Teacher Perceptions on Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Academic English Module

Abstract: The current study explores the perceptions of a group of Academic English (AE) lecturers on their views on critical thinking in teaching English for academic purposes and the ways they believe this can be developed, if at all. The findings suggest that the majority of teachers believe in the importance of touching upon critical thinking in their classes. They consider evaluating information, analyzing, logical reasoning, arguing, reflecting, and problem solving are among the main strategies needed for developing critical thinking skills and believe that that they can be developed in the academic English language classes. The results of the second survey (second stage) showed that AE teachers believe Academic English should be responsible for incorporating critical thinking into their teaching. The main activities perceived to be effective were debates, class discussions, evaluating presentations, listening for main ideas and details, reading for the main idea and evaluation of sources, writing argumentative essays, academic reports and reflection.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern higher education in many parts of the world demands that the development of critical thinking skills be included in the curriculum (Paul and Elder 2000, cited in Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 191). As it is emphasized by Cohen et al. (2004, 172), Fry et al. (2008, 394) and Biggs and Tang (2011, 10), an essential aim of higher education is to help students develop their critical thinking because employers expect possession of sound critical thinking skills by their employees. Being a transferrable skill, critical thinking helps students survive in academic environments, be more active and autonomous learners, and thus be better able to comprehend and apply knowledge in a complex society (Liaw 2007, 47; Dwee et al. 2011, 632; Gunawerdana and Petraki 2014, 70 ; Gbenakpon 2017, 750). In addition and more specifically, critical thinking skills have been recognized as skills that help learners improve their language learning skills (Chapple and Curtis 2000, cited in Liaw 2007, 56). Since 1991 when the Republic of Uzbekistan became independent, the country has paid considerable attention to the fundamental reorganization and modernization of the educational system. The law adopted "On education" (1997, 45), the "National Programme of Personnel Training" (1997) and Presidential Decree "On measures to further improve foreign language learning system" (2012) targeted at implementing new approaches in the educational system, creating opportunities for learning and teaching foreign languages and upbringing knowledgeable, effectively developed and professionally skilled young generation of people who can comprehend, analyse and find solutions to modern issues. These education reforms have led to establishment of new international higher education institutions with instruction in English.

One of such institutions is Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) which was established in 2002. Within 17 years the student population has grown to over 3,000
and is predicted to increase in the future. While the university offers a wide range of opportunities for students to receive solid education, students are required to adjust to academic environment where they are expected to be active and autonomous. The learning process at the university is based on British system of education which is different from the education system at local secondary schools where still much of the focus is placed on rote learning, memorization, and orientation on exams. Most of the newly enrolled students come from the local schools, and while they might enjoy the rich social life at the university, many of them struggle to adjust academically not having the necessary critical thinking skills. Often in English – medium institutions students struggle to apply them due to their education background, culture and beliefs (Halx and Reybold 2005, 307; Gunawerdana and Petraki 2014, 67; Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 193). Consequently, prior education background, passive behavior, and lack of autonomy contribute to making the novel learning environment even more challenging. This negative backwash effect has its own impact as students enter the university with different language proficiency.

Shaheen (2016, 21) suggests students can face difficulties in adjusting to the new system which provides educational experience significantly different from their previous one. In this sense, students might be challenged by the academic requirement to use critical thinking in their studies. In this context, perceptions of lecturers about development of critical thinking skills and their teaching strategies make a difference in the lives of these students (Halx and Reybold 2005, 309; Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 198). Although not all research studies revealed that ESL teachers agree critical thinking should be an integral part of their teaching (Atkinson 1997, cited in Zhao, Pandian and Singh 2016, 14; Dwee et al. 2016, 633), AE lecturers, to the greater extent, agree that incorporating critical thinking into their teaching helps students improve their language skills and become better learners (Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 772; Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 198).

Academic English (AE) module is a core module students at WIUT take in their first year. It is a yearlong module that aims at helping students

become more proficient in using English for academic purposes. We believe AE is a pertinent

venue to help students develop critical thinking skills to facilitate their learning as different research studies have recognized AE as a suitable context for attaining critical thinking skills along with helping students enhance their language learning (Paton 2011; Thompson 1999, cited in Gunawardena and Petraki 2014, 65; Shaheen 2016, 24; Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 198). In fact, the ability to think critically is crucial for Academic English courses in higher education establishments where all subjects are taught in English to students whose first language is not English. One of the reasons is assessment tasks and the whole educational process demand having higher-order thinking skills. Yet, it is important to study the perceptions of other lecturers in the module to obtain a more objective picture.

