.2.2. Assessment of critical thinking

Assessing students' critical thinking skills poses its own challenges. Standardised exams and quizzes used in many Indonesian classrooms emphasise discrete right or wrong answers, which is fundamentally at odds with the open-ended, higher-order nature of CT. Indeed, Wilson and Defianty (2024) argue that Indonesia's legacy of high-stakes testing is "inimical to the teaching of critical thinking," because it encourages recall over analytical reasoning. The literature therefore advocates for authentic assessment, which requires students to demonstrate

reasoning through tasks such as essays, projects, or problem-solving activities (Moon, 2008). These forms of assessment emphasise the quality of argumentation, use of evidence, and depth of analysis rather than discrete answers. However, empirical studies suggest that implementing such assessments is not straightforward. Fernandes et al (2024), for instance, found that teachers often face practical constraints, including limited time, lack of assessment tools, and uncertainty about evaluation criteria. As a result, a gap remains between theoretical models of CT assessment and classroom practice. While frameworks exist, their application in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesia, remains inconsistent. This gap underscores the importance of examining how CT is actually assessed in practice, including whether assessment methods align with instructional goals and truly capture students' critical thinking abilities.

Accordingly, this study adopts Ennis's (2018) conception of critical thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do," as it offers a comprehensive view that integrates both cognitive processes and purposeful judgement. Drawing on this perspective, the study examines how critical thinking is enacted in classroom practice, particularly in terms of how students are guided to analyse, evaluate, and make reasoned decisions. To analyse pedagogical practices, the study draws on the explicit instruction model (El Soufi & See, 2019), paying attention to how the instructor introduces critical thinking concepts, models thinking processes, and provides structured guidance for students to engage with them, while also considering how classroom activities encourage student participation. Assessment practices are examined in relation to the criteria for authentic critical thinking assessment proposed by Moon (2008), focusing on whether tasks require students to demonstrate reasoning, construct arguments, and justify their ideas. In addition, the analysis takes into account the contextual challenges identified by Wilson and Defianty (2024), particularly those related to exam-oriented systems and practical constraints in classroom implementation. Through this combined lens, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how critical thinking is both taught and assessed within the CTPS course.

3. Method

As noted earlier, this piece constitutes a research project whereby the crux of the scheme is to discover what the teacher really teaches in the class of CT in ELT as an independent course, namely Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (CTPS), at UNISSULA, examining its implementation closely using a qualitative approach. Since the study aims to investigate a specific case, which is the teaching of critical thinking as an independent course in a university, the research method is categorised as a case study in the world of qualitative research. Through inductive, data-driven analysis, the present study constructed a general concept explaining the phenomenon. As mentioned, the present study aimed to gather data regarding the practice of teaching critical thinking as a stand-alone course within the ELT realm.

To obtain the intended data, this study adopted purposive sampling in selecting the participants based on specific and relevant criteria. The chosen participant was the only instructor teaching the CTPS course in the ELT programme at the time of the study; therefore, the case was inherently singular and justified the inclusion of a single participant. Moreover, the

instructor had over 24 years of experience teaching English at the university level and had actively participated in numerous ELT conferences and seminars, particularly those related to critical thinking pedagogy. Given this extensive experience and institutional role, the participant was considered an *information-rich* case capable of providing meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

The instruments of collecting data in this study comprise observation using notes and checklists, documents and an interview guide. The link across the instruments which have multiple methods of data collection in the current study is considered the way to validate the research data. The checklists were adopted from Moore and Parker (2012) to identify the skills that the selected participant (sometimes addressed as the instructor) taught in the classrooms (see Table 2). In this regard, the checklists functioned not only as an observation tool but also as an analytical framework to map the presence of critical thinking skills during instruction.

Furthermore, an in-depth interview with the participant was also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching of critical thinking in ELT. The interview was conducted in a flexible way; hence, several meetings with the participant for the interview were organised through WhatsApp. Classroom observation was accomplished by examining the way the participant nurtured critical thinking in the students and how he assessed their critical thinking, witnessing the skills and lessons taught in the class of CTPS, capturing the moments of student participation, discerning the relationship between critical thinking and students' linguistic performance, and noting the difficulties encountered by the participant in cultivating critical thinking skills.

