

The Effect of a Critical Thinking-Based Approach on EFL University Students' Attitudes Towards Studying English Literature

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the influence of critical thinking (CT) on students' attitudes towards English literature is an intriguing and relevant area of study. The current study seeks to understand how a critical thinking-based approach can enhance university students' overall learning experience and appreciation for this subject. The study explores the potential changes in attitudes exhibited by university-level EFL students towards studying English literature following the integration of CT. The study used a control-experimental pretest–posttest design to assess the effectiveness of the proposed approach utilising a questionnaire before and after the intervention. The results revealed a noticeable positive shift in students' attitudes towards studying English literature after exposure to the critical thinking-based approach.

KEYWORDS: Critical Thinking, Attitude, Literature

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Remark

In contemporary education, particularly within the purview of EFL instruction, the imperative to cultivate cognitive aptitude alongside linguistic proficiency has garnered significant scholarly consideration. The modern global milieu, characterised by unprecedented connectivity and linguistic diversity, has underscored the inadequacy of mere language acquisition. Instead, the cultivation of critical thinking skills (CTSs) has emerged as a pivotal educational goal, endowing students with the capacity to thoughtfully analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information. This cognitive acumen is essential in comprehending intricate literary compositions and enhancing students' orientations and capabilities in exploring English literary studies.

The present study embarks upon a meticulous exploration of the intricate interplay between the infusion of a critical thinking-based approach and the attitudinal dispositions of EFL university students towards the study of English literature. While prior scholarly endeavours have engaged in multifaceted inquiries into diverse facets of language acquisition and cognitive maturation, a noticeable gap remains in undertaking a comprehensive scrutiny of how the deliberate assimilation of pedagogical constructs fostering critical thinking may contribute to perceptual and dispositional shifts among students concerning the study of literary works. Notably, English literary inquiry assumes significance, necessitating students to adeptly navigate linguistic distinctions and the nuanced fabric of cultural, historical, and thematic dimensions intricately woven within literary constructs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to address the identified research problem:

To what extent can incorporating CT in literature instruction be effective in teaching English literature?

How does integrating CTSs in EFL instruction affect university students' attitudes towards studying English literature?

Hypotheses

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the EG students who study literature according to the critical thinking-based approach and the CG students who study the same subject according to the currently-used method in the posttest of attitudes.

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the EG students who study literature according to the critical thinking-based approach in their attitudes before and after the intervention.

Aims of the Study

The following principal aims drive this research:

Examine CT Integration: The primary aim of this study is to investigate the effects of integrating CT into the EFL curriculum.

Explore Attitudinal Changes: This study also aims to explore the potential changes in attitudes exhibited by university-level EFL students towards studying English literature following the integration of CT.

Defining Critical Thinking

Critical thinking, an enduring educational concept, has deep historical roots dating back to ancient times, with figures like Socrates pioneering its practice by instilling doubt in students to stimulate their pursuit of truth. This approach was further developed by Plato, Aristotle, and Greek sceptics, emphasising systematic thinking and probing beyond surface information. In modern times, Dewey's (1910) emphasis on 'reflective thinking' in the early twentieth century laid the groundwork for what we now term critical thinking. CT has gained contemporary recognition as one of the four essential components of thinking ability, alongside creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving, making it a cornerstone of 21st-century education, often grouped within the '4 C's.'

In the early 1940s, Glaser laid the groundwork for defining CT as an attitude predisposed to thoughtful consideration of problems, a grasp of logical inquiry methods, and a disposition toward their application. CT, a multifaceted skill set comprising knowledge, skills, and dispositions, has drawn significant scholarly attention, yielding multiple definitions that underscore ongoing debates about its precise meaning and scope. Some definitions focus on CTs, others on the CT process, and others on its inherent characteristics. Facione (2000) emphasises CT as the ability to theorise and evaluate arguments, particularly honing the skill of critically assessing information from credible sources.

Prominent contributors to the development of CT offer nuanced definitions of this cognitive process. Ennis (1985) defines CT as reflective and reasonable thinking directed towards decision-making, encompassing the dimensions of the product (decision and action) and process (reflection and questioning). Similarly, Beyer (1988) asserts that CT involves rational judgments. Brookfield's (1987) definition accentuates the critical questioning of assumptions, highlighting the product (thinking or acting differently) as a consequence of the reflective process. Conversely, Kurfiss (1988) characterises CT as a logical response to inquiries lacking certainty and full data access, emphasising its investigative nature and the pursuit of convincing justifications. These definitions collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of CT as both a process and a means to informed decision-making.

In the pursuit of conducting the present study, an extensive review of various definitions of CT was undertaken to discern the nuanced interpretations within the academic discourse and to select the most suitable definition for the research context. This inquiry revealed a lack of a single, uniform definition for CT; however, consensus among experts tends to converge around a definition proposed by Facione (1990), which characterises CT as "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment resulting in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, accompanied by an explication of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations underpinning that judgment" (p. 2). In essence, CT emerges as a deliberate cognitive process guiding individuals in comprehending, investigating, evaluating, and drawing informed conclusions. In contrast, Paul's (1992) definition emphasises a process-oriented perspective, portraying CT as purposeful thinking wherein thinkers consistently apply specific intellectual standards to guide and evaluate their thinking processes. Paul's depiction is notably more detailed than Ennis's, Brookfield's, or Facione's, yet it does not emphasise a distinct outcome or product. Lipman (1988) also posits that existing definitions are overly broad, lacking the granularity needed to capture CT's characteristics fully.