While it is difficult to measure how critical thinking skills influence language learning, it is evident that not encouraging students to think critically in and outside the classroom could create barriers in effective language acquisition. The reason is lack of opportunities to think creatively and critically in the classroom can hinder language proficiency of a learner (Masduqi 2011, cited in Dwee et al. 2016, 633; Gbenakpon 2017, 752; Kabilan 2000, cited in Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 194) and a teacher should be accountable for helping students improve such thinking skills (Stefanova, Bobkina and Sanchez-Verdejo 2011, cited in Gbenakpon 2017, 757; Lipman 2003, cited in Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 194). Nonetheless, teachers might face different obstacles and use varying activities to help students develop such skills. It is clear that the role of an ESL teacher in developing critical thinking skills in students is significant (Rezaei, Derakhshand, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 772; Gbenakpon 2017, 757).

Consequently, studying their perceptions can reveal their attitudes to teaching critical thinking, issues they face and strategies they use in this respect. We decided to undertake a similar study at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) for several reasons. The current paper examines

language teachers' views today of teaching critical thinking since as Choy and Oo (2012, 168) enunciate, their perceptions can impact their teaching

practices. The study also contemplates problematic areas of students' use of critical thinking in the classroom and singles out the main challenges to be considered by teachers while integrating definite activities. Besides, it looks at teaching practices of lecturers and the ways they use to promote critical thinking skills in the English language classrooms. The significance of the current study is included in exploring the challenges to be addressed by teachers and the most effective means to enhance students' critical thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINITION OF CRITICAL THINKING

To conduct our study, we reviewed a wide array of definitions of critical thinking to see what researchers understand under this concept and be able to select the one most suitable to our context. There is no one consistent definition of critical thinking, but the one commonly accepted by experts is "purposeful, self-regulatory judgement which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgement is based" (Facione 1990, 2, cited in Zhao, Pandian and Singh 2016, 15). Another insightful definition was provided by Dwee et al. (2016, 633) who described critical thinking as an ability of learners to grasp ideas through self-reflection upon how one learns and discovery of solutions to an issue based on viewpoints from various angles.

These definitions of critical thinking relate to our context as many ongoing and assessment tasks at WIUT require students to use critical thinking skills such as analytical reading, argumentative writing, focused discussions, comprehension, questioning and inferencing. The definitions above indicate that critical thinking has complex nature, and this

strengthens our support of the argument that critical thinking needs learning and teachers can lead students to improve their critical thinking (Rezaei, Derakhshand and Bagherkazemi 2011, 771). ESL can, thus, be one of the areas where this learning could be provided.

LINK BETWEEN CRITICAL THINKING (CT) AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Studies have confirmed that critical thinking skills can be effectively taught through teaching in EFL classroom (Davidson 1994, 1995; Chapple and Curtis 2000, cited in Liaw 2007, 75). Critical thinking skills teaching in ESL was emphasized by Masduqi (2011) who believes they help students become more competent in language learning, and Shirkhani and Fahim (2011) who suggested that critical thinking reinforces autonomous learning (cited in Dwee et al. 2016, 633). According to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in the U.K. (2001-2002), activities that encourage reflective thinking as well as language learning should be an integral part of the contemporary second language education. Having no exposure to practicing critical thinking skills, L2 learners of English might be deprived of the chances to do well academically, be successful in today's job market, and become active participants in the global society (cited in Liaw 2007, 47).

