

**DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSES  
THROUGH NOVELS**

**İngilizce'nin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretildiği Dil Sınıflarında  
Roman İnceleme Yoluyla Eleştirel Düşünce Becerilerinin  
Geliştirilmesi**

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**Abstract**

Critical thinking is an intellectual concept that encourages individuals to analyze, evaluate and explain through interpreting ideas from a broader perspective. So as to encourage critical thinking among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, literary texts, can be a beneficial tool. This article aimed at paving the ways to make students achieve critical thinking skills through reading novels. The main purpose of choosing novels to establish critical thinking skills in students is that literature has been looked at as an object of study and this field was little treated as an applied field in the other aspects of language learning, especially critical thinking. In this study a mixed research design is followed. First, CAAP Critical Thinking Test is conducted to pre-service English teachers before and after the treatment. In the second phase, follow-up qualitative interviews are conducted with the volunteers only. In addition, a special course design is developed for their presentations during a 14 week period. As literature fosters the development of critical thinking skills, content-based instruction has been suggested by the researchers as an effective way to develop both critical thinking and language learning skills of the students.

**Keywords:** *Literature, novel, content-based instruction, critical thinking.*

**Özet**

Eleştirel düşünce, bireylerin fikirlerini analiz etme, değerlendirme ve açıklama becerilerini geliştiren, dolayısıyla bakış açılarını genişleten bir kavramdır. İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin eleştirel düşüncelerini geliştirmeleri konusunda edebiyat eserleri yararlı bir araçtır çünkü eserlerin incelenme süreci bu yetiyi doğal olarak geliştirmektedir. Bu çalışma roman inceleme yöntemiyle, öğrencilerin eleştirel düşünme becerilerini geliştirme süreçlerini incelemektedir. Edebi tür olarak romanın seçilmesinin en önemli sebebi ise eleştirel düşünmeyi geliştirme konusunda roman incelemesine yeteri kadar ağırlık verilmemesidir. Çalışma da karma bir yöntem izlenmiştir. İlk aşamada, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının eleştirel düşünme becerileri, uygulamanın başında ve sonunda CAAP testi ile ölçülmüştür. İkinci aşamada, sadece gönüllü olan öğrencilerle mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. 14 haftalık, öğrenci sunumları ile desteklenen, bir müfredat yoluyla bu becerilerinin geliştirilmesi hedeflenmiştir. Bu süreçte, içerik odaklı öğrenme yaklaşımı tercih edilmiş ve öğrencilerin hem dil becerilerinin hem de eleştirel düşünme yetilerinin geliştirilmesi hedeflenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Edebiyat, roman, içerik-odaklı öğrenme, eleştirel düşünce.*

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Critical Thinking**

Modern societies often require people to possess remarkable knowledge and strong thinking skills, referred to as critical thinking skills as well. However, in most countries the educational system does not allow it. Students are not given the chance to practice their thinking skills since they are taught to be passive thinkers. Realizing the place of critical thinking in acquiring foreign languages, many educators have been examining the feasibility of integrating critical thinking in teaching English as a foreign language. In other words, they are trying to find out its benefits with EFL instruction (Long, 2000; Stapleton, 2002).

Parallel to social life, the classroom environment needs to be much more dynamic. In such a dynamic environment, critical thinking stands at the very center of the learning process. As Liaw indicates (2007) "Since higher-order thinking skills are increasingly required for success in a knowledge-based society, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to assist their students to acquire critical thinking skills while learning English" (p. 51). In this connection, one of the essential life issues which has recurrently been cited in the literature to be an important skill in life skills education is critical thinking. Moreover, several researchers have acknowledged the key role played by critical thinking in individuals' academic success (e.g., Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010; McCutcheon, Apperson, Hanson, & Wynn, 1992). More specifically, in the field of ELT, several scholars and researchers have deemed critical pedagogy and critical language awareness to be significant notions in language teaching (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999).