CT, as understood through various scholars' definitions, emerges as a multifaceted and intellectually disciplined process involving the active and skilful conceptualisation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information drawn from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, ultimately guiding belief and action. Paul and Elder (2006) emphasise CT as a versatile mode of thinking applicable to diverse subjects and problems, enhancing the quality of thinking by adeptly managing cognitive structures and intellectual criteria.

The common thread among the diverse definitions of CT lies in their recognition of two core elements: the ability to make judgments, evaluate, and assess and a willingness to embrace novel ideas and perspectives. Given CT's intersection with a wide array of disciplines, it engenders many definitions, often depicting it as a set of cognitive processes and strategies for effective decision-making and problem-solving. Terms like "higher-order thinking," "logical thinking," "complex thinking," and "reflective thinking" are interchangeably used to describe it. Despite numerous attempts to define CT by highlighting its skill-based and disposition-based aspects, no universally accepted theoretical definition has emerged, resulting in a lack of consensus among experts, scientists, educators, psychologists, and philosophers regarding a standard definition for CT.

Literature: Definitions and Genres

Defining literature is a complex task involving various aspects of written and spoken communication, language use, and artistic expression. Scholars and educators have put forth different definitions and perspectives to capture what literature encompasses.

From a language teaching standpoint, Baird's (1969) definition of literature highlights its effective use of language in suitable contexts. According to Baird, literary texts can be utilised in language teaching because they are created using language that fits the events' contexts.

Moody's (1971) perspective views literature as an umbrella term encompassing various written and spoken domains, such as literature for construction, medicine, or child raising. In this view, literature refers to any communication that expresses a specific subject and may include the author's style as a defining characteristic.

Rees (1973) defines literature as a permanent expression of thoughts or feelings about life and the world using words. In other words, this definition emphasises that literature serves as a means for authors to encapsulate their reflections on life's complexities and the human experience. This perspective emphasises the enduring nature of literary works, their ability to convey universal themes and the integral role of language in shaping and conveying these expressions.

Rollin (1989) emphasises the importance of literature being 'repeatable or recoverable,' meaning it should exist in permanent written texts, recorded speech, or transmitted orally. Meanwhile, Lazar (1993) defines literature as fictional novels, short stories, plays, and poems that convey messages through rich and multi-layered language. Eagleton (1996) suggests that literature systematically transforms ordinary language, deviates from everyday speech, and possesses structures and devices integrated into the language.

Meyer (1997) offers prototypical characteristics of literature, such as being written texts, demonstrating careful language use, fitting into literary genres (poetry, prose fiction, or drama), and being read and intended aesthetically. Meyer also suggests that literary works contain deliberate open-mindedness and weak implicatures, allowing for interpretation.

In the context of this study, literature is operationalised as any creative writing, both fiction and non-fiction, presented in the forms of poetry and short story. It involves the creative manipulation of language to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas, often with attention to language's aesthetic and communicative qualities.

In language education, incorporating literary genres into the classroom offers EFL teachers diverse materials to engage students. Among these genres, poems and short stories stand as valuable resources for enhancing language learning experiences. While each genre possesses distinct advantages, their integration is pivotal in cultivating language skills, cultural understanding, and analytical abilities.

Poetry, although relatively underutilised in FL classrooms due to its deviation from conventional sentence structures (Widdowson, 1983), presents a unique opportunity for language learners. Kellem (2009) emphasises that poetry holds substantial value as a pedagogical tool, providing students access to rich content, creativity, and vocabulary within a contextual framework. Engaging with poetry offers learners a dual benefit. Firstly, they delve into the author's psyche, unravelling the emotions, thoughts, and perspectives underpinning the poem's creation. Secondly, grappling with the nuanced meanings of words within poems nurtures enhanced analytical skills, fostering a deeper connection with the language.

Short stories, often lauded as an accessible gateway to literature, offer an engaging means of introducing language learners to the world of literary texts (Spack, 1985). Their inherent brevity and simplicity facilitate comprehension, making them an effective tool for language acquisition. Beyond this, their concise nature allows teachers to cater to diverse student preferences, catering to a range of tastes within the classroom. Brewster et al. (2002) highlight the motivation instilled by short stories, fostering positive attitudes towards language learning. These narratives demand fewer time commitments than novels, permitting educators to incorporate a variety of stories within their lessons. However, the succinct nature of short stories necessitates supplementary activities to unveil the layers of meaning and richness they encompass (Collie & Slater, 2004).

In summary, incorporating various literary genres into EFL classrooms yields multifaceted benefits for language learners. Through exposure to poetry and short stories, students gain linguistic proficiency, cultural insights, and analytical capabilities. Each genre presents unique advantages, contributing to a comprehensive and holistic language learning experience.

Current Approaches to Teaching Literature

The utilisation of literature in education has experienced a transformative shift, evolving from a conventional emphasis on literature as an isolated academic discipline to a dynamic integration as a valuable resource across diverse fields, with particular significance in language teaching. This evolution underscores the versatility of literature and its pedagogical applications, wherein teachers harness its potential to enhance learning outcomes. The subsequent discussion delves into the methodological approaches educators can adopt when teaching literary works.