LINK BETWEEN AE AND CRITICAL THINKING

A number of linguists and researchers in the area of English language teaching investigated the relationship between critical thinking and Academic English in different higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, United Kingdom (UK), Russia and Malaysia using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study conducted by Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198) revealed the significance of critical thinking in Academic English language teaching and found it beneficial for students. They consider the development of critical thinking in teaching reading, writing, speaking and listening in the English language classroom to be

effective. Development of learners' critical thinking can be achieved in an "integrated context, rather than in separate skills" (Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 200). In correspondence with Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 200), Shaheen (2016, 24) emphasizes the close link between AE and critical thinking. He believes that developing students' abilities to write, read and discuss in good Academic English helps to improve

critical thinking. However, Masduqi (2011) after conducting extensive research, came to conclusion that critical thinking skills should be incorporated in the English language teaching to improve language skills (cited in Dwee et al. 2016, 633). Liaw (2007, 51) emphasized the need to assist students in improving critical thinking skills while learning English. Moreover, Vdovina (2013, 57) states that critical thinking introduction in teaching Academic English is essential, as today the use of English as the language of instruction in higher education institutions is widespread. She proposes that involving students in the interactive activities targeted at learning English and developing critical thinking can enhance their self-consciousness, dispositions and skills of analysing, problem-solving and decision making. Brown (2004) agrees that for teaching AE "the objectives of a curriculum are not limited to linguistic factors alone, but also include developing the art of critical thinking" (25). Based on the statements above, considerably close link between AE and critical thinking can be observed and their interrelation with each other can be shown to indicate that, in this context, language skills enhancement cannot be achieved without critical thinking teaching and vice versa. Since there is still inconsistency in views of researchers whether critical thinking skills should be an important part of second language teaching, it is significant to examine this issue in new contexts, and WIUT is one of them.

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS' OF CRITICAL THINKING

AE TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN THEIR CLASSROOM

Critical thinking skills are incorporated into educational programs and instruction of various Academic English programs around the globe. According to research, a large population of teachers, instructors and linguists believe that it is important to develop critical thinking in Academic English classroom and indicate that a number of activities can be implemented through reading, listening, speaking and writing (Brown 2004, 25; Fry et al. 2008, 395; Vaseghi 2012, 401; Vdovina 2013, 59; Hasni et al. 2018, 510; Tuzlukova 2018, 200). The validity of

developing critical thinking skills along with improvement in language learning in AE has been acknowledged by AE researchers and practitioners (Paton 2011; Thompson 1999, cited in Gunawerdana and Petraki 2014, p65). Academic English specialists stress that students should be competent in the English language and able to differentiate cause and effect, categorization, description, comparison and contrast language patterns. Ability to scan, skim, and apply linguistic principles in academically and professionally - oriented fields of study are among other skills promoted in Academic English (Gunawerdana and Petraki 2014).

Gunawardena and Petraki (2014) found that language teachers in Sri-Lanka think of critical thinking as a process with stages where learning material is comprehended and analyzed, reflected upon and argued about. The results of the study conducted by Hasni et al. (2018, 510) indicate that English instructors believe that it is crucial to teach students how to develop criticality so that they will become independent learners and possess problem-solving and decision making skills. Masduqi (2011) notes that a number of English Language Teaching experts emphasise that development of critical thinking in relation to language learning makes students competent in English language (cited in Dwee et al. 2016, p633). However, as Dwee et al. (2016, 634) claim, it depends on how teacher approaches criticality.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES FACED BY AE TEACHERS

Nevertheless, the integration of critical thinking cannot always be an easy process. One of the reasons for having such difficulties is students' education background. For example, Dwee et al. (2016, 634) found that Malaysian lecturers believe students do not possess critical thinking skills as they are not actively involved in the classroom activities and are used to accepting ideas without questioning them. This was earlier found by Choy and Cheah (2009, cited in Dwee et al. 2016, 633). Such passive behavior is attributed by Dwee et al. (2016, 634) to factors such as teacher-centeredness of the classes,

system oriented on exam, and culture of spoon-feeding. Gunawardena and Petraki (2014, 71) identified that teachers perceived learning based on repetition and memorization and assessment tasks, targeted at performance, lead students to have no exposure to inquire, critique, or infer during the learning process. Another argument is that students can struggle to think critically due to lack of language proficiency (Kumaravadivelu 2003, cited in Gunawardena and Petraki 2014, 72). They (2014) concluded that comprehension, being crucial to critical thinking, creates the greatest obstacle for AE learners as their ability to process information depends on it. Moreover, according to Aliakbari and Sadeghdahighi (2012), teachers face challenges in embedding critical thinking because "students themselves constituted the constraints in improving their thinking skills in various ways" (2). They state that these constraints are lack of time due to curriculum overload and students' preferences of easy assignments. However, besides those issues, language teachers report on lack of time for designing and developing critical thinking activities as a barrier for teaching success. Choy and Cheah (2009), in a Malaysian context, revealed that due to teachers' lack of understanding of how to develop tools for fostering criticality, they find its integration difficult (198).

