| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Measuring Pedagogical Transformation: A Quantitative Analysis of Critical Thinking Integration in Literary Criticism for Heightened Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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| **ABSTRACT**

In today's democratic world, one of the most significant objectives of the educational system is to promote independent thinking in students regarding both academic subject matter and daily life (Ennis, 1989; Grinberg, 2004; Nelson, 2004). The necessity and significance of critical thinking in education might primarily lie in the fact that students are not passive participants in the learning process since they are no longer engaged in rote memorization of facts; rather, they need to graduate from educational institutions that engage them in learning that improves their thinking skills. Empirical research suggests that benefits accrue to students who possess the ability to think critically; hence, many institutions need to incorporate instruction oriented toward providing students with critical thinking skills (Tsui, 1999; Stupnisky et al., 2008) through programmed interventions that vary from the traditional instructional approach (Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga et al., 2009). This paper examines the significance of the application of a literature-based critical thinking program and its impact on both students' critical thinking skills and teachers' and students' beliefs about literature instruction. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods, namely, survey research and One-Group Pre-Test/Post-Test Design. It is based on one group pre-test–post-test design, a quasi-experimental design, in which a seven-week literature-based critical thinking program involving 34 students attending an English Language and Literature Department was implemented. Data regarding the present critical thinking situation and change process were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. T-test results show a significant change between the students' pre-critical thinking and post-critical thinking levels. These findings indicate that a literature-based critical-thinking program leads to more student-centered classrooms and creative literature instruction that fosters the development of students' critical thinking skills. Another major purpose of this research study is to discover and understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers on the topic of using multicultural literature as responsive pedagogy to engage cultural understanding. Therefore, the study will also be conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews.

| **KEYWORDS**

Critical thinking, literary criticism, multicultural literature

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

Education can be transformative in the lives of students as they come to see themselves as citizens of the world. In order for our students to be prepared to live and work in today's global society, it is increasingly important that education in the classroom reflects the growing diversity of our communities. The potential role that teachers and educators can play in the process of students

developing critical thinking and a deeper understanding of themselves and those who are different is significant. The utilization of literature for fostering critical thinking in the educational setting has garnered significant attention in recent times. This focus stems from the recognition that cultivating and enhancing students' critical thinking skills is imperative for their future preparedness. Critical thinking, identified as a fundamental skill essential for supporting both in-class and extracurricular learning, empowers students to make sound judgments, hone problem-solving abilities, and develop heightened reasoning skills and critical awareness. Moreover, fostering critical thinking contributes to the enhancement of students' cultural and social awareness, equipping them for life in society and the professional arena. It is widely acknowledged that the integration of literature into the English classroom stands out as an effective strategy for advancing students' critical thinking. This involves the incorporation of various literary forms, such as poems, short stories, novels, and other literary works, to underpin the learning process and encourage students to engage in critical thinking. Research conducted by Stefanova and Bobkina attests to the high effectiveness of the literature integration model in classrooms for improving critical thinking skills, as perceived by both students and teachers. By interweaving learning with literary works, students can derive more meaningful and engaging educational experiences. Studies indicate that the use of literary works is not only interesting but also advantageous, as it provides students with enjoyable learning experiences. Furthermore, literary works serve as motivational tools, inspiring students to participate in activities and facilitating discussions on literary texts while connecting them to contemporary issues in the real world. Emphasizing these areas is part of a greater goal of contributing to the personal development of students, which contends that a better sense of self contributes to the overall intellectual, academic, and social achievement of students. Finally, students who feel good about themselves are likely to be more open and receptive to interaction with others and to respect their cultures and identities.