The next procedure involved analysing documents comprising the syllabus used as a teaching guideline, as well as the lesson plans and materials constructed and applied in teaching practices. This procedure was conducted after several interviews with the participant to ensure the alignment between reported practices and documented plans. The syllabus helped determine which lessons should be observed to get the relevant data; the lesson plans enabled more focused observation of classroom activities. Thus, besides acquiring the main data from interviews, supporting data from observation and document analysis were also incorporated.

Following data collection, the analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The process began with transcribing interview data and compiling observation notes and documents, followed by repeated reading to achieve data familiarisation. In line with the study's exploratory nature, a hybrid coding approach was employed. Initially, deductive coding was applied based on the research focus and theoretical perspectives on critical thinking, including the types of skills, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. Subsequently, inductive coding was conducted to allow themes to emerge from data without being restricted to predefined categories. The codes were then grouped into broader categories and further refined into themes through iterative comparison across data sources. This process involved condensing large amounts of textual data into key themes, displaying them in organised categories, and drawing conclusions by comparing the participant's perspectives with the observed teaching practices. Through this recursive process, the study constructed a coherent explanation of how CT was taught in the CTPS classroom.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied. Triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing interpretations with the participant to verify the accuracy of the findings. While the study involved a single researcher, repeated review of the data was undertaken to ensure consistency in coding and theme development. Ultimately, I acknowledge my positionality in the study and its potential influence on data interpretation. To minimise bias, I maintained reflective notes throughout the research process and ensured that interpretations were grounded in the data.

4. Findings and discussion

This section will present and discuss three main discoveries from investigating the practice of teaching CT as a standalone course.

4.1. Conceptualising CT as a cognitive tool

To begin with, the thematic analysis of interview data revealed that the necessity of being critical thinkers for students, especially in higher education, was more demanding since the emergence of the 21st-century life. In this case, students need to know the practical theory of CT so as to do better in utilising their critical thinking ability in the process of English language teaching and learning. That way, they would have a strong and determined upbringing about CT as a facility to benefit within their life situation, at least to learn and use English for communication, to confront the ultra-topical concern such as “fake news”, and to prepare them to face the workforce in the era of disruption. In the era of disruption, any profession across the globe needs certain skills in order to adapt to the rapidity of the changing world, including being a teacher as a profession. That was one of the best rationales to instil CT in students’ minds. This discovery supported what Ilyas (2023) mentioned in his project, that CT could be used as a means to survive in this third millennium era.

Accordingly, the instructor was trying to install the operating system to process information inside the students’ brains, which is critical thinking. In this manner, the role of the teacher here was shifting from an agent of transfer of knowledge to an agent of transfer of tools. It was due to the assumption that students need a suitable tool to process information, which is fundamental for language learners. That is not enough for students to only know the term—for instance—but they also need to go through the way in processing the term, such as the process to understand, analyse, evaluate, and comment. The information—no matter how good and important it is—would be useless if the tool of processing is not appropriate. The students are taught general critical thinking using this tool to build the concept of understanding, process and comprehending information, and dealing with terms and arguments. The students were also trained to make reasoning before concluding a thing and to evaluate the quality of their reasoning. Therefore, the students would not simply accept the conclusion—they are supposed to know the layers of reasoning on how to come to a conclusion. This discovery was not quite different from the previous literature that conceptualised CT as a cognitive tool (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Sajidin, 2026).

As a tool—which is akin to an operating system of a technology—CT has been considered essential for the life sustainability and civilisation of human beings. Nevertheless, critical thinking skills, as an operating system for human beings, need to be installed by the teachers in the students' brains within the education realm across the disciplines. Furthermore, along with the increasing attention to AI, CT should function as an operating system for language learners to show their superiority in language performances over what technology can do. Moreover, in the digital world saturated with information—information wars as well as plenty of misinformation—and in the age of disruption, educated human beings are not only required to prove that their bits of intelligence could beat AI in terms of accuracy in translating languages. Nevertheless, they are also required to be able to detect fraud among the complex garde of words; distinguish fake and factual information not only more accurately but also faster. Therefore, it was assumed that if CT and linguistic competences could collaborate, the result would enable students to show off their supremacy as language learners. This idea was legitimised by Spector and Ma (2019), who suggested that education practitioners should place more emphasis on the development of CT skills in human beings, especially students and young learners, by considering the support of AI.