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WAYS TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Vaseghi et al. (2012, 404) and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198), in their work, highlight the benefits of implementing critical thinking in teaching students as it encourages active learning placing focus on how to think rather than what to think. They assert that this type of thinking should be promoted through four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The most favourable methods for embedding criticality in the English classroom, as teachers think, are workshops, practical ideas, more examples and collaborative discussions. Especially, as Lipman (2003) suggests, activities focusing on problem-solving and decision – making stimulate their critical thinking. He believes that it is a teacher's responsibility to integrate these activities to expose students to argumentation, analysis and resolution of questions and problems (cited in Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 194).

Moreover, the results obtained by Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198) demonstrate teaching activities with focus on analyzing, making inferences and evaluating in teaching through reading can be effective to promote critical thinking. As reading is mostly used as one of teaching strategies in the English language classroom, Vaseghi et al. (2012, 408) highlight the importance of critical reading in fostering critical thinking. This corresponds to the view expressed by Elder and Paul (2004) who emphasize the significance of asking questions in the process of reading (cited in Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 72). Moreover, Zhao, Pandian and Singh (2016, 16) articulate the strategies related to reading such as identifying and summarising the main idea, underlining and evaluating key claims and reasons, and judging evidence and sources. However, critical writing, critical listening and discussions also stimulate students to go beyond the material by analyzing, assessing, synthesizing and reflecting.

Writing is another process which can assist learners in developing critical thinking (Elder and Paul 2005, cited in Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 772). Specifically, Johnston et al. (2011, 129) accentuated the value of academic writing in developing argumentation and personal reaction. Furthermore, in their study they found that lecturers believe feedback on students' written work, analysis and discussion contribute immensely to criticality. Shaheen's (2016, 27) study findings specify incorporating activities which help students have a clear line of argument, act upon feedback effectively and reflect can promote critical thinking. On the contrary, Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 199) after conducting research among AE teachers, consider writing analytical essay to be effective. Nonetheless, Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi, (2011, 775) after an in-depth study of sources on critical thinking and Dwee et al. (2016) in their study, recommended to use different forms of reflection to facilitate development of critical thinking among students. Incorporating activities to teach listening in the classroom through questioning, recognizing bias and reflection can enable learners to develop critical thinking skills (Dwee et al. 2016, 636 and Johnston et al. 2011, 127). However, Tuzlukova et al. (2018) in their study identified the evaluation of the credibility of an argument to be the most effective (200). They continue that the skill of evaluating the information is essential in teaching listening, and agree with Dwee et al. (2016, 636) and Johnston et al. (2011, 208) in terms of incorporating the activity of reflecting to develop students' critical thinking skills. Special focus is placed on the language skill of speaking and its active use in the classroom. When students are exposed to thinking over a thought-provoking question, discussing it in groups and sharing the answers through clear explanations, the higher-order reasoning skills, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation are activated and developed (Yuretich 2004, cited in Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 773). Besides discussions, engaging students in debates are considered to be as an essential aid to critical thinking, allowing them to think critically about strengths and weaknesses of any argument (Barnet and Bedau 2012, 463; Tuzlukova et al. 2018, 199). Shaheen (2016, 29).

emphasises the use of pair discussions can move students towards critical thinking, while Dwee et al. (2016, 635) consider brainstorming in small groups

can be integrated as one of the ways for lecturers to help students develop critical thinking skills. The acquisition and development of critical thinking among students require much work and practice. As Browne and Keeley (2007) underline, critical thinking cannot be developed simply through instructions on what to do or observations (12). Students need to practice, and certainly the practice will be both rewarding and laborious.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our research questions were:

Stage 1:
- Should critical thinking be incorporated into Academic English module?
  - Sub-question:
- If yes, what critical thinking skills should be taught in Academic English module?