2. Literature Review

Ernst von Glasersfeld (1995), the father of constructivism, cited in Williams and Burden (1997), believes that education has two main purposes: (1) to empower learners to think for themselves and (2) to promote the next generation ways of thinking and acting that are deemed important by the present generation. Put another way, education is not merely getting information or knowledge but mainly causing a change in one's belief system. This cannot be obtained if the sender and receiver of information are demarcated. That is, the teaching is not done with the help of a linear sequence of events - with the teacher as the primary as well as secondary actor and the student as the silent audience. Pedagogically, students are not viewed as passive sponges waiting to soak up facts or as metaphor receptacles that must be poured in and teachers in this model are not viewed as jars of which duties are to fill up these mugs. However, in most reading classes centered on EAP, teachers tend to focus on interpreting the meaning of a text, acting as 'arbiters of meaning' (Wilson, 2007, p. 367). Literature has been used for a long time in English classrooms because of its usefulness, such as providing authentic materials, improving linguistic knowledge, developing interpretive skills, promoting cultural understanding, facilitating critical thinking, and stimulating social development. Literature can encourage active learning in students by fully involving them in the learning process. Students could get more opportunities to explore, interpret, and understand the world around them further. This means making them more active in observing and evaluating things related to their daily life and experiences, which require them to think critically. Students are expected to do a deeper comprehension of the literary works through understanding contexts in the literary works and then building connections to other contexts so that they can generate their own interpretation and judgment towards the texts. According to Violet Harris, "When individuals find literature that captures and sustains their attention, they have the opportunity to experience the world through written words". In fact, this encounter with the written words is very powerful and can help students understand the human experience from different perspectives. When the concept of diversity as it pertains to culture is not addressed in schools, students will often develop without the necessary and sufficient knowledge about how to approach these differences and critically apply their critical and analytical skills to the text they read.

2.1 Multicultural Literature and Literary Criticism

Literary criticism refers to the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works. It is a discipline that involves examining and understanding the various elements of literature, including its themes, characters, plots, styles, and linguistic choices. Literary critics aim to explore the meaning and significance of literary texts, often considering the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which the works were created. Literary criticism involves a close examination of the form and content of literary works, seeking to uncover deeper meanings, cultural influences, and the author's intentions. Critics may employ various theoretical approaches, such as structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism, or postcolonialism, to interpret and analyze literature. The field of literary criticism encompasses a diverse range of perspectives and methodologies, and literary critics may focus on specific genres, time periods, or cultural movements. Ultimately, literary criticism contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of literature by offering insights, interpretations, and discussions that enrich the study of literary works. Literary criticism plays a significant role in the analysis and appreciation of multicultural literature. Critics apply various theoretical frameworks to examine how multicultural texts represent diverse cultures, identities, and experiences. They explore how authors negotiate and navigate issues of representation, authenticity, and cultural context. Literary criticism helps readers and scholars engage critically with multicultural literature, unpacking its complexities and understanding its broader social and cultural implications. Conversely, multicultural literature

provides rich material for literary critics to apply diverse analytical tools and perspectives, contributing to ongoing conversations about the intersections of literature, culture, and identity. The relationship between literary criticism and multicultural literature is symbiotic, as each informs and enriches the other in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of literature's role in reflecting and shaping our diverse world.

2.3 Multicultural Literature: Literary and Pedagogical Definitions
At the most basic level, multicultural literature includes literature about people who are considered to be outside of the mainstream of society and have been marginalized in some way (Canals, Lucido & Salas, 2002). More narrowly defined, multicultural literature focuses on people of color from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious groups (Canal, Lucido & Salas, 2002). Developing a definition for multicultural literature depends upon one's interpretation of literature that is culturally diverse. Thus, the definition of multicultural literature is problematic as there is no single definition of it and not every definition can embrace all multicultural texts. Cai (1998) argued that the controversy over the definition simply has to do with how many and which cultures should be covered in multicultural literature and determining the parameters of the prefix "multi". Cai divides definitions of multicultural literature into those that focus on its inherent literary qualities or nature and those that focus on the pedagogical purposes it should serve in education.