The reason why EFL students need to develop critical thinking skills lies under the fact that EFL students who cannot practice in critical thinking skills lose the chance of adapting into the global workplace, broadening their horizons and becoming part of the international community as creative and questioning individuals. The English language took the role of the lingua franca and is used globally by non-native speakers of English for intercultural communication. Critical thinking skills are indispensable when practicing such intellectual traits as empathy and tolerance thus getting ready for communication in multicultural contexts. (Vdovina, 2013)

As a significant term, critical thinking has been defined in various ways by theorists and educators. Critical thinking can be defined as the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking and develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking. The purpose of critical thinking is to achieve understanding, evaluate viewpoints, and solve problems (Siegel, 1999; Lipman, 1991; Norris & Ennis, 1989; Elder & Paul, 1994; Maiorana, 1992).

Critical thinking is associated with inferences drawn from factual statements, recognition of assumptions, interpreting whether conclusions are warranted or not, judging conclusions as relevant to given statements, and evaluating arguments. To encourage critical thinking and establishing its skills, teachers should get their students to apply the three processes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Mayfield, 2004) and in order this to happen, teachers should be encouraged to teach their courses in that way (Hakes, 2008; Khatib & Shakouri, 2013; Bedir, 2013). Teaching our students the theory of critical thinking will be superficial, hence educators should offer courses in which students can actively do the thinking themselves.

### 1.2. Content Based Instruction

There are several ways of developing critical thinking skills and content based instruction is an effective tool to achieve critical thinking skills. Although the significance of content-based instruction on developing critical thinking skills is known, only a few studies have been conducted about the effectiveness of promoting EFL learners' critical thinking skills with a content-based instruction. For instance, Davidson and Dunham(1997) and Chapple and Curtis (2000) suggested different ways of increasing critical thinking skills among language learners through the use of different content-based teaching techniques as part of EFL instruction. They stated that videos, television and films, for example, seem to assist with comprehension. In general terms, visual media are highly motivating for students and also contextualize language development by providing meaningful and authentic models of language use.

Content-based instruction (CBI) in language teaching is not new however; it has gained popularity and significance, particularly in EFL environments, in the past 20 years. As an alternative to more conventional approaches, content-based instruction has developed considerable credibility. The term CBI refers to an approach that integrates language instruction with content instruction, but which allows the content to determine the nature and order of the linguistics syllabus. According to Crandall & Tucker (1990) CBI is "an approach to language instruction that integrates the presentation of topics or tasks to form subject matter classes within the context of teaching a second or a foreign language" (p.187). There is a consensus among the educators and researchers that in order to develop language proficiency and encourage students meeting their professional and personal goals, content is crucial in language education. (Bragger &Rice, 1999; Hoecherl-Alden, 2000).

### 1.3. Critical Thinking and Literature

The significance of critical thinking and the power of literature to foster that kind of ability in promoting academic achievements and cultural knowledge within a content-based curriculum are considered as the most crucial aspects of ELT. As a part of the ELT curriculum, authentic texts are primarily used for instruction for the purpose of promoting critical thinking as a major goal. Khatip and Nazari (2012) and Khatib and Mehrgan (2012) also underline the significant bond between literature and critical thinking. In their experimental studies carried out at an advanced level, they came up with such a fact that short stories, poems and novels can establish and enhance critical thinking skills of the students. The materials which are used in the classroom must also give the learners a degree of understanding of the relationship between taught material and the real world. Connected with this, analyzing "literary texts" as authentic materials, is a dynamic and complex process that encourages readers to reflect on their prior experiences, memories to construct meanings of the text. In that kind of a dynamic process, they achieve to develop multiple points of views, to build a causal bridge among events and actions, to make moral reasoning and judgments, to apply the acquired knowledge to other fields and real-life context. That is why Lazere (1987) argued that "literature is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking" (p. 3). It can be assumed that, a literary work is a reflector of the world we are living in through analyzing the plot, characters, thematic development, and interaction of the characters with the social environment. As a result, through critical thinking activities, EFL students are compelled to develop multiple point of views and encouraged to create their own ideas

and actions. In addition, EFL students, through critical thinking activities that are shaped by “novel” analysis, contribute to academic achievements, cultural knowledge and awareness. Oster (1989) argues that focus on point of view in literature promotes critical thinking which is important in traditional education systems unfamiliar with how to read, question, and analyze critically.