This way of seeing CT also shapes how the teaching is carried out in the CTPS class. Since CT is treated as a general tool for thinking, the instruction does not focus on one particular subject matter, but on how students process information across different situations. Students are taught how to deal with information, claims, arguments, and evidence, and are trained to reason before making conclusions and to evaluate the quality of their reasoning. At the same time, the teaching is not entirely abstract, as the instructor brings in students' own academic problems – such as writing their final projects – as cases to work with. In this sense, the course seems to combine a general approach to CT with a more contextual application, allowing students to apply the same thinking processes in real situations. From this perspective, the "operating system" metaphor does more than describe CT; it frames the whole instructional orientation of the course. CT becomes the basis upon which students engage with knowledge, rather than an additional skill to be attached to language learning. This is in line with Ennis's (2018) view of CT as reflective thinking concerned with deciding what to believe or do, where the emphasis is placed on the process of thinking itself.

4.2. Operationalising critical thinking through explicit instruction

To discuss this matter a little further, the participant explained that the students at UNISSULA were prepared to face the workforce in this era of disruption and the age of fake information with the installation of this CT skill. This course was taught to the students in the sixth semester. Furthermore, it was discovered during the observation in the course of CTPS that students were taught to think clearly; they were trained to find the best and most reasonable solution using the related problems faced by them as cases. Thus, one of the problems they faced at the time was related to their final projects; the participants posed their problems as cases during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom, for example: "How did the students deal with writing their background of the study in their final project?" It can be construed that the

participant taught his students to be more analytical in reading and more judgmental in writing by utilising their critical thinking skills.

The following materials are what the teacher taught in the classrooms. The data were obtained from the course outline that he created.

Table 1
Learning objectives of critical thinking and problem solving.

Course Name: Critical thinking and problem solving	**Credit:** 2	**Semester:** 6
Learning objectives:	**Attitudes** Demonstrate faith-based values in devotion to Allah SWT; uphold and practice noble character; engage in cooperation within classroom and group settings; and show responsibility in academic and collaborative activities. **General Skills** Apply logical, critical, and systematic thinking; communicate and discuss ideas effectively; demonstrate independent and high-quality performance; and take responsibility for one's own work. **Knowledge** 1. Demonstrate mastery of core concepts in critical thinking, including claims, assertions, statements, arguments, conclusions, reasons, and assumptions; 2. Demonstrate understanding of problem-solving concepts such as goal setting, brainstorming, and troubleshooting; 3. Demonstrate understanding of the distinction between facts and opinions, as well as moral and ethical considerations in decision-making. **Specific Skills** Present, discuss, and develop elements of critical thinking, including claims, assertions, statements, and arguments; write and present argumentative essays; present, discuss, and construct problem-solving models, including goal setting and brainstorming; and distinguish between facts and opinions, as well as ethical and moral dimensions in decision-making.	

As presented, the participant taught several lessons to his students in the CTPS class, mainly to identify, determine, distinguish, select, conclude, decide, solve, construct, and present the coverage materials. The students were taught how to deal with these things: information, claim, argument, logical fallacy, analysis, data, conclusion, evidence, decision, and solution. I would focus on discussing "information" in this part. In this era of the internet, information can be accessed easily without hard searching. Information comes from everywhere without invitation; the information could be in the form of reading text or verbal. The "rivers" of information do not belong to a certain person anymore; everyone can taste the "water", but who knows that the water is not poisonous? However, it is not information anymore that human beings really need in the world. It is the skill of processing the information that human beings need to possess. In the information, there should be claims stated, data displayed, evidence

shown, solution offered, analysis presented, and a conclusion made. In that case, human beings, likewise, the students are trained to deal with them.