The literary definition of multicultural literature concerns with literary works "that are explicitly about multicultural societies" or "are implicitly multicultural in the sense of inscribing readers from other cultures inside their own cultural dynamics" (Cai, P.4). According to this definition, there are two types of multicultural literature: the explicitly multicultural and implicitly multicultural. Literary definitions generally center around issues of whether or not a text either explicitly or implicitly treats the experiences of a culture or cultural group. Dasenbrock (1987) states that the first type is easy to understand. The author gives an example of a book that explicitly depicts the reality of a multicultural society. For example, the United States is explicitly multicultural. For example, Gary Soto's (1991) Taking Sides tells how a Mexican American boy tries to maintain his cultural identity after he and his mother move from an urban barrio to a predominantly white suburb. The author claims that because this story depicts the interaction between cultures in a multicultural society, it is, therefore, multicultural literature.

The Pedagogical definitions, according to Cai, do not refer to individual texts but rather to a body of work that serves a particular pedagogical purpose "to break the monopoly of the mainstream culture and make the curriculum pluralistic". From the pedagogical perspective, Cai asserts that multicultural literature is not intended to highlight the multicultural nature of a literary work but to raise awareness of pluralism in the school curriculum. Different from his literary definition, this definition seems to be more acceptable for the advocates of multicultural literature because they emphasize the need and the importance of multicultural literature in educating students to be more open minded about race, class, gender issues, and religion. The ultimate purpose is educational, and it should serve to spread multicultural education. The modern tendency in defining what multicultural literature includes is shifting from exclusiveness towards "all-inclusiveness" (Cai P 6). In other words, the prevailing opinion is that all-inclusiveness is the best way to view multicultural literature. Cai and Sims Bishop argue that the main concern is not with the nature of literature per se but rather with the role it plays in education. In this sense, multicultural literature is a pedagogical term rather than a literary one. The most common definition of multicultural literature is "books by 22 and about people of color" (Bishop, 1992; Cai, 2003; Harris, 1992; and Kruse & Horning, 1991).

2.4 Strategies for using multicultural literature.
Multicultural literature provides enough space for learners to comment, justify and mirror themselves. Literature with multicultural settings and characters can enlarge students' worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people, teaching tolerance and respect, dispelling negative stereotypes, encouraging pride in students' heritage, and showcasing universal human emotions and feelings. One of the greatest strengths of literature is its suggestive power. It makes readers and listeners think beyond the literal meanings of words, helps students go beyond the surface meaning, dive into underlying meanings, and provides learners with a chance to use their creativity. Literary pieces depict society in all its shades and tints -short stories, poetry, dramas, novels, travelogues, biographies, autobiographies and the like. Using one of these is of great importance to expose students to the real world that exists outside the classroom setting. In the classroom, using multicultural literature as an educational tool involves a multifaceted approach. Teachers can select a diverse array of texts that encompass different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. To foster cultural inclusivity, it's essential to weave these materials into the curriculum throughout the year, not just during special occasions. Encouraging open discussions, prompting critical thinking through guiding questions, and drawing connections between the literature and real-world issues are key. To enhance understanding, exploring the backgrounds of authors and integrating multimedia resources can provide a broader context. Additionally, creative projects, guest speakers, and field trips can offer experiential learning opportunities. In this environment, students can reflect, compare, and analyze, building empathy and a deeper appreciation of diverse cultures while honing their critical thinking skills. It's important to create an atmosphere of respect and inclusivity, fostering an appreciation for global citizenship and ensuring that students see the classroom as a space where their backgrounds and voices are valued and respected.