7.1 The Cultural Approach

The cultural model of teaching literature is frequently acknowledged as a conventional approach within academic circles. Central to this approach is the role of the teacher in disseminating knowledge to students concerning the social, political, and historical contexts that underlie the texts under study. Providing insights into the principles and aims of the cultural approach, Carter and Long (1991) elaborate that students instructed through this framework are effectively equipped to comprehend and value diverse cultures and ideologies. Simultaneously, they develop an appreciation for the traditions of thought, sentiment, and artistic representation inherent to these cultures.

Fundamentally, the cultural model strives to enhance students' cultural awareness and comprehension of universally relevant concepts that may diverge from their own. This paradigm recognises literature as a potent instrument for interlinking diverse cultures and cultivating an appreciation for, as well as an acceptance of, diversity. In this context, Lazar's (1993) "literature as content" approach resembles the cultural model on several fronts. Notably, this methodology finds widespread acceptance suitable for

tertiary-level literature instruction, where students are expected to have attained a certain level of language proficiency, enabling them to engage substantively with literature as content.

7.2 The Language-Based Approach

The approach under consideration accentuates the meticulous analysis of literary language, placing the student at the centre of the learning process. This pedagogical approach involves detailed scrutiny of specific linguistic constructs, encompassing both literal and metaphorical language, to facilitate an improved comprehension of the text's underlying significance. Carter and Long (1991) posit that this approach facilitates students' engagement with the text through various methodological strategies, thereby exposing them to innovative language applications that ultimately enhance their literary competence.

A further objective of this approach is the enhancement of students' language proficiency. Educators can harness literary texts to formulate various vocabulary and grammatical exercises, furnishing students with opportunities to augment and enrich their language skills. Moreover, this approach frequently underscores the dissection of the text's stylistic elements, aiding students in constructing meaning and refining their prowess in literary interpretation (Van, 2009).

Notwithstanding its merits, this language-based approach has encountered criticism from eminent scholars, including McKay (2001), who argue that its emphasis on linguistic and structural facets might inadvertently neglect the crucial dimension of readers' responses to the text. This approach, predominantly focused on examining linguistic and structural aspects of the literary work, may inadvertently overshadow the emotional and personal connections that readers may establish with the text. In essence, an exclusively mechanistic implementation of the language-based approach may diminish readers' inclination to derive enjoyment from the experience of engaging with literary works.

To summarise, the language-based approach prioritises the development of fundamental language proficiencies encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Concurrently, it endeavours to cultivate learners' adeptness in linguistic expression. However, reducing literary texts to a set of rules and structures can inadvertently estrange readers from the work's emotional resonance and personal relevance, thereby underscoring the need for a more holistic pedagogical approach.

7.3 The Personal Growth Approach

The foundational principle of the personal growth approach is rooted in engaging students in reading literature. Carter and Long (1991) assert this approach as a potent means to facilitate student engagement with literary texts and their personal development. Essentially, the personal growth approach is tailored to optimise individual reading satisfaction. Consequently, students are encouraged to actively immerse themselves in the literary content as they peruse, resulting in a more indelible and immersive reading encounter.

Furthermore, the personal growth approach underscores the intrinsic value of literature in stimulating students to tap into their distinct experiences, thoughts, and emotions. This pedagogical framework advances the notion that students are not merely passive recipients of preordained interpretations; they emerge as intellectually and emotionally active participants. By prompting students to articulate their viewpoints and musings, the personal growth approach cultivates an atmosphere conducive to CT and dynamic interaction with literature (Carter & Long, 1991).

The personal growth approach underscores the pivotal role of involving students in literature reading, fostering active participation and nurturing CT. This approach acknowledges the potential of literature to kindle students' connection with their unique experiences, thoughts, and sentiments. Ultimately, the personal growth approach focuses on the educator's responsibility to curate texts that resonate with students' interests and requirements, elevating their engagement and gratification in literature.

7.4 The Integrated Approach

The recognition of a functional convergence among the approaches above is widely acknowledged within the literature. Duff and Maley (1991) underscored the imperative of adopting an integrated instructional paradigm when teaching literature in the EFL classroom. According to their perspective, this integrated approach is defined by three pivotal components:

The linguistic element exposes students to diverse real-world texts, facilitating their familiarity with various forms of English-language discourse.

The methodological component entails the instruction of students in using cognitive frameworks alongside the introduction of intensive and extensive reading strategies grounded in literary discourse.

The motivational aspect harnesses literature's potency to kindle students' latent interest in engaging with literary texts.

Moreover, integrating linguistic and literary facets deepens students' grasp of their own and other cultures. This amalgamation empowers learners to articulate themselves more effectively, augments their familiarity with the lexical and grammatical constructs intrinsic to the English language, and actively contributes to the cultivation of their CT and problem-solving competencies (Duff & Maley, 1991).

The integrated approach harmoniously blends the tutelage of literature with the acquisition of language skills, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, and the four language proficiencies. This holistic method amplifies learners' linguistic dexterity while concurrently nurturing their perceptiveness and comprehension of diverse English-speaking cultures, encompassing the British, American, and others (Stern, 2001).