Those skills mentioned above were taught along with the lessons stated in the syllabus. In one lesson, students might learn several skills that bring them to criticality. The students were not only taught the theory of critical thinking but also trained to apply it by practising to solve the given problems, evaluating facts, concluding things, setting goals, and performing other tasks and activities. Therefore, the participants also let the students understand that stating a fact is not the same as claiming it or making a factual claim. He emphasised that a proposition can be regarded as a fact only when it corresponds to reality; at the same time, people assert that something is a fact and be mistaken or even intentionally misled. Similarly, a student may claim to know something while in fact being incorrect. From this perspective, CTPS does more than teach students about thinking: it cultivates the habits and skills of thinking critically—teaching learners to distinguish belief from knowledge, to treat claims as fallible and arguable, to evaluate the quality of evidence and reasoning, and to revise their judgements when reasonable. This epistemic orientation—foregrounding justification, skepticism, and reflective correction—underpins the course's objective of moving students beyond thinking toward the practice of critical thinking. Furthermore, it was found out from the classroom observation that the participant conducted a pre-test in the first meeting. The questions in the pre-test were mainly about how the students deal with making decisions, solving problems, constructing arguments, and processing information. None of those questions was addressed to identify the students' understanding of English language teaching, except that the language used in the test was in English. It could be said that the students' reading comprehension was tested in the pre-test. In the following meetings, the participant taught the students the theory of critical thinking based on what he wrote in the lesson plan. He used several books as references and provided cases using the students' problems as teaching materials to be discussed.

The participant did not really pay attention to the students' language performance. He tended to be concerned more with the way the students process the knowledge delivered by him. This means that the participant taught the students how to decide things and not to simply rely on what they believe in making conclusions. The students were also taught how to make arguments. It was in line with what he told previously in the interviews that the teaching focus in the class of critical thinking and problem solving was building the basis understanding of critical thinking; what is the definition, what are the roles, why is it important, why do they need to learn, how to use it, and so forth. This emphasis on cognitive processing over linguistic performance highlights an important characteristic of the CTPS course. While the course is situated within an ELT programme, the instructional priority was placed on how students think rather than how accurately they use language. On the one hand, this supports the development of critical thinking as a general cognitive skill. On the other hand, it raises a potential tension in the EFL context, where students may have the ability to think critically but face challenges in expressing their ideas due to limited linguistic competence, as also noted by Ilyas et al. (2025).

After examining the instructional materials presented in the CTPS class, classroom observation revealed several approaches to teaching CT as a standalone course. These approaches are outlined below.

Table 2

Ways of developing students' critical thinking skills.

The students were taught to:	Examples of ways:
a. determine what information is or is not pertinent	Coaching students to question articles (from online media for example) that students read. *this applies literacy first then critical thinking
b. distinguish between rational claims and emotional ones	Teaching the concept of claims and issues, asking the students to think through whether claims (of an advertisement) make sense.
c. separate fact from opinion;	Giving examples of fact and opinion; asking students to evaluate facts within their realities (for example in the advertisements, news media); embedded in the discussion of evaluating facts.
d. spot deception and holes in the arguments of others	Using debate as a teaching strategy so the students could evaluate and analyse the arguments of others.
e. present his /her own analysis of the data or information	Each student was encouraged to speak up on the given issue, and was asked to evaluate an argument and explain their analysis.
f. recognize logical flaws in arguments	Teaching the students to think in the first place.
g. draw connections between discrete sources of data and information;	Teaching the connection between premises and conclusion.
h. attend to contradictory, inadequate, or ambiguous information	Questioning the students' claims and asking them to question the other students' statements.
i. construct cogent arguments rooted in data rather than opinion	Asking students to provide facts and supporting details for their claims and assertions.
j. select the strongest set of supporting data	Teaching students how to pick up the relevant materials for their final projects; the students explain their ideas and research topics.
k. avoid overstated conclusions	Training students how to understand the topic or a certain discourse, and asking them to focus and stick on it before making a conclusion.
l. identify holes in the evidence and suggest additional information to collect	Using their issue on making background of the study in their final project.
m. recognize that a problem may have no clear answer or single solution	Embedded in the discussion of ethics and moral dilemma; posing them with cases
n. propose other options and weigh them in the decision	Embedded in the teaching of ethics and moral dilemma; through discussion

o. articulate the argument and the context for that argument	Engaging the students in a debate activity.
p. correctly and precisely use evidence to defend the argument	Using debate as a teaching strategy.
q. logically and cohesively organize the argument	Coaching the students in making premises and conclusions.