After reviewing the literature surrounding multicultural literature, I believe this particular genre can be an excellent tool for enhancing critical thinking in the classroom setting. Multicultural literature plays a vital role in enhancing critical thinking skills in numerous ways. Firstly, it exposes readers to diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences, challenging them to think beyond their own worldviews. Through exposure to characters and settings from different backgrounds, readers are prompted to question stereotypes, biases, and preconceived notions, thus encouraging critical analysis. Furthermore, multicultural literature often delves into complex social issues, providing opportunities for readers to engage in deep, empathetic thinking about the challenges faced by individuals from various backgrounds. This can lead to meaningful discussions and the development of problem-solving skills. By exploring different cultural contexts and viewpoints, students can hone their ability to analyze situations from multiple angles, an essential component of critical thinking. Incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum also fosters open dialogue about diversity and inclusivity. This discussion can encourage students to reflect on their own identities and values, which is a fundamental aspect of critical self-awareness. Overall, multicultural literature is a powerful tool for cultivating critical thinking by broadening perspectives, nurturing empathy, and prompting analysis of complex social issues, making it an indispensable part of any education that seeks to develop well-rounded, critically thinking individuals.

2.5 Critical thinking

The integration of critical thinking skills into literary criticism courses has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of fostering analytical abilities in students engaged in the study of literature. Existing literature on this topic delves into various strategies and approaches employed by educators to infuse critical thinking into literary analysis. Studies explore the incorporation of activities such as close reading and collaborative discussions to deepen students' engagement with texts and encourage them to question, analyze, and interpret literature independently. Researchers have investigated the outcomes of these interventions, examining the impact on students' ability to critically assess literary works, develop nuanced arguments, and articulate their interpretations effectively. By synthesizing these findings, scholars contribute valuable insights into effective pedagogical methods that enhance critical thinking skills within the context of literary criticism courses.

Researchers have offered many definitions and ideas regarding the characteristics of critical thinking and the disposition of critical thinkers. Matthew Lipman defines critical thinking as "skillful, responsible thinking that is conducive to judgment because it relies on criteria, is self-correcting, is sensitive to context, and provides intellectual empowerment". Critical thinking in any area involves being able to pursue one's questions through self-directed search and interrogation of knowledge, a sense that knowledge is contestable, and being able to present evidence to support one's arguments (Pither & Soden, 2000, P.239). According to Zhang (3003), "the ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, willing to reconsider, diligent in seeking relevant information, and reasonable in the selection of criteria. Literature reading is eminently congenial to the essential traits of critical thinking. Accordingly, Tung and Chang (2009) count two reasons in favor of the issue that literature reading and critical thinking emanated from the same origin. First, the mental process of literature reading requires critical thinking skills such as recalling, retrieving, and reflecting on prior experiences to construct the meaning of the texts. While doing this, the readers are required to demonstrate certain capacities, among which we can include the ability to differentiate between facts and opinions, being perceptive of multiple points of view, making moral reasoning and fair-grounded judgments, and finally applying what is learnt to the real world. Second, the setting and the language of a literary work provide readers with a great deal of real-world scenarios to construct the meaning of self and life incrementally. By investigating its plot, thematic development, and the interactions of the characters with others and the milieu, readers are exposed to multiple points of view and thus compelled to think and rethink their own ideas and actions. Research has suggested that teachers increase the spirit of inquiry when they share an abundance of culturally diverse literature with their students. As an instructional tool, it offers valuable exposure to stories representative of the students, beautiful and colorful illustrations, and enriching vocabulary. The stories include issues and topics familiar to the students, thus encouraging them to reflect and respond, make decisions, and solve problems. To do this effectively, students must be able to evaluate critically what they read.

Beyer (1988) posits that the effective teaching of thinking involves three essential components: the skills that constitute thinking, the knowledge associated with these cognitive operations, and the dispositions that govern and cultivate thinking. A nuanced understanding of these facets is imperative for educators, who must be well-versed not only in the subject matter they teach but also in related fields to facilitate the intricacies of thinking processes. Teachers should possess comprehensive knowledge of the conceptual, strategic, epistemological, philosophical, and pedagogical complexities inherent in critical thinking. To achieve this, educators must actively engage with the multidimensional aspects of critical thinking by immersing themselves in research articles and participating in seminars, workshops, and conferences dedicated to the subject. This continual professional development is crucial for educators to impart these competencies to both colleagues and students. Constantly expanding one's content knowledge and gaining insights into the processes of learning and thinking contribute to the ongoing development of a rich knowledge base, a fundamental cornerstone in the realm of education, and a nurturing ground for intellectual growth.