Similarly, there are several studies on the use of literature in EFL classes and its effects on enhancing critical thinking skills of EFL learners conducted in Turkish context. However, most of these studies focus on linguistic competence, four skills, motivation and different reading strategies of students and their affect on the development of critical thinking strategies (Akyel & Yalçın, 1990; Sarıçoban, 2002; İçmez, 2009; Erkaya, 2005; Arslan & Yıldız, 2012; Bedir, 2013). They all insist that different types of literary texts such as short stories or other authentic texts are beneficial for the learners but the use of novels to develop critical thinking skills is a neglected area. The integration of novels into the curriculum to develop critical thinking will help EFL students to become well-rounded professionals in their future careers. When the development of this skill is supported by the use of novels with a sound instructional approach it may have various benefits for the learners.

In the light of the positive effects of implementing literature as content in EFL classes, reading novels through CBI helps the students to exercise what the Critical Thinking experts termed “explanation,” “analysis,” “synthesis,” “argumentation,” “interpretation,” “evaluation,” “problem-solving,” “inference”, “logical reasoning,” and “application” (Facione, 2007). Novels which are analyzed through CBI can be regarded as appropriate tools to achieve critical thinking skills in EFL students. While analyzing novels, EFL students develop a critical attitude towards them, make judgments, postulate different point of views, ask questions, and integrate the literary milieu into the real-life context. As a result of these, critical thinking can be developed among EFL students through teaching and reading novels. Because, in this process, EFL students achieve to form reasonable bonds between the text, society and one’s own life. The main reason of choosing novels to foster critical thinking skills in EFL students is that literature has been considered as a tool which should be integrated into the EFL teaching programs. Literature, namely novel, has academic, intellectual, cultural and linguistic benefits. Through the analysis of the characters, for instance, students develop critical perception in the way they perceive the characters in the texts they read. That kind of perception leads pre-service English teachers to understand others’ perspectives that encourage them to become critical thinkers (Stapleton, 2002). Centering CBI in the EFL curriculum with the use of literary texts such as novels will help students to take a critical look at all aspects of language learning and teaching that can illuminate their education and professional lives as open-minded individuals.

This study concentrates on a literature and language teaching course that uses a literary text as a teaching tool. It endeavors to provide novel as a teaching tool for pre-service English teachers to achieve critical thinking skills through content-based instruction. It is also claimed that having a critical look in the classroom will also help pre-service English teachers gain a multi-faced view of the world and themselves.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Participants**

Participants in this mixed research design study were 40 pre-service English teachers (24 females and 16 males) enrolled in the “Literature and Language Teaching” course in ELT department at a state university in western part of Turkey in the 2013-14 academic year.

### **2.2. Experimental Design**

In this study a mixed research design is followed. A dominant-status concurrent design is conducted (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). There are both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. However, the specific design is a QUAN + qual design (i.e., quantitative-dominant concurrent design). The quantitative component has the dominant status because more quantitative data were collected than qualitative data. As for the type of the experimental design, quasi-experimental procedure is assigned. This is a single-group interrupted time-series design (Creswell, 2014). The investigator used a naturally formed group, namely a classroom. That is, the individuals are not randomly assigned. In this design, the researcher records measures for a single group both before and after a treatment. First, a critical thinking test is conducted to pre-service English teachers before and after the treatment. In the second phase, follow-up semi-structured interviews are conducted with ten students who volunteered to participate in the study. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and corresponding written texts were created. A preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted to obtain a general sense of the data. Phase 2 is used in a complementary way; specifically, phase 2 data and results help clarify the phase 1 finding about the development of critical thinking skills.