Similarly, Savvidou (2004) advocated for a novel integrated approach that amalgamates the abovementioned three paradigms. This integrated approach underscores the compelling import of infusing literature into the instructional milieu, as it potently enhances the process of EFL learning. Contrary to pedagogies that exclusively prioritise language acquisition, incorporating literary works injects a dynamic and captivating facet into the learning experience. The integrated approach underscores the augmentation of students' cultural acumen and language prowess while concurrently nurturing their maturation.

In conclusion, an integrated approach to literature instruction within the EFL classroom garners substantial endorsement from scholarly circles. Infusing literary materials into language education enriches students' linguistic proficiency and catalyses their personal and cultural evolution. The tripartite configuration of the integrated approach, comprising linguistic, methodological, and motivational facets, presents a comprehensive scaffold for integrating literature into EFL teaching, ultimately culminating in elevated language aptitude and heightened cultural consciousness among students.

7.5 The Stylistic Approach

The stylistic approach to literary analysis came to the fore during the late 1970s, aiming to augment students' prowess in literature by directing their attention toward the distinct attributes of literary language. Central to this approach is the pivotal role assumed by the teacher, who assumes the responsibility of encouraging students to harness their linguistic acumen for analysing and evaluating texts grounded in their aesthetic qualities. Notably, this approach finds particular resonance in poetry, a genre renowned for its proclivity towards non-grammatical expression, freestyle compositions, and unconventional structural configurations. Furthermore, the discernment of genre-specific nuances remains paramount within this framework. To illustrate, dramatic dialogues often exhibit a pronounced semblance to reality, while poetry frequently traverses the abstract and fanciful realms (Van, 2009).

Within the purview of the stylistic approach, a notable pedagogical outcome is Widdowson's (1983) 'comparative approach' to instructing literature, which hinges on juxtaposing literary texts with diverse textual forms like news articles, travel brochures, or advertisements. This pedagogical strategy imparts to students an understanding of the multifaceted applications of language and underscores the autonomous nature of literary language as a distinct mode of discourse.

Furthermore, the stylistic approach empowers students to fathom registers – the nuanced utilisation of language to convey specific meanings within particular contexts. Through a comparative exploration of the registers employed in literary and non-literary works, students acquire insights into the divergences between the two realms and grasp how language can be artfully tailored to accomplish diverse communicative goals. Ultimately, this approach furnishes students with a profound comprehension of the pliability and malleability of linguistic forms in encapsulating a broad spectrum of human emotions and experiences (Van, 2009).

The stylistic approach to literary analysis emerges as a potent instrument for amplifying students' literary dexterity through its dedicated focus on the intrinsic attributes of literary language. The analysis of texts through this stylistic prism accentuates the malleability and adaptability of language in encapsulating the gamut of human experiences and emotions. This pedagogical approach nurtures a heightened discernment among students as readers and enhances their writing proficiency.

7.6 The Critical Literary Approach

Deeply rooted in critical pedagogy, mainly drawing from the tenets of Freire's critical pedagogy and philosophy, the critical literacy approach emerges as a pedagogical paradigm with a distinct focus. Its objective is to nurture students' critical awareness by instilling the imperative to interrogate and scrutinise information rather than passively accept it as unerring or authentic. A pivotal tenet of this approach resides in recognising that each literary composition harbours an underlying message shaped by social and political influences.

The framework expounded by Maley (1989) elucidates that this approach is centred on the intrinsic literary merits of texts. It encompasses various elements spanning plot intricacies, character evolution, motivations, values, psychological nuances, and historical backdrop. Its implementation presupposes students' attainment of an intermediate proficiency level, signifying that they are operating beyond foundational language skills. Furthermore, students are expected to have acquired a firm grounding in literary conventions, thus enabling them to delve into the subtleties and complexities embedded within the texts.

The core of the critical approach to teaching and learning lies in its endeavour to challenge the uncritical embrace of prevailing beliefs perpetuated through unceasing repetition, thereby becoming entrenched in the existing status quo. With a foundation in critical literacy, this approach aims to equip students with the capacity to discern and comprehend the naturalisation process, unveiling the mechanisms through which the status quo is portrayed as self-evident and immutable (Wallace, 1992).

Moreover, the critical literacy approach aspires to facilitate students' apprehension of the sociopolitical milieus underpinning language acquisition. It allows educators and learners to collaboratively cultivate a discerning perception of how language operates within socio-political dynamics. Through such collaborative efforts, students can deftly employ language to contest and shape social realities, as delineated by Cummins (2000).

In summation, the fundamental objective underpinning the critical literacy approach is to kindle within students an acute sensitivity to the texts they encounter. This approach prompts them to question established norms, recognising the intricate interplay of socio-political forces that influence language usage. Through its multifaceted components, the critical literacy approach engenders a generation of astute readers poised to engage critically with the world around them.

Attitudes: Definitions, Characteristics and Types

The role of attitude in FL acquisition has garnered substantial recognition among researchers. Among the array of social motives, an attitude has emerged as a focal point of inquiry for social psychologists, given its profound implications for steering and moulding social behaviour.

A multitude of definitions concerning attitudes are found within the literature. Allport (1967) furnishes a comprehensive illustration wherein an individual's attitude is characterised as a mental and neurological predisposition influenced by past experiences. This predisposition dynamically guides one's behaviour with diverse objects and situations. Subsequent definitions have expanded upon this foundational framework.