In alignment with Beyer's perspective, Costa (1991) underscores the educators' persistent efforts to integrate reflective learning, craftsmanship, meta-cognition, and rigor into the curriculum. Supporting this viewpoint, Webster (1997) emphasizes that educators play a pivotal role in creating an environment that fosters continuous learning, facilitating a culture where the pursuit of knowledge is a lifelong endeavor within the academic realm—the very essence of a school as the dwelling place of the intellect.

2.6 Obstacles to critical thinking

Mangena and Chabelli (2005) highlighted that students face challenges in developing critical thinking skills. Fostering critical thinking in literary criticism classes faces several challenges. Students may encounter difficulties due to a lack of foundational knowledge in literary analysis, hindering their ability to engage deeply with complex texts. Cultural differences among students can also pose obstacles, influencing their interpretations of literature. Some students may resist active learning approaches that require them to question and analyze literature actively. Additionally, limited exposure to critical thinking skills in earlier education may impede the transition to a more analytical and reflective approach in literary criticism. Faculty members, too, may face challenges related to their own knowledge and time constraints. Traditional, didactic teaching approaches that prioritize information transmission overactive inquiry can hinder the development of critical thinking skills. Inadequate resources, both in terms of materials and technology, can limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives. Overcoming these obstacles requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach, incorporating active learning strategies, providing additional resources, and creating a supportive learning environment that encourages self-reflection and embraces diverse perspectives.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research objectives

This study is designed with a multifaceted set of objectives aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between multicultural literature and the development of critical thinking skills within the educational milieu. Firstly, the research seeks to delve into the perspectives of instructors, aiming to unearth their nuanced insights on the pivotal role that multicultural literature plays in nurturing critical thinking abilities among students. Concurrently, the study endeavors to establish a baseline comprehension of critical thinking among students through the administration of pre-implementation assessments, encompassing qualitative methods such as observations and in-depth interviews, as well as quantitative tools like the Cornell Critical Thinking Test. Moving beyond theoretical considerations, the research incorporates a practical dimension by implementing critical thinking activities interwoven with multicultural literature. This phase aims to explore the lived experiences of students engaged in these pedagogical interventions, shedding light on the dynamic and interactive aspects of critical thinking development. As the study progresses, it strategically transitions into an evaluative stage, seeking to identify and analyze any discernible changes in critical thinking skills post-implementation. By synthesizing qualitative and quantitative data, this research endeavors to contribute substantively to the scholarship on educational practices, offering valuable insights into the potential impact of multicultural literature on the enhancement of critical thinking skills in the diverse landscape of contemporary education.

3.2 Data collection
3.2.1 Research design

This research utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including survey research and a one-group pre-test/post-test design. The study unfolded in three phases: firstly, identifying current critical thinking situations through observation, pre-instructor interviews, pre-student questionnaires, and the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (pre-test); secondly, implementing critical thinking activities; and finally, assessing the changes post-implementation through instructor interviews, student questionnaires, and the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (post-test). The research design for this comprehensive study reflects a deliberate and intricate approach, meticulously structured to delve into the multifaceted interplay between multicultural literature and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Employing a sophisticated mixed-methods framework, the research seamlessly integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. In the qualitative dimension, the study unfolds with a qualitative immersion strategy involving astute observations and in-depth interviews with instructors. This phase aims to unearth the nuanced perspectives of educators on the profound impact of multicultural literature in nurturing critical thinking abilities among students. Concurrently, pre-implementation assessments employ a qualitative toolset, incorporating student questionnaires to capture diverse viewpoints and establish a baseline understanding of critical thinking. To fortify these qualitative insights, the quantitative arm of the study utilizes the Cornell Critical Thinking Test as a pre-test metric, providing a quantifiable baseline measure. Transitioning from theoretical considerations to practical applications, the research seamlessly integrates a transformative phase that involves the implementation of critical thinking activities intricately woven into the fabric of multicultural literature. This immersive pedagogical experience seeks not only to scrutinize theoretical frameworks but also to illuminate the dynamic and lived experiences of students engaging with diverse literary contexts. The research design orchestrates a carefully choreographed three-stage process, culminating in post-implementation assessments that employ a combination of qualitative methods, including instructor interviews and student questionnaires. This final phase is complemented by a post-test measure utilizing the Cornell Critical Thinking Test, thereby facilitating a comprehensive triangulation of data. By navigating this intricate research design, the study aims to provide a robust