(Lists of skills were adopted from Moore and Parker, 2012)

As is known, the observation checklists and field notes were also conducted in the current study. From doing so, it was discovered that the students were taught how to deal with these things: information, claim, argument, logical fallacy, analysis, data, conclusion, evidence, decision, and solution. Exploring what the teacher really did in the class of CT allowed me to see the way he nurtured the skill in the students' cognition and behaviour. From the interview, the participant mentioned several methods of teaching comprising the teacher's presentation, discussion, question answer, students' presentation, group work, and individual assignment. During the interviews, the subject also conveyed that he usually posed the students problems, questions, roles, and games to nurture the students' critical thinking ability. In addition, the students were handed the e-book used in the classrooms to do independent reading and learning. These strategies further show that the teaching of CT was operationalised through a combination of explanation, modelling, and guided practice.

To further illustrate the role of CT in higher education, it can be seen as a preparatory phase that equips students with the ability to engage in academic reasoning. While entering a university programme does not automatically prepare students to think critically, a structured course such as CTPS provides the foundation needed for analysing, evaluating, and constructing ideas. Without this preparation, students may participate in academic activities but struggle to engage with them critically. Therefore, positioning CT as a standalone course helps students develop the cognitive readiness required for subsequent academic tasks.

If we compare this situation with the practice of CT teaching as an independent course within the EFL classroom through a problem-based learning (PBL) program conducted by Cosgun and Atay (2021), the students' language performance tends to show improvement in several skills, including reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary. It was also mentioned in their discussion that learners perceived PBL as highly beneficial for their language growth, alongside gains in critical thinking and creativity. We should note that despite its peculiarity, the practice of teaching CT as a standalone course could be seen as a promising alternative approach to improve students' CT in the field of English language teaching. This being discussed, the tendency is that the practice of teaching CT using explicit instruction seems to emerge effectively to both enhance students' CT skills and language performances. My observations thus far have shown that CT should be taught as an independent course in higher education, especially in the language department, including the English language department. However, CT is better taught at the beginning of semesters, as it is more suitable for freshmen or sophomores.

Referring to Ilyas et al (2025), the students' initial unfamiliarity with CT as an academic expectation became a significant challenge, especially among freshmen students and sophomores, in promoting CT as well as implementing a range of strategies to integrate CT into the English language teaching and learning process. They also noted that, however strong their students' arguments were, they were still reluctant to demonstrate their criticality due to their lack of linguistic competence. Previously, El Soufi and See (2019) tried to reveal whether explicit teaching of critical thinking is effective in enhancing the critical thinking skills of English language learners in higher education or not. In their findings, they explained that instruction in general critical thinking skills involved training students to define arguments, evaluate the reliability of sources, identify fallacies and assumptions, use inductive and deductive logic, synthesise information, make inferences, etc., which are still in line with the main discoveries in the present study. They also explained that explicit instructions are the most promising approach to teaching critical thinking skills. In the EFL setting, the importance of explicit instruction in improving students' critical thinking is even more urgent, considering the fact that even in more general contexts, the explicit teaching of critical thinking is highly favourable (El Khoiri & Widiati, 2017; Sajidin, 2026). It is interesting here to note that the presence of explicit instruction in the CTPS course, acting as a standalone course within the ELT department, is considered a great salvation.

4.3. Assessing students' critical thinking

This section revealed and discussed the alignment of assessment with instructional goals by critically evaluating the assessment methods against the course objectives and the literature on CT assessment. As elaborated earlier, the instructor taught the students how to deal with claims, assertions, statements, arguments, conclusions, reasons, and assumptions. Thereby, the participant said that the way he assessed his students' critical thinking was based on what he observed during the class session. It can be construed that he persistently develops his students' critical thinking, fostering reflection and continuous improvement by providing prolonged formative feedback. This suggests that formative assessment played a significant role in the development of students' critical thinking. Through questioning, feedback, and classroom interaction, the instructor was able to monitor how students reasoned and responded to ideas in real time. Such ongoing assessment complements formal evaluation, as it captures aspects of critical thinking that are not easily reflected in written products alone. This way of assessing students' critical thinking in the classroom was also suggested by (Susyla & Jaya, 2024), as it also demonstrated the flexibility of assessment methods, which may support the wide spectrum of learner needs and uphold ethical standards like cultural sensitivity.