Triandis (1971) articulates attitude as encompassing three constituents: "to think about," "to feel about," and "to behave toward." (p. 2). This tripartite structure delineates attitude's cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. This discourse centres on the cognitive facet, which pertains to an individual's convictions about a social object or phenomenon. While these convictions might arise from fiction, they are perceived as reality by the individual. The multitude of beliefs learners harbour regarding a particular state varies based on their experiences.

The affective dimension of attitude encompasses the learner's emotional response to language, ranging from positive to negative, desirable to undesirable. The behavioural facet of attitude is manifested in the learner's readiness for action toward the object of their attitude. This disposition may manifest directly through their everyday actions or subtly through verbal and nonverbal cues. This facet unveils the learner's perceptions of a particular language (Triandis, 1971).

Gardner's (1985) proposal asserts that learners' success in acquiring a second language is intrinsically tied to their attitudes toward the language. Those harbouring positive attitudes are more likely to excel in learning the target language than those steeped in negativity. In essence, a positive attitude expedites learning and enhances its potential.

Learners' beliefs and opinions influence their response to referents, objects, individuals, and situations. Thus, it is evident that the constructs of "feelings," "beliefs," and "disposition" converge to shape the structure of a learner's attitude.

On the other hand, Ajzen's (1988) conceptualisation defines attitude as the inclination to respond favourably or unfavourably to a specific entity, individual, institution, or event. This definition underscores the evaluative aspect of attitudes and their sway over behavioural responses. Additionally, attitudes are a fusion of thoughts and emotions about objects or events within a social context, spotlighting attitudes' societal role in shaping one's disposition towards others.

These definitions underscore the intricate nature of attitudes, comprising cognitive and affective elements influenced by a spectrum of social, cultural, and contextual forces. Grasping attitudes and their impact on behaviour is imperative for formulating effective strategies to bolster positive attitudes and behaviours while mitigating negative attitudes and their repercussions.

Baker's (1992) proposition labels attitudes as hypothetical constructs capable of steering and prolonging human behaviour. This assertion postulates that attitudes serve as mental constructs shaping human conduct by directing individuals toward specific courses of action and motivating them to pursue goals persistently.

Attitudes bear specific differentiating characteristics when compared to other ideas an individual holds. Firstly, the intensity of an attitude varies and is reflected in the degree of excitement or arousal it triggers toward the object of the attitude, whether positive or negative. Secondly, attitudes exhibit a preferential nature, necessitating varying degrees of alignment or discord with the attitude object to effectively guide behaviour. Thirdly, attitudes indicate differing levels of privacy. They can assume the form of private or public attitudes, with private attitudes emanating from personal experiences and remaining confined to an individual's thoughts. Even when individuals desire to express their attitudes, they might retain them privately.

On the contrary, public attitudes entail shared beliefs among individuals sharing similar inclinations. Furthermore, attitudes can be shared within groups characterised by similar tendencies and evolve due to environmental influences. Fourthly, attitude intensity is another distinguishing feature, with each individual displaying varying levels of fervour or arousal toward the attitude object, indicative of their alignment or discord with it (Gardner, 1985; Baker, 1992; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) propose a three-component model, often called the ABC model, for defining attitudes. According to this model, attitudes encompass affect (feelings), cognition (thoughts), and behaviour (actions). The affective component encapsulates the emotional response reflecting an individual's preference for a particular entity. The behavioural component encompasses verbal expressions or habitual behavioural tendencies an individual demonstrates. Lastly, the cognitive component encompasses the mental evaluation of the entity, representing an individual's beliefs about the object in question. In language teaching, this model reveals that forming teachers' attitudes is a complex process influenced by multiple factors that can vary among individuals and across cultural contexts.

Oppenheim (2000) defines attitude as a state of predisposition or readiness to respond in a particular manner to specific stimuli. When an attitude's object is observed, it is typically manifested through verbal or behavioural expressions. This definition underscores that attitudes are not static but can be shaped by external stimuli and environmental circumstances, resulting in diverse behavioural responses.

In conclusion, attitudes are intricate constructs influenced by diverse factors that can shape behaviour. Grasping the distinctive attributes of attitudes is imperative for comprehending their role in shaping individual conduct and predicting the outcomes of various interventions.

Attitudes Towards Integrating Critical Thinking in Teaching Literature

Attitudes are pivotal in shaping the perception and acquisition of knowledge within the education sector. They encompass a psychological predisposition to evaluate an object with either favour or disfavour, thereby exerting the potential to either facilitate or hinder the learning process (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For instance, students harbouring negative attitudes towards literature may encounter challenges in improving their language proficiency and communication skills. Conversely, integrating literature into classroom instruction can provide authentic contexts for language learning. Extensive research delves into the role of attitude in second language acquisition, affirming that effective teaching strategies and supportive social and classroom environments are imperative in mitigating negative attitudes (Candlin & Mercer, 2001). Thus, educators should comprehend the significance of attitudes in learning and employ strategies fostering positive attitudes toward the learning process.

In the EFL context, the influential impact of attitude emerges as a determinative factor in shaping the trajectory and efficacy of language acquisition. Starks and Paltridge (1996) contribute insightful scholarship, noting that "positive language attitudes enable learners to adopt a favourable disposition toward the acquisition of the English language" (p. 5). Consequently, attitudes assume a consequential role in the language-learning process, either obstructing or facilitating the assimilation of the new language within the learning environment.