and nuanced examination of the transformative potential of multicultural literature in shaping critical thinking skills within the rich landscape of contemporary education.

In the comprehensive exploration of the intricate interplay between multicultural literature and the facilitation of critical thinking skills, a meticulously crafted research design was implemented to ensure a thorough and nuanced understanding of this dynamic relationship. Employing a mixed-methods approach that seamlessly integrated both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study unfolded through a series of deliberate stages. Qualitative data acquisition commenced with a qualitative immersion, characterized by astute observations and in-depth interviews with instructors. This initial phase sought to extract the nuanced perspectives of educators regarding the role of multicultural literature in nurturing critical thinking skills. Simultaneously, a qualitative baseline was established through the administration of pre-student questionnaires, capturing the diverse viewpoints and initial critical thinking dispositions of participants. To fortify these qualitative insights, the quantitative dimension of the study was activated, employing the Cornell Critical Thinking Test as a pre-test metric. Transitioning into the subsequent phase, the research ventured into the practical realm of critical thinking activities intricately woven into the fabric of multicultural literature. This immersive pedagogical experience was designed not only to assess the theoretical underpinnings but also to illuminate the lived experiences of students engaging with diverse literary narratives. The conclusive phase of the study unfolded as a symphony of data collection methodologies, orchestrating post-implementation insights. This crescendo involved in-depth instructor interviews to discern transformative pedagogical impacts, post-activity student questionnaires to gauge evolving perspectives, and a recalibration of the Cornell Critical Thinking Test as a post-test measure. Through this methodological symphony, the research aimed to harmonize the multifaceted facets of the impact of multicultural literature on the intricate tapestry of critical thinking skill development within the educational landscape.

Step 1: Identifying the critical thinking situation

Before launching the study, I distributed a preliminary questionnaire to students and conducted observations in the first term of the Literary Criticism course. The questionnaires sought information on the classroom atmosphere, typical critical thinking practices in the course, and students' inclination for engaging in critical thinking. The purpose of the observations was to glean insights into lesson activities, classroom dynamics, and the types of questions posed during lessons. Recognizing the significant impact of teachers' beliefs and experiences on students' critical thinking skills, research indicates that teachers' beliefs and experiences are of great importance in educating students in critical thinking skills (Keys, 2007). The course instructor underwent a pre-instructor interview to assess the initial critical thinking context. Subsequently, a post-implementation instructor interview was conducted to evaluate the outcomes. To gauge the students' current levels of critical thinking, I administered the Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z as a pretest. This widely used test, integral to our extensive and ongoing research on critical thinking, assesses skills such as induction, deduction, observation, credibility, and assumption.

Step 2: Quasi-Experimental Design: One-group pre-test/post-test design

The study employed One group pre-test/post-test design (Cohen & Manion, 1994) to assess whether there existed a noteworthy difference in the critical thinking levels of students following exposure to a literature-based critical thinking program. The critical thinking activities implemented in the study were categorized into three groups. The first group comprised activities aligned with Bloom's taxonomy, encompassing elements such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, as well as problem-solving, real-life scenarios, questioning, and supporting ideas (Combs, 1992; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Schmit, 2002; Brown, 2004; Boostrom, 1992; Chaffe, 1999; Derry et al., 2000; Ruggerio, 2002; Halvorsen, 2005; Paul & Elder, 2006; Gillies & Khan, 2008). The second group of critical thinking activities was tailored to the course content of Literary Criticism, wherein students engaged with various literary approaches and applied them to works. This involved practicing the initial four thinking levels of the Cognitive Level of Bloom's Taxonomy—knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis—which are pivotal for success in subsequent levels, namely synthesis and evaluation. The third group of critical thinking activities was designed in accordance with the Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z, focusing on induction, deduction, credibility, and assumption.