On the other hand, Bağ & Gürsoy (2021) believed that CT remains seen as a complicated issue to be dealt with, including how to assess it when it is taught in the Eastern setting due to several conservative cultural norms. In a sense, Wilson and Defianty (2024), whose research focuses on CT discovering the CT assessment in the high school EFL learning, revealed that CT was still evaluated in a rigid way using discrete testing on merely grammar and vocabulary. Probably, that is why Moon (2008) argues that many teachers feel that they are assessing their

students' critical thinking while in fact they are not. When compared to the range of skills taught in the course (see Table 2), this form of assessment appears to capture only part of the intended learning outcomes. While argumentative writing allows students to demonstrate their ability to construct and justify ideas, many other skills – such as identifying logical fallacies, evaluating contradictory information, and responding to others' arguments in real time are less directly assessed. In this sense, there is only partial alignment between what is taught and what is formally evaluated.

Irrespective of the cultural background and the various problems on the subject of CT assessment, the participant conducted a summative test for his students by assigning them to write an argumentative essay at the end of the semester. As follows, an argumentative writing grading rubric from Utah ELA Core Academy (2011) was employed. However, relying primarily on an argumentative essay as the main summative assessment presents certain limitations. Although it reflects students' ability to organise and present arguments in written form, it may not fully represent the ability to engage critically in an interactive context, such as discussion or debate, which were frequently practised during the course. As a result, some dimensions of critical thinking observed in classroom activities may remain underrepresented in the final evaluation.

Regarding this, Fernandes et al (2024) discussed the CT assessment conducted by ELT teachers on speaking skill which still focus on the pronunciation, grammar, and fluency, which, according to them, are not sufficiently relevant to the CT features. This condition reflects a broader issue identified in the literature, where assessment practices often struggle to capture the full complexity of critical thinking. As Moon (2008) suggests, authentic assessment should require students to demonstrate reasoning processes, not merely produce correct or well-structured answers. In this case, while the use of argumentative writing moves toward authentic assessment, it still does not fully encompass the range of cognitive skills developed during instruction. That being said, the participant in the current study could actually add one more instrument to evaluate their students' CT in the English language learning context through speaking tests such as debate or public speaking. That should not be too difficult to accomplish, as the students' weekly activities in the CTPS classroom also involved those activities. In other words, this current study still failed to propose a proper assessment to measure students' critical thinking development. A comprehensive examination on fixing the issue of critical thinking assessment needs to be established among practitioners.

However, problems related to critical thinking assessment have been known and were somehow unsolved. In this case, Williams and Burden (1997) noted that standard approaches to cognitive measurements are not always built upon sound theories, which, according to them, was quite surprising. Accordingly, previous research on critical thinking also reported a similar conclusion that there should be an established measurement of critical thinking skill (El Khoiri & Widiati, 2017; El Soufi & See, 2019), especially in the Asian context, including Indonesia. If we refer to the philosophical approach to defining critical thinking ability, it should not be surprising that critical thinking development is hardly measured. In the psychological approach, critical thinking expresses what is inside the human brain, which would be seemingly impossible

to evaluate since the human brain is undeniably complex and infinite. While in the psychological approach, critical thinking is a way of thinking in which the procedures can be predicted. In this approach, to measure critical thinking is to know the state of the thinking ways; it is not to identify what is inside the mind. The illustration of this method can be identified within Bloom's taxonomy. Notwithstanding the fact that human beings' brains are complicated and unpredictable—referring to the components inside—the activities resulting from the working brain that process anything can be calculated, decisions. In fact, many things in life are just difficult to measure and perhaps impossible to cluster under statistical models.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of Critical Thinking (CT) as a standalone course in higher education, particularly within the English Education Department in the Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Drawing on the findings of this case study, CT was taught explicitly as both content knowledge and a cognitive tool, guiding students through procedural stages of thinking—from identifying and comprehending information to analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating it for meaningful communication. Rather than remaining implicitly embedded within language instruction, explicit CT instruction equips students with practical skills for critical engagement. In language learning, while accurate and appropriate information processing is central to effective communication, CT functions as a cognitive foundation that enhances students' comprehension, language production, and communicative judgment. When introduced systematically and taught explicitly—ideally during the early stages of university study—CT has the potential to foster transferable skills, enabling students to become analytical readers, reflective thinkers, and responsible writers across diverse academic and communicative contexts. In this study, CT was primarily assessed through argumentative writing, wherein students demonstrated their ability to construct and justify ideas coherently. Notwithstanding its demonstrated significance, the present study acknowledges the inherent limitations of its single-case design. The findings are not intended for broad generalization but rather for providing a detailed, contextualized understanding. Nonetheless, the study suggests that a standalone CT course can offer a focused environment for developing foundational critical thinking skills, while further research is required to examine its applicability across different institutional settings.