Stage 2
- How do AE teachers at WIUT perceive the development of critical thinking?
- What challenges do they face while integrating it in the classroom?
- What strategies do AE teachers employ to foster critical thinking?

METHODS

The current research involves two stages of data collection. The research tool used was online survey conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019 when 17 Academic English lecturers were asked to provide their anonymous responses. The purpose of the research at the first stage was to find out whether the lecturers believe critical thinking should be incorporated into AE module. Another question the teachers were asked was about the types of skills the lecturers think should be taught in this module to improve the students' critical
- One more question that the teachers were inquired about was if they believed the activities they used in the classroom were

Developing critical thinking requires time, practice and patience. Therefore, it is important to teach students how to develop criticality at foundation level (the first year of their study). The issue we focus on in our research is that students are unable to demonstrate sound critical thinking in completing tasks and course works due to their prior knowledge and experience. Before coming to a new education institution, they were exposed to passive learning and memorization. Certainly, at the beginning they experience difficulties in adapting to new academic environment. In addition, culture has an immense effect on students' perception of critical thinking.

thinking. The second stage of data collection was at the end of the second semester, the end of the academic year.

This time the same lecturers (but only 14 were available) were asked to provide more detailed responses to explore what challenges students in Academic English module face in using critical thinking skills and activities lecturers use in the module to help them develop the skills. This was an extension of the previous survey conducted in the fall of 2018. More specifically, the AE lecturers (their experience in teaching the module ranges from 2 to 9 years) were asked to reflect on a number of questions including:
- Their perceptions about the possibility and importance of teaching critical thinking through AE module;
- What difficulties they encounter in their teaching;
- What activities incorporating critical thinking skills they used in their classroom. The four major language skills we focused on in our survey were: speaking, listening, reading and writing;

  effective in developing students' critical thinking skills.

The request to the teachers to fill in the questionnaire was sent through e-mail well in advance to ensure the lecturers were available to respond to the questions. It was vital to collect the responses at the end of the academic year when the teachers had just finished teaching the module, and thus were able to provide more authentic data for our research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the first survey reflect the teachers' perceptions on whether critical thinking should be incorporated into Academic English, reasons for it and activities that should be taught in the module. All the respondents, except one who was hesitant, agreed that critical thinking should be a part of the module. Moreover, the most common response was that critical thinking should be embedded across different modules in undergraduate education. This finding is consistent with the argument by Halx and Reybold (2005, 293) that helping undergraduate students improve their ability to think critically is crucial who

also state critical thinking is frequently acknowledged and promoted by university instructors in their teaching practices. Another interesting finding was that using critical thinking in the classroom can help student improve their skills in evaluating, selecting, analysing and synthesizing information. They think activities integration of critical thinking enables students to better cope with writing and other assessment tasks and thus produce argumentative and logical ideas both in oral and written form. When asked what specific critical thinking skills students need to develop, most teachers chose evaluation of information (85,7%), analysing, logical reasoning and arguing (all 71.4%). Reflecting and problem solving (57,1% each) was another significant finding. The findings suggest that the teachers agree, to the most extent, on what critical thinking skills they should teach in their module.

The obtained results demonstrate teachers' beliefs on whether critical thinking can be incorporated into

language teaching and how it can be achieved. There were 13 participants (94%) who believe critical thinking can be taught, whereas only one teacher thinks negatively. This illustrates that the majority of teachers believe that incorporation of critical thinking is achievable. Another question on whether critical thinking should be taught was asked intentionally to find out what teachers think about it. Findings indicate all of them believe that critical thinking should be taught except one participant who considers it as probable. The majority of respondents agree that critical thinking should be taught in English language teaching and it should be done despite their language proficiency level. This corresponds to the view of Chapple and Curtis (2000, cited in Liaw 2007, 56), Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi (2011, 772), and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198), who consider the importance of

teaching critical thinking in their studies. They accentuate teaching critical thinking is crucial and teachers should incorporate different activities to assist their students to become effective critical thinkers. Subsequently, a question was asked to determine whether the module should take responsibility to help students improve their critical thinking skills. The findings revealed that most of respondents believe critical thinking must be embedded in AE, and the module should be responsible for that. On the other hand, 3 participants consider that it should not take the full responsibility.