Furthermore, the study underscored the significance of class discussions pair and group work activities, emphasizing their role in enabling students to generate and evaluate diverse viewpoints to substantiate their perspectives (Combs, 1992; Paul & Elder, 2001; Halvorsen, 2005). The critical thinking activities spanned a seven-week period (13 sessions, totaling 39 hours) within the Literary Criticism course and were seamlessly integrated into the course syllabus. To facilitate the smooth implementation of data collection and ensure universal student participation, activity handouts were meticulously prepared for each session.

Step 3. Identifying the change after the implementation

Following the seven-week implementation of critical thinking activities, a post-test using the Cornell Critical Thinking Test was once again administered to assess any improvements in students' critical thinking levels. Additionally, a post-implementation student questionnaire was specifically crafted to elicit information about students' interest in critical thinking activities (Halvorsen, 2005), identify the activities perceived as most challenging (Facione, 1990; Halpern, 1997; Tsui, 1999; Halvorsen, 2005), and explore

how these activities contributed to their understanding and appreciation of literature (Cobine, 1993), real-life comprehension (Combs, 1992; Üstünlüoğlu, 2004; Halvorsen, 2005), activation of their thinking (Facione, 1990; Halpern, 1997; Halvorsen, 2005), and the generation of original and creative ideas (Facione, 1990; Halpern, 1997; Ruggerio, 2002).

Conversely, the instructor interview conducted post-implementation included targeted questions aimed at gaining insights into the instructor's overall reflections on the critical thinking activities. These questions delved into whether the activities effectively activated students' thinking, instigated any changes in the classroom dynamics, and contributed to the students' understanding and appreciation of literature.

3.3 participants
The participants in this study form a diverse and integral component of the research exploration into the relationship between multicultural literature and the development of critical thinking skills. The study engages both instructors and students within an educational setting, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of perspectives. Instructors, selected through purposive sampling, bring their varied experiences and insights to the forefront, contributing valuable viewpoints on the incorporation of multicultural literature into the curriculum and its potential impact on critical thinking development. Students representing a diverse cross-section are recruited to participate in this research journey, contributing their perspectives through pre- and post-implementation assessments. The sample for the study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in a fourth-year Literary Criticism course in the Department of English Language and Literature at University Mohammed-V, Rabat. In the study, the purposive sampling method was used as the inclusion of all departmental literature courses was not feasible. Literary Criticism course was found as the most suitable course for the implementation as the study aimed at encouraging critical thinking through literature by dealing with various literary works from novels to poetry, and the course covered two terms, which were required first to identify the current critical thinking situation and then to improve the existing situation. The total number of students who participated in the study was 34 (31 females and 3 males) senior students attending the literary criticism course. The inclusion of both instructors and students ensures a holistic examination, capturing the multifaceted dynamics of how multicultural literature may influence critical thinking skills across different educational levels and disciplines. This deliberate selection of participants aims to enrich the study with a range of voices and experiences, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research objectives.