The study also identifies the need for more systematic approaches to assessing students' critical thinking development. Although argumentative writing served as the primary assessment mode, clearer and more robust assessment procedures remain necessary. Future research may also explore the relationship between students' grammatical competence and their critical thinking ability to better understand how linguistic knowledge interacts with higher-order thinking skills in EFL learning. By positioning CT as a teachable and transferable skill, this study advocates for its broader educational relevance and institutional integration as an independent course in higher education, thereby ensuring that students are not only linguistically proficient but also intellectually equipped to engage critically in academic and social discourse.

Declaration on the use of AI

In the course of preparing this manuscript, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were engaged as supportive resources to enhance the clarity and articulation of the text. Tools such as Quillbot and DeepL were consulted primarily to assist in refining sentence structure, grammar, and lexical choice. Their role, however, remained at the level of linguistic facilitation rather than intellectual contribution. The shaping of ideas, the development of arguments, and the interpretation of findings were undertaken independently by the author. In this sense, the presence of AI in the writing process may be understood not as a co-authoring force, but rather as a mediated aid, operating under the author's critical awareness and control.

References

Amale, M., & Gebretsadik, A. (2024). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for teaching critical thinking skills and practices of its strategies. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, *14*(1), 98–120. https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v14i1.12657

Anggraeny, E., & Khongput, S. (2022). Teachers' perceptions and practices of critical thinking instruction in Indonesian senior high schools: A case study. *TEFLIN Journal*, *33*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v33i1/1-26

Atkinson, D. (1997). A critical approach to critical thinking in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, *31*(1), 71–94. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587975

Bağ, H. K., & Gürsoy, E. (2021). The effect of critical thinking embedded English course design to the improvement of critical thinking skills of secondary school learners. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *41*, 100910. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100910

Brookfield, S. D., Rudolph, J., & Tan, S. (2023). Teaching critical thinking. In *Teaching Well*. Routledge.

Cosgun, G., & Atay, D. (2021). Fostering critical thinking, creativity, and language skills in the EFL classroom through problem-based learning. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, *13*(3), 2360–2385.

Daniel, B. R. (2013). *Defining critical thinking for the 21st century world language classroom* [Brigham Young University]. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4288

El Khoiri, N., & Widiati, U. (2017). Logical fallacies in EFL learners' argumentative writings. *Dinamika Ilmu*, *17*(1). https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v17i1.638

El Soufi, N., & See, B. H. (2019). Does explicit teaching of critical thinking improve critical thinking skills of English language learners in higher education? A critical review of causal evidence. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *60*, 140–162. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.12.006

Elder, L., & Paul, R. (2010). Critical thinking: Competency standards essential for the cultivation of intellectual skills, part 1. *Journal of Developmental Education*, *34*(2), 38–39.

Emilia, E. (2010). *Teaching writing: Developing critical learners*. Rizqi Press Bandung, Indonesia. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=13427400773446392740&hl=en&oi=scholarr

Ennis, R. H. (1985). A logical basis for measuring critical thinking skills. *Educational Leadership*, *43*(2), 44–48.