Critical thinking has to be taught throughout the curriculum and be the focus of other subjects. Similar viewpoint was expressed by Brown (2004), Vdovina (2013, 57), Shaheen (2016, 24) and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 192). They state there is a close link between AE and critical thinking development and their mutual incorporation in the classroom can enable students to advance in modern competitive world.
One of the important points was to identify the challenges the majority of their students usually have in using critical thinking skills in AE module. As Table 1. displays, most respondents determine the skill of "reading critically" as the most challenging

for students. Besides, 71.4% responded reflection and presentation of arguments cause difficulties among students. 64.3% of the teachers indicate evaluation of sources and learning from feedback are problematic for their students.

Table 1. Challenges in using CTS by Academic English lecturers

Challenge	Percentage
Reading critically	92.9%
Reflection	71.4%
Presenting arguments	71.4%
Evaluation of sources	64.3%
Learning from feedback	64.3%
Formulating question(s) for research (basic)	57.1%
Making inferences	50%
Expressing their opinions in writing	50%
Making a general idea more specific	35.7%
Assessing ideas	35.7%
Persuasion	35.7%
Distinguishing between opinions and facts	28.6%
None	7.1%
Other	7.1%
I do not know	0%

The list of options including activities was provided to let teachers choose which of them they assign for speaking. This enabled us to explore the activities they find as highly promoting critical thinking. 71.4% of the participants consider "question and answer" to be the most effective for developing critical thinking in AE (Table 2). Moreover, debates, oral presentation (both individual and group) and class discussions are also recommended as efficient ways for fostering criticality in teaching speaking at 64.3% respectively. Half of the respondents believe "justification of opinions" is also effective to promote critical thinking. However, interview and case studies are shown as the least effective for use in the classroom.

Table 2. Speaking activities used by the Academic English lecturer

Activity	Percentage
Question and answer	71.40%
Debates	64.30%
Presentations (both individual and group)	64.30%
Class discussions	64.30%
Justification of opinions	50%
Evaluation of opinions	43%
Reflective interactions	28.60%
Round-table discussion	21.40%
Persuasive speech	21.40%
All of them	14.30%
Interviews	7.10%
Case studies	7.10%
Other	7.10%
None	0.00%

The use of "question and answer" and its impact on developing criticality is highlighted by Elder and Paul (2003, cited in Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi 2011, 773), and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 199). They stress employing questions is an important part of teaching critical thinking and must become a necessary component of learning process. In terms of debates and class discussions, Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi, (2011, 775), Barnet and Bedau (2012, 463), Shaheen (2016, 29) and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 199) emphasise they can inspire learners to critically discuss upon versatile and controversial topics enthusiastically.

Our findings also showed how important it is to involve students in debates and discussions to create a meaningful and productive education of critical thinking. The next table (table 3.) refers to developing critical thinking among students in teaching listening in the AE classroom.

Table 3. Listening activities used by Academic English lecturer.

Activity	Percentage
All of them	38.50%
Listening for facts	23.10%
Evaluating presentations	15.40%
Listening for main idea and details	15.40%
Other: most of the options listed above	7.70%
Critical listening (listening for concepts and ideas; organizing what you hear; evaluating)	0.00%
Inferencing from listening	0.00%
Critical questioning	0.00%
Listening for opinions	0.00%
Recognizing bias	0.00%
Evaluating credibility of an argument or opinion	0.00%
Reflecting	0.00%
Summarizing	0.00%
None	0.00%

Interestingly, the most part of respondents (38.5%) chose an option "all of them" which indicates that all activities can be considered as effective to develop critical thinking. A substantial group of people (23.10%) perceive listening for main ideas and facts as effective though it may appear to be a comprehension task or regarded as note-taking skill. Less than 8% of people chose the option "other: most of the options listed above". The results demonstrate teachers use these activities because they believe they can help with development of critical thinking among students. This corresponds with the studies by Johnston et al. (2011, 208), Dwee et al. (2016, 636) and Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 200) that suggest that critical questioning, listening for identifying bias, evaluation and reflection can be used to foster critical thinking.