### **2.3. Research Instrument**

Critical thinking skills were measured using the CAAP Critical Thinking Test developed by ACT, Inc. (2008). The coefficient of Cronbach’s alpha for the survey was found to be 0.665. It means that the survey is moderately reliable. Additivity was confirmed using ANOVA with Tukey’s Test for non-additivity. The CAAP Critical Thinking Test is a 32-item, 40-minute test that measures students’ skills at analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments. An argument is defined as a sequence of statements that includes a claim that one of the statements, the conclusion, follows from the other statements. The Critical Thinking Test consists of four passages that are representative of the kinds of issues commonly encountered in a postsecondary curriculum. The study employed a pretest, posttest quasi-experimental design.

In this study, for evaluation purposes, the approach mentioned in the CAAP Critical Thinking Test is adopted. In this test, critical thinking is subcategorized into ability to extend, analyze and evaluate an argument.

### **2.4. Instructional Design**

This 14-week course was a compulsory course with 3 hours/per week instruction and discussion covering fiction as a genre. Through literature reading and discussion, critical thinking was not particularly or separately taught in class but was briefly introduced in the first week and embedded in the following weeks. Then students were scheduled to take the CAAP Critical Thinking Test in the first class hour and in the last week.

During the treatment period which lasted 14 weeks, pre-service English teachers were taught to employ the following critical thinking skills;

1. Asking critical questions concerning the characters, analyzing the characters
2. Identifying the logical reasons of why such a novel is written,
3. Analyzing events, symbols, and special characteristics,

4. Shaping thoughts, expressing, and extending them coherently,
5. Predicting the alternative consequences of possible actions,
6. Suggesting one's own literary criticism,
7. Making and analyzing value judgments properly,
8. Evaluating arguments.

The students met three times a week and in each class, they read the assigned chapters of a novel, applied the critical thinking skills, and noted down their analyses, evaluation, and criticisms. The novel we have selected to demonstrate the range of activities available in presenting a work of literature to develop critical thinking skills in content-based literature and language teaching classes through reading novels is the modern classic *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding. There are many reasons for our choice. Golding is a major twentieth-century English writer, whose works are read and studied throughout the world. *Lord of the Flies* deals with the universal themes of violence, social control, human nature, survival in conditions of adversity – yet in a setting that is neither culture-specific nor restricted to one time. The book suits a readership of almost any age and we have read it successfully with advanced learners, that is, pre-service English language teachers. Its rich, associative, metaphorical language provides a challenge through context, strong characterization and plot (Collie & Slater, 1987). Last, but not least, *Lord of the Flies* has a strong pull on the readers' involvement, from the very first page.

For convenience we divided the novel into 12 sections corresponding to its 12 chapters. The pre-service English teachers grouped themselves into four and chose the scheduled dates for group presentations. For each chapter, pre-service English language teachers described a large and varied number of classroom and homework activities within a specific course design. With our guidance, the pre-service English language teachers selected activities which complement each other and deepen their understanding of the book and elicit a response. We tried to encourage them to read the novel for enjoyment and also for deeper understanding to enrich their experiences. On the day of presentation, all the members needed to present themselves in front of the class: some were in charge of the opening, some in explaining the ideas, some in conclusion. The pre-service English teachers had to follow a certain course design as shown by their instructor. In their presentations of the novel *Lord of the Flies*, each group prepared a certain lesson plan for each chapter. This lesson plan was the same for all groups except for the first part of the plan, which was presented only by the first group. That part contained information about the historical setting and the author, biography and literary career of the author and the literary importance of the text. The other groups started directly with warm-up activities. The sample lesson plan is given below:

#### 1. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- a) Introduction to the historical setting and the author
- b) *Post-Second World War Era*
- c) Biography and the literary career of *William Golding*
- d) Introduction of *Lord of the Flies*: Literary importance of the text

#### 2. WARM-UP

Building familiarity with the setting of the novel before the texts are read.

**Tools:** Pictures, posters, music and videos.

**Aims:** Developing prediction, guessing and imagination abilities of the students through discussions.

### 3. WHILE READING

**a)** A brief plot summary of the chapters through focusing on significant elements of the characters and the events.

**Aims:** At the very beginning of the activities, students are encouraged to focus on reading confidently for gist through choosing and ordering, chessboard, summary comparison, and the book on postcard activities.