In essence, by cultivating an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere, instructors can inspire students to approach literary texts with curiosity and openness, fostering a positive attitude towards reading. Literature, a potent tool for delving into the intricacies of human existence, including the pursuit of happiness, provides a platform for discourse and exploring ideas articulated by authors. The study of literature offers students an authentic context for language learning, facilitating their engagement in reciprocal exchanges of ideas. However, this efficacy is contingent upon active involvement, motivation, and the use of contextually comprehensible language in responses (Krashen, 1999), an approach supported by scholars like Widdowson (1975, 1983) and Tomlinson (2008).

Experts in the field unanimously acknowledge literature's role in language learning, yet the success of this approach hinges on students' attitudes towards it. The learning process can be compromised if learners lack the requisite cognitive and affective language proficiency or fail to cultivate a genuine interest in reading. Consequently, a judicious selection of texts resonating with cultural and emotional sensitivities is imperative, significantly influencing their engagement with the material.

Similarly, the teaching approach adopted by EFL instructors significantly shapes students' attitudes and motivation towards literature. Effective educators employ diverse strategies and techniques that foster an environment conducive to developing positive attitudes towards literature. Facilitating student engagement with literary works involves providing a supportive and inclusive learning milieu, a goal attainable through meticulous planning, preparation, and innovative pedagogical methods that establish a connection between students and the material. Students are receptive to creative teaching techniques but require instructors capable of orchestrating meaningful discussions, nurturing critical analysis, and encouraging written and verbal communication (Gardner, 2001). Hence, instructors' pedagogical approach is critical to fostering positive attitudes toward literature courses.

Scholars with extensive experience in English language and literature instruction, spanning over two decades, including Widdowson (1975, 1983), Heath (1986), Duff and Maley (1991), and Lazar (1993), consider literature an indispensable tool for language learning. The material must align with learners' cultural and emotional inclinations to foster a favourable attitude towards literature, enhancing engagement and contributing to a more profound language learning experience.

In conclusion, comprehending their significance in language learning is imperative, given the paramount importance of attitudes. Negative attitudes toward subjects such as literature can impede students' capacity to learn and interact with the material. Therefore, educators should acknowledge students' attitudes and cultivate positive attitudes towards literary texts.

METHODOLOGY

10.1 The Experimental Design

The current study utilised a quasi-experimental design, specifically a control-experimental pretest–posttest design, to evaluate the effect of the intervention. In this design, only the Experimental Group (EG) followed the critical thinking-based approach, while the Control Group (CG) was taught using the currently used literature-teaching approach.

10.2 Sample of the Research

The investigation concentrated on senior-level students enrolled in the College of Arts within the English Department at the University of Mosul during the academic session of 2022-2023. Employing a quasi-experimental design characterised by non-random assignment, the study's principal objective was establishing a causal link between independent and dependent variables within the educational domain. Subsequently, a cohort of 60 university students pursuing EFL was meticulously chosen, and this sample was evenly divided into two distinct groups. One group, the experimental group, underwent instruction grounded in a critical thinking-based approach, while the second group, designated as the control group, adhered to conventional pedagogical methodologies currently prevalent in practice.

10.3 Research Instruments

10.3.1 The Attitudes Questionnaire

In order to assess potential shifts in participants' attitudes consequent to adopting a critical thinking-based pedagogical approach in the teaching of literature, a comprehensive questionnaire was administered to measure their attitudes before and after the instructional intervention. In the meantime, a notable challenge was the search for an existing measurement scale that could effectively capture attitudes pertinent to the study of English literature. Following consultation with experienced English literature educators, the decision was made to develop a tailored questionnaire designed explicitly to gauge attitudes in a pertinent

and fitting manner. To this end, the Likert scale was selected, presenting a series of statements related to the subject under consideration and prompting respondents to indicate their level of agreement on a spectrum ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.'

The adoption of the Likert scale was predicated upon its capacity to offer a straightforward and efficient avenue for participants to articulate their viewpoints concerning the subject matter. Additionally, it is a relatively expeditious and uncomplicated instrument to construct. The questionnaire encompassed various facets of CT while studying English literature. It is noteworthy to emphasise that the questionnaire was not designed as an evaluative test but rather as a tool for exploring students' attitudes towards the study of literature both before and after their exposure to the experimental conditions. The data from these questionnaires subsequently served as the foundation for the ensuing data analysis.

The data scoring process utilised the Likert five-point scale. This scale entails assigning numerical values to each response option ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree,' thereby quantifying participants' attitudes toward the research subject.

10.3.1.1 Pre-questionnaire

The pre-questionnaire was administered to the students before the commencement of the experimental phase with the following objectives in mind:

To discern the prevailing attitudes of the students towards English literature, informed by their prior experiences in a college setting.

To elucidate the students' perspectives concerning integrating literature as a tool for cultivating CT.

Before its administration, the students were provided with a comprehensive briefing regarding the purpose and structure of the questionnaire. On average, each participant required approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

10.3.1.2 Post-questionnaire

After the intervention, the identical questionnaire was again administered to assess potential shifts in students' attitudes towards English literature. A comparative analysis was conducted by juxtaposing the scores derived from the questionnaire distribution before and after the experimental phase, thereby facilitating an evaluation of the disparities between the two groups.