Ennis, R. H. (2018). Critical thinking across the curriculum: A vision. *Topoi*, *37*(1), 165–184. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-016-9401-4

Fernandes, R., Willison, J., & Boyle, C. (2024). Characteristics of facilitated critical thinking when students listen to and speak English as an additional language in Indonesia. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *52*, 101513. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2024.101513

Halvorsen, A. (2018). *21st Century skills and the "4Cs" in the English language classroom*. University of Oregon. https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/23598/halvorsen_21_century_skills.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Ilyas, H. P. (2023). Elements of critical reading in EFL teachers' instructions. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, *10*(2), 92. https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v10i2.17142

Ilyas, H. P., Solihati, N., & Hikmat, A. (2025). Pedagogies of thought: unpacking Indonesian EFL teachers' approaches to critical thinking in language skills instruction. *European Journal of English Language Studies*, *5*(3), 179–190. https://doi.org/10.12973/ejels.5.3.179

Janssen, E. M., Mainhard, T., Buisman, R. S. M., Verkoeijen, P. P. J. L., Heijltjes, A. E. G., van Peppen, L. M., & van Gog, T. (2019). Training higher education teachers' critical thinking and attitudes towards teaching it. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *58*, 310–322. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.03.007

Lai, E. (2011). Critical thinking: A literature review. *Pearson's Res Rep*, *6*, 40–41.

Lau, J. Y. F. (2024). Revisiting the origin of critical thinking. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *56*(7), 724–733. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2320199

Liang, W. (2023). Towards a set of design principles for technology-assisted critical-thinking cultivation: A synthesis of research in English language education. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *47*, 101203. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101203

List, A., & Sun, Y. (2023). To clarity and beyond: Situating higher-order, critical, and critical-analytic thinking in the literature on learning from multiple texts. *Educational Psychology Review*, *35*(2), 40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09756-y

Moghadam, Z. B., Narafshan, M. H., & Tajadini, M. (2023). The effect of implementing a critical thinking intervention program on English language learners' critical thinking, reading comprehension, and classroom climate. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *8*(1), 15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-023-00188-3

Moon, J. (2008). *Critical thinking: An exploration of theory and practice*. Routledge.

Moore, B. N., & Parker, R. (2012). *Critical Thinking* (10th edn). McGraw-Hill.

Muthmainnah, Ibna Seraj, P. M., & Oteir, I. (2022). Playing with AI to investigate human-computer interaction technology and improving critical thinking skills to pursue 21st century age. *Education Research International*, *2022*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/6468995

Paul, R. (2005). The state of critical thinking today. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2005*(130), 27–38. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.193

Roberts, R. (2015). What's new in English language teaching? *Voices Magazine*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/whats-new-english-language-teaching

Sajidin. (2026). Fostering critical thinking skills among EFL learners in higher education—A systematic review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *59*, 101943. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2025.101943

Shabrina, D. B., Basthomi, Y., & Zen, E. L. (2025). Exploring higher order and lower order thinking skills in Indonesian junior high school ELT textbooks. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, *12*(2), 323–340. https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v12i2.29201

Spector, J. M., & Ma, S. (2019). Inquiry and critical thinking skills for the next generation: From artificial intelligence back to human intelligence. *Smart Learning Environments*, *6*(1), 8, s40561-019-0088-z. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-019-0088-z

Sternberg, R. J., & Niu, W. (2025). *Critical thinking across disciplines, vol. 1: Theory and classroom practice*. Springer Nature.

Sudjatmiko, B. (2019). Indonesia 4.0 Talents. *Kompas*.

Susyla, D., & Jaya, S. (2024). Integrating critical thinking skills in English language teaching assessment: a theoretical framework. *Edu-Ling: Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, *7*(2), 273–291.

Wang, X., & Zheng, H. (2016). Reasoning critical thinking: Is it born or made? *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *6*(6), 1323. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0606.25

Widyastuti, S. (2018). Fostering critical thinking skills through argumentative writing. *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan*, *37*(2). https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v37i2.20157

Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Willingham, D. (2019). How to teach critical thinking. *Education: Future Frontiers Occasional Paper Series*. https://apo.org.au/node/244676

Wilson, K., & Defianty, M. (2024). The critical challenge for ELT in Indonesia: Overcoming barriers in fostering critical thinking in testing-oriented countries. *TESOL in Context*, *33*(1), 82–96. https://doi.org/10.21153/tesol2024vol33no1art2011

Yang, A., Sulaiman, N. A., & Yaccob, N. S. (2025). Enhancing critical thinking skills for higher education students through English reading modules: A systematic review. *Cogent Education*, *12*(1), 2587466. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2587466

Yuan, R., Liao, W., Wang, Z., Kong, J., & Zhang, Y. (2022). How do English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers perceive and engage with critical thinking: A systematic review from 2010 to 2020. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *43*, 101002. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101002