**b)** Character analysis

**Tools:** Making charts, diagrams, tables, and memory exercises.

**Aims:** Gaining insight into the personalities of the characters, providing support for a structured speaking task. Preparing students to the development of the theme later on in the book through taking notes, speaking, feedbacks and discussion.

**c)** Teaching linguistic aspects and Vocabulary

**Tools:** The selected parts of the chapters, quotations from the text, dialogues between the characters.

**Aims:** To teach the grammatical structures and patterns such as; models, tenses, reported speech, register types, vocabulary; idiomatic expressions. Providing students with full grammatical competence and extended knowledge of vocabulary to have a deeper understanding of the text.

**d)** Studying the plot

**Tools:** The selected parts of the chapters, quotations from the text, dialogues between the characters.

**Aims:** As students have already mastered their control of grammar and vocabulary, they can give explicit responses to the characters and situations in the novel leading them to the theme through open-ended questions; oral activities, star diagrams, and brainstorming.

**e)** Studying literary Devices

**Tools:** The selected parts of the chapters, quotations from the text, dialogues between the characters.

**Aims:** Teaching literary devices; since *Lord of the Flies* is very rich in terms of literary devices students are guided to figure out certain literary devices such as simile, metaphor, personification and symbols through group work, peer work, the grids, snowball wall chart, and the meaning of signs activities.

### 4. POST-READING

**a)** Developing Critical Thinking Skills

**Aim:** After having analyzed the novel in detail, pre-service English teachers try to develop their critical thinking skills by asking wh- questions. These questions help them to extend their understanding of the novel and analyze and evaluate it at the highest

level. At this level of the course students learn to read between the lines through the technique of skimming.

**b) Homework**

**Aims:** Reinforcing student’s critical thinking skills. Encouraging student’s ability to transform the knowledge they gained in the course into real life through activities such as parallel reading, writing an alternative ending to the novel, preparing posters and film trailers, moviemaker, school reports, diary keeping and interviews.

**2.5. Data analysis**

Results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 17). To check whether items in the survey is additive Tukey’s additivity test is used. In a survey, two-way ANOVA test is used for determining the importance of the answers given to the questions according to people. Also, the similarity among items is analyzed with F test. Since there is a single experimental group, before and after of the same treatment is evaluated in the study. Dependent paired t- test is used in the analysis, which provides a hypothesis test of the difference between population means for a pair of random samples. The descriptive statistics of paired samples, the result of paired-t test and descriptive statistics of differences between the samples (before and after training), descriptive statistics of each argument (extending, analyzing and evaluating) in the survey for before and after training, the descriptive statistics of differences and the p-value for each argument and the number of true answers of pre-training and post-training groups for each argument are displayed in the tables (1, 2, 3 and 4) and the figure (1) in the following section. The findings of the quantitative data are also supported by 10 students who volunteered to be interviewed. Some of the participants’ remarks are illustrated in the discussion part to support the statistical findings.

**3. Results**

There are descriptive statistics of paired samples in Table 1. The mean and standard deviation of pre-training group is 15.32 and 3.744 while the mean and standard deviation of post-training group equals to 20.4 and 4.34248.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of paired samples

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Total pre-training	15,32	50	3,744	,529
Total post-training	20,4000	50	4,34248	,61412

In Table 2, there are the result of paired-t test and descriptive statistics of differences between the samples: before training and after training. The mean and standard deviation of differences equals to -5.08 and 3.84304. P-value equals to 0.000 and the null hypothesis (1.3) is rejected. Hence, we can say that there is a significant difference between two groups.