10.3.2 Constructing the Items

The questionnaire items were meticulously crafted to align with the theoretical conceptualisation of attitudes. They were thoughtfully designed to encompass various dimensions related to the curriculum, the instructor, and the educational materials employed within the context of the English literature course. Furthermore, the researcher took into account the cognitive abilities and intellectual capacities of senior-level students while also aligning the questionnaire with the overarching objectives of the study and the distinctive attributes of the population under investigation.

In order to determine the congruence of the questionnaire with the theoretical construct of attitudes and its suitability for the intended target population, a systematic method was employed to formulate a tool capable of yielding data characterised by validity and reliability. This methodological approach aligns with established principles of questionnaire design, which highlight the significance of crafting instruments specifically tailored to the research context and the target population's characteristics.

10.3.3 Validity of the Questionnaire

Validity, a fundamental concept in research methodology, refers to the degree to which an instrument adeptly captures the intended construct, as validated by expert assessments (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Ensuring the appropriateness of research instruments is paramount as it underpins the capacity of researchers to derive accurate and meaningful conclusions from the acquired data.

To establish the face validity of the instrument, experts in the fields of education and psychology were convened. Their mandate encompassed evaluating, potentially deleting, and refining the questionnaire's items. Notably, no items were deemed necessary for removal; however, minor adjustments were judiciously implemented in response to the constructive feedback provided by these expert panels. This meticulous process served to fortify the questionnaire's alignment with the intended construct and its aptness for the study's target population.

10.3.4 Piloting the Questionnaire

Conducting a pilot study on a questionnaire serves several pivotal purposes, enhancing its reliability, validity, and practicality. This rigorous approach extends to evaluating every facet of the questionnaire, including aspects as seemingly minor as the typeface and paper quality, following the guidance of Oppenheim (2000).

A pilot study was meticulously executed to validate the questionnaire's efficacy involving ten students and two educators who were not part of the main sample. Their primary task was completing the questionnaire and providing feedback concerning its content and structure, contributing valuable insights into its face validity. Then, a distinct group of senior students, separate from the initial cohort, was randomly selected from the research population. The questionnaire was administered to 100 students from the College of Education, Department of English, University of Mosul. This administration aimed to evaluate the questionnaire's overall clarity, the comprehensibility of instructions and items, the discrimination index, and the time required for its completion. Notably, participants were allotted 25 minutes to respond to the questionnaire.

The principle aims of the pilot study was to identify and rectify any potential issues with the questionnaire, ensuring that both instructions and questions were unambiguous and readily comprehensible to students and educators alike. In light of the feedback from this exercise, minor refinements were introduced to certain items to enhance comprehension for both respondent groups.

10.3.5 Attitude Questionnaire Coefficient Reliability

The Alpha-Cronbach Coefficient Formula was employed to ascertain the scale's reliability and internal consistency. This statistical formula offers valuable insights into how all the items within the scale exhibit positive intercorrelations and collectively function to measure a specific trait or characteristic, which, in this context, pertains to attitudes (Ary et al., 2010).

The analytical outcomes yielded a compelling result, with the scale demonstrating a high level of consistency, as indicated by a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.91. This coefficient signifies that the items comprising the scale exhibited positive intercorrelations and effectively cooperated to gauge attitudes uniformly and coherently. Consequently, it can be confidently asserted that the scale is reliable and internally consistent in measuring attitudes.

10.3.6 The Discrimination Index of Items

Within the realm of educational measurement, the term "discrimination index" ascribes to the extent to which each item within an assessment is capable of effectively distinguishing between respondents, much akin to how the overall score serves to discriminate (Ary et al., 2010). To ascertain the discrimination index of the items in this study, the subsequent steps were methodically employed:

The cumulative score for each participant was computed based on their responses to the questionnaire.

Subsequently, the total scores amassed by the sample of 100 respondents were meticulously arranged in descending order, spanning from the highest to the lowest scores.

The Upper and Lower groups were then identified by selecting the initial 27% of respondents with the highest scores as the Upper Group and the initial 27% with the lowest scores as the Lower Group. This particular ratio was chosen to optimise the size of the groups and maximise discrimination potential.

A two-sample t-test was subsequently conducted to evaluate any significant disparities between the Upper and Lower Groups concerning each scale item. The resultant calculated t-value served as a crucial indicator of each item's discriminatory capacity and was juxtaposed with the tabulated t-value. This rigorous analytical process was undertaken to confirm that each item incorporated within the scale consistently and effectively differentiated between high-scoring and low-scoring individuals, thereby furnishing substantial evidence supporting the instrument's discriminant validity.

10.4 The Experiment Application

The current study began with a meticulous sample selection process, which emphasised ensuring congruence between the experimental and control groups across various relevant variables. Following this crucial step, a diligent effort was made to meticulously design research instruments and lesson plans for both groups, thus ensuring a rigorous methodological approach.

10.4.1 The Course Materials

The materials for the course were carefully selected. They included two poems: “Mother to Son” and “The Dream Keeper” by Langston Hughes, and two short stories: “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe and “Charles” by Shirley Jackson. The materials were selected after a thorough consultation with English literature teachers, and the specific texts were chosen for their literary and educational value. Each text was carefully selected to promote the participants’ CT when dealing with literary texts.