Table 4. demonstrates AE teachers' perceptions of ways to develop critical thinking in reading. The majority of participants chose "reading for the main idea" as the most effective way to foster criticality at 85.7% respectively. This can be explained by the importance of comprehending the text through identifying the main idea. Zhao, Pandian and Singh (2016, 16) suggest that employing skills of understanding the main idea of the text also contributes to the development and use of critical thinking in the classroom. The second mostly selected option is "evaluation of sources" (73.1%) which is similar to Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198) findings where the same quantity of respondents chose that option as helpful way for promoting critical thinking in reading. The same idea is expressed in Zhao, Pandian and Singh (2016, 16) study, who recommend to use evaluation of claims, evidence and sources. On the contrary, writing headlines and recognizing bias in reading are considered as less effective strategies (21.4%) for developing this type of thinking. This is dissimilar to Tuzlukova et al. (2018, 198) study as more than half of their participants think "recognizing bias" can be used as an activity to promote critical thinking in the classroom.

Table 4. Reading activities used by Academic English lecturers

Activity	Percentage
Reading for the main idea	85.70%
Evaluation of sources	71.40%

Jigsaw reading	64%
Finding evidence from scholarly articles to support arguments	64.30%
Identifying main ideas and details	64%
Matching headings	57.10%
Reflecting on reading	57.10%
Formulating open-ended questions based on reading materials	46%
Distinguishing facts from opinions	42.90%
Making inferences from reading materials	35.70%
Analytical reading	28.60%
Writing headlines	21.40%
Recognizing bias in reading	21.40%
All of them	7.10%
Other	7.10%
None	0.00%

Another important point was to identify the most effective strategies to develop critical thinking through teaching writing. The results revealed (Table 5.) that all participants believe writing argumentative essays can contribute to the development of critical thinking skills. This is highlighted in Johnston's et al. (2011, 129) findings as well. They state that developing argumentation is valuable, and argumentative essay writing can be helpful. Another strategy mostly chosen by teachers was reflective writing at 92.9% respectively. Interestingly, 71.4% of respondents consider report and blog writing to be promoting critical thinking among students. Although academic blog writing was introduced in the first semester of the academic year, it was found as highly valuable for teaching criticality.

This is supported by Johnston et al. (2011, 129) who stressed the importance of personal reaction in writing. It is evident when students write blogs they are to include their personal reaction towards problems, events and cases. In contrast, 14.3% of participants relate descriptive writing and writing reviews to the least effective means of developing critical thinking via writing in their classrooms.

These findings are in line with Shaheen's study (2016, 29), who suggests that enabling learners to express their views and ideas linking with the secondary data and give useful implications lead to the employment and enhancement of critical

thinking skills. Rezaei, Derakhshan, and Bagherkazemi (2011, 775) also indicate use of reflection can be helpful to engage learners in critical thinking process.

Table 5. Most effective strategies to develop critical thinking

Activity	Percentage
Writing argumentative essays	100.00%
Writing reflection	93%
Writing report	78.60%
Writing blogs	71.40%
Paragraph writing	64%
Summarizing	57.10%
Paraphrasing	57.10%
Evaluating evidence	50.00%
Writing peer feedback	28.60%
Integrated writing	21.40%
Descriptive writing	14.30%
Writing reviews (articles, books, etc.)	14.30%
Other	7%
Writing interactive journals	0.00%
All of them	0.00%
None	0.00%

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, the results of this research demonstrate that AE lecturers believe it is important to develop students' critical thinking, though they faced certain challenges in incorporating activities necessary for its promotion. We help students develop their thinking through reading, listening, writing and discussion in AE teaching classroom. Therefore, we aimed in our research to explore the ways AE lecturers use to develop critical thinking in teaching reading, writing, listening and writing. The study results will be beneficial for educators and linguists working in the area of English language teaching.

Concluding, the current study has identified how teachers perceive critical thinking and whether it should be taught, the problems faced by lecturers, and what activities they use to develop critical

thinking of their students. The results and discussion demonstrate critical thinking should be taught and despite challenges teachers should try to implement critical thinking strategies in their classroom. In terms of effective activities to be incorporated, lecturers believe debates, discussions, evaluations, reflection and feedback can engage students in productive critical thinking process. Further research is clearly needed to explore teachers' views in other higher education institutions of Uzbekistan with English – medium instruction, as well as problems faced by students in using critical thinking skills.

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