**Table 2.** Paired-t test for general*Paired Samples Test*

		Paired Differences				T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Total pre-training - Total post-training	5,08000	3,84304	,54349	6,17218	-3,98782	9,347	49	,000

In Table 3, there are some descriptive statistics of each argument in the survey for before and after training. For extending, the mean and standard deviation of pre-training group equals to 2 and 1.04978 while the mean and standard deviation of post-training group is 3 and 1.16058 (marked as yellow). For analyzing, pre-training group has the mean of 9.4 and the standard deviation of 2.61861 while post-training group has the mean of 11.94 and the standard deviation of 2.80968. In the argument of evaluating, the means and the standard deviations for pre-training and post training groups equal to 3.92;5.46 and 1.53649;1.54140.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for arguments: extending, analyzing and evaluating  
*Paired Samples Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Extending pre-test	2,0000	50	1,04978	,14846
	Extending post-test	3,0000	50	1,16058	,16413
Pair 2	Analyzing pre-test	9,4000	50	2,61861	,37033
	Analyzing post-test	11,9400	50	2,80968	,39735
Pair 3	Evaluating pre-test	3,9200	50	1,53649	,21729
	Evaluating post-test	5,4600	50	1,54140	,21799

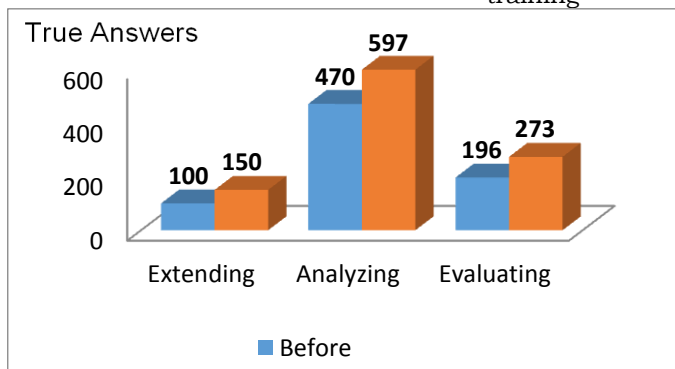
In Table 4, the descriptive statistics of differences and the p-value for each argument can be seen. For the extending argument, the mean of differences equals to -1 and the standard deviation of differences is 1.34012. In the argument of analyzing, the mean and standard deviation are -2.54 and 2.46783. For evaluating, the mean and standard deviation equal to -1.54 and 2.08209. The null hypothesis (1.3) is rejected, and we can say that there is a significant difference between pre-training and post-training for all arguments.

**Table 4.** The results of paired-t test for arguments: extending, analyzing and evaluating

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Extending pre-test Extending post-test	-1,00000	1,34012	,18952	-1,38086	-,61914	-5,276	49	,000
Pair 2 Analyzing pre-test Analyzing post-test	-2,54000	2,46783	,34900	-3,24135	-1,83865	-7,278	49	,000
Pair 3 Evaluating pre-test Evaluating post-test	-1,54000	2,08209	,29445	-2,13172	-,94828	-5,230	49	,000

Figure 1 displays the number of true answers of pre-training and post-training groups for each argument.

**Figure 1.** The bar plot of the true answers for each subgroups with before and after training



As displayed in Figure 1, after the treatment, the bar plot of true answers for analyzing changed from 470 to 597. The change in the bar plot of true answers for extending (100 to 150) and evaluating (196 to 273) also showed a significant change.

#### 4. Discussion

Critical thinking is the ability which individuals make use of to analyze facts, evaluate and extend ideas, produce and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems (Chance, 1986). In the CAAP Test conducted in this study, the passages are categorized as analyzing, evaluating, and

extending arguments. Descriptive analysis and paired t-tests are applied for each argument on pre-service teachers' CAAP pre-test and post-test.

This study produced several findings. As for the descriptive statistics of paired samples, there was an increase in the mean and standard deviation of the post-training group in comparison with the pre-training group. The results of the paired-t test for general were also meaningful. Paired-t test for general shows a significant difference between the pre and post critical thinking results, which can be a sound base for the implementation of a critical thinking program. The activities adapted in the content -based course design made the pre-service English teachers think critically and turned them into creative individuals who extend, analyze and evaluate knowledge, as illustrated by one female pre-service English teacher:

This 14 week period was a big experience for us. I mean, the novel we studied in the class, the activities we adapted during the presentations helped me to look at the texts from a different perspective. The detailed analysis of the characters and their behaviors, our discussions about the theme..... they were all amazing. Now, I can say that I express myself better and see the hidden messages underlying the texts.