10.5 Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

This section presents the analysed outcomes of the collected data within the experimental design. Initial descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were computed for both the EG and CG, offering an initial understanding of data distribution. Subsequent paired t-tests were conducted within each group to compare pretest and posttest mean scores, revealing potential changes in performance over the study period. Unpaired t-tests then compared the posttest results between the experimental and control groups, evaluating the impact of a critical thinking-based approach on students’ attitudes towards studying English literature.

10.5.1 The First Null Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that:

“There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the EG students who study literature according to the critical thinking-based approach and the scores of the CG students who study the same subject according to the currently-used method in the posttest of attitudes.”

The hypothesis currently subject to examination concerns the mean scores exhibited by both the EG and the CG on the posttest attitudes scale.

Table (1): Comparative Analysis of Attitudinal Development: T-test Results between Control and Experimental Groups

Group	No.	Mean	SD	‘t’ Value	
				Computed	Tabulated
EG	30	28.1796	3.68247	21.527	1.982
CG	30	4.1440	4.88252		

** Significant at ≤ 0.05 level under (58) degree of freedom*

The data presented in the table above shows that the computed t-value reads (21.527) under (58) degrees of freedom at (0.05) level of significance, while the tabulated t-value under the same degree of freedom and at

the same level of significance was (1.982), a case which indicates that the difference is in favour of the EG. Consequently, the first null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative is accepted. This outcome signifies a statistically significant differentiation between the EG and CG about enhancing students' positive attitudes. The findings denote a perceptible positive shift in students' attitudes towards studying English literature after exposure to the critical thinking-based approach. There is now a heightened level of confidence among students regarding the effectiveness of this method or intervention in reshaping their approach to engaging with literary texts.

10.5.2 The Second Null Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that:

“There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the EG students who study literature according to the critical thinking-based approach in their attitudes before and after the intervention.”

The hypothesis under consideration focuses on the mean scores of the EG on the attitudes scale, explicitly comparing the scores between the pretest and the posttest. The following table comprehensively depicts the results obtained in this regard.

Table (2): Comparative Analysis of Attitudinal Development: T-test Results between Pre- and Posttests in the Experimental Group

Test	No.	Mean	SD	‘t’ Value	
				Computed	Tabulated
Pretest	30	61.2415	4.37515	28.342	2.045
Posttest		89.4211	3.24281		

** Significant at ≤ 0.05 level under (29) degrees of freedom*

Upon careful examination of the preceding table, it becomes evident that the computed t-value reads (28.342) under (58) degrees of freedom at (0.05) level of significance. In contrast, the tabulated t-value under the same degree of freedom and at the same significance level was (2.045), indicating that the difference favours the EG. Consequently, the second null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative is accepted.

The obtained result demonstrates a statistically significant improvement in students' attitudes towards studying English literature, as evident in the EG posttest results. During the experiment, students of the EG were exposed to and actively engaged in CT tasks in their literary analysis activities. This immersive exposure allowed them to discern these strategies' inherent advantages and transformative capabilities. As a direct consequence of this immersive experience, their attitudes underwent a conspicuous and positive metamorphosis, a discernible transformation that is substantiated by the quantitative data collected from the study.

Discussion

The insights derived from (Table 1) shed light on the positive effect of adopting a critical-thinking-based approach, emphasising its advantages over conventional instructional methods. The data compellingly underscores this point by revealing the notably superior performance of the EG, thereby lending strong support to the argument that the integration of CT can significantly enhance students' abilities in analysing and interpreting English literature. These findings hold substantial implications for educators and curriculum designers, advocating for the deliberate inclusion of CT as a potent pedagogical tool in the teaching of literature.

Concurrently, (Table 2) provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of the intervention methods utilised, particularly the CT-based approach. The data unveils a significant disparity in fostering positive attitudes between the EG and CG. Importantly, these results highlight a substantial difference in cultivating attitudes favouring the EG.

These findings accentuate the effectiveness of integrating CT in shaping students' attitudes toward the learning process. This suggests that the infusion of CT exerts a meaningful and positive influence on students' perspectives on the instructional approach.

As supported by the data, the critical thinking-based approach induces a favourable shift in students' attitudes, indicative of increased confidence and belief in the effectiveness of this approach when engaging with literary materials. The perceived effectiveness of CT is likely to inspire students to approach literature with a more critical and analytical outlook, ultimately enhancing their comprehension and interpretation skills.

Finally, the statistically significant outcomes underscore the effectiveness and educational significance of CT in exploring literary texts. The study's robust design and rigorous data analysis methods instil confidence in these findings. These results undeniably bolster the argument that students' attitudes undergo a profound and positive transformation in response to the deliberate incorporation of CT.

CONCLUSIONS

Incorporating a pedagogical framework grounded in CT principles within English literature instruction positively influenced students' attitudes towards literature study. Active participation in CT activities fosters an environment wherein students are prompted to examine diverse viewpoints, cultivate a heightened comprehension of literary compositions, and recognise the significance of analytical scrutiny. This immersive engagement creates a more rewarding and intellectually invigorating educational journey, thereby cultivating a constructive disposition among students regarding their pursuit of English literature studies.

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