Another important finding to emerge from this study is that pre-service English teachers' descriptive statistics for each argument showed significant differences. Those who scored low in CAAP pre-test in all arguments displayed high improvement about their overall critical thinking and their ability of "analysis" particularly made significant improvement after the treatment. One female pre-service English teacher mentioned the difference she realized after the treatment:

I learnt a lot in this course. I realized that literature, especially reading novels motivated me to learn more about English. I took pleasure from the quotations we read, brainstorming activities we did and all others.... I openly revealed my ideas, I imagined myself on the island with the characters in the novel. They became alive in my mind. We discussed their strengths and weaknesses.

A male student, likewise, expressed his appreciation of the novel and the experience he gained:

I was impressed with the ending. With the in-depth analysis of the chapters I gained control of the book and extended my knowledge of the world. We made predictions and guesses about the end of the novel. Now I can see beyond the lines..... Wow! I can't believe myself.. I see the unseen part of the iceberg now. It feels good.

As illustrated by the quotations given above, pre-service English teachers were found to improve their critical thinking skills through studying novel as content. The findings in this study support that using a novel as a literary text did help the weak thinkers improve their overall critical thinking and especially demonstrate better skills in analysis. In the beginning, they were exercising their prior knowledge and experiences in L1 acquisition in reading the English texts. However, along with the time and with the help of teaching/learning activities, some students gradually fostered better thinking patterns and habits and some could make in-depth interpretation or inference.

The use of a novel to establish critical thinking skills in students was fruitful. The findings of this article reveal at least two facts: First, critical thinking skills are

undoubtedly vital for the educational settings; this is what most of the studies and scholars approve. (Khatib & Shakouri, 2013; Tung & Chang, 2009; Khatib & Mehrgan 2012; Daud & Husin, 2004; Arslan & Yıldız, 2012; Khatib & Nazari, 2012). Second, one of the ways to establish critical thinking skills in students can be using novels in English language teaching classes through content-based approach. Rereading the novel also produced new insights, new perceptions and a deepened response. The latter sheds light on the fact that literature is an invaluable tool in educational settings in general and language learning in particular. The study shows that literature can be turned into an active process by emphasizing critical thinking in literature and language courses.

## 5. Conclusion

The study has discussed the efficacy of developing critical thinking skills and disposition in pre-service English teachers through reading novels. In general, the findings supported the aims and objectives of the course. Although it is found that pre-service English teachers may resort to their past learning habits, experiences or knowledge to solve problems in a new situation, if they were equipped with critical thinking skills, they would be confident in adapting to a new situation or even locating innovative solutions to the new problems. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data supported each other. The majority of the pre-service English teachers during the interviews claimed that they previously were not aware of critical thinking skills. They also expressed that before taking such a course they were simply reading the texts without caring for analysis, evaluation and interpretation. They also learned how to extend information. They were also observed to be showing CT dispositions such as exploring thoughts underlying feelings, developing confidence in analysis and interpretation and thinking independently. They reflected in the post-lesson interviews that they improved their analysis and evaluation skills in English and they were able to apply these critical thinking skills when they were reading. Therefore, developing critical thinking is a vital objective in higher education and to achieve this aim, using novel reading to encourage students to think critically is a highly feasible approach. Following the findings of the article, it should be mentioned that curriculum developers, material designers, and language teachers are highly recommended to employ literature, especially novels in developing critical thinking skills through content-based instruction.

In the modern education system, developing critical thinking skills is a crucial element of EFL classroom. It is an active and systematic process of organizing ideas, understanding and evaluating arguments, making comparisons, drawing inferences, creating meaning and exploring facts. Moreover, content-based instruction is appropriate for the development of critical thinking skills and reawakens the language learners' desire to study English with a deeper understanding. To achieve this, one of the ways to establish critical thinking skills in students can be reading novels as a literary genre. Through the use of novels, challenging activities can be presented to force learners' critical thinking skills. Finally, based on the results of the quantitative and qualitative data, it can be concluded that this study produced fruitful results not only for the pre-service English teachers but for the educators as well.

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