3.4 research instruments
The research instruments employed in this study are thoughtfully selected to facilitate a thorough examination of the intricate relationship between multicultural literature and the development of critical thinking skills. For the qualitative dimension, in-depth interviews with instructors serve as a primary tool, allowing for a nuanced exploration of educators' perspectives on the role of multicultural literature in fostering critical thinking. Observations during these interviews contribute to the qualitative data, providing rich context and depth to the findings. Additionally, student questionnaires are strategically designed to capture diverse viewpoints and establish a baseline understanding of critical thinking prior to the implementation of multicultural literature activities. On the quantitative front, the Cornell Critical Thinking Test is adeptly utilized both as a pre-test measure to gauge initial critical thinking levels and as a post-test measure to assess any observable changes post-implementation. This multifaceted combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments aims to triangulate data effectively, providing a robust foundation for the comprehensive exploration of the research objectives and shedding light on the potential impact of multicultural literature on critical thinking skills in the educational context.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Results
4.1.1 A promising context for reflective practice
An investigation into the Literary Criticism course was conducted using a pre-student questionnaire to assess various aspects, including the classroom atmosphere, activities, questions posed, teaching methods employed by the instructor, and the inclination of students toward critical thinking. Thirty-four students enrolled in the Literary Criticism course participated in the pre-student questionnaire to discern the state of critical thinking within the literature course under consideration. The gathered data reveal a notable deficit in the incorporation of critical thinking features within the course. However, the overall direction and content of the Literary Criticism course position it as intrinsically suitable for fostering critical thinking. This assertion is supported by the data, with the highest value ($\bar{x}$ = 4.26) indicating that students highly value listening to classmates with different ideas. Conversely, the lowest value ($\bar{x}$ = 3.02) pertains to students' expression of disagreement in the course. Additionally, students expressed agreement on positive aspects related to critical thinking, with mean values indicating a high level of mutual respect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.10), the freedom to voice opinions ($\bar{x}$ = 3.88), and a sense of comfort within the course ($\bar{x}$ = 3.60). These positive results contribute to a favorable outlook on the integration of critical thinking in the program. Since there is an inherent connection between critical thinking and higher-order questions, the nature of questions posed in the classroom holds significant sway over the quality of education (Renaud & Murray, 2007). To assess the instructor's application of critical thinking in the Literary Criticism course, a comprehensive observation spanning 39 class hours was conducted. The focus was on scrutinizing the instructor's questions through the lens of

Bloom's Taxonomy, considering its six levels (Combs, 1992; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Schmit, 2002; Brown, 2004). The analysis of data unveiled that a predominant portion of the course leaned heavily towards knowledge transmission and lecture-style instruction. Specifically, a substantial 73.7% of the instructor's questions were categorized as low-level, lower-thinking questions, with 44.6% dedicated to knowledge and an additional 29.1% to comprehension. A fraction of these questions (20.6%) fell into the mid-level range, comprising 12.6% for analysis and 8.0% for application. Notably, a meager 5.7% of the overall questions belonged to the category of higher-order thinking questions, specifically evaluation. While these findings held promise, they underscored a discernible need to augment the frequency of higher-order thinking questions in the Literary Criticism course.

4.1.2 The effect of reflective practice

To assess the initial critical thinking levels of students prior to the intervention, the Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z was administered to the 34 students in the experimental group. Following the implementation of literature-based critical thinking activities, the same test, the Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z, was administered again as a post-test to identify any alterations in their critical thinking scores. All 34 students who attended the Literary Criticism course and took part in the pre-test also actively participated in the post-test. The means of the pre-test and post-test scores for the experimental group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre/post-test Critical Thinking Scores of the Experimental Group

			T-test			
	N	Mean	s.d	df	t	p
Pre-test	34	21.21	3.35	33	-3.44	0,002
Post-test	**34**	**21.74**	**3.84**			

Table 1 illustrates that the initial mean score of the group in the pre-test stands at 21.21 out of 52, representing the highest achievable grade. In contrast, the mean score in the post-test registers a slight increase to 21.74. The standard deviation for the pre-test is 3.35, and for the post-test, it is 3.84. These findings indicate a discernible shift in the Literary Criticism group's pre-test and post-test scores, with a noteworthy rise from 21.21 to 21.74 in critical thinking scores. To ascertain the statistical significance of this difference, a T-test was conducted, revealing a statistically significant result (t = -.344, p < 0.005). This statistical significance supports the observation that the post-test scores ($\bar{x}$ = 21.74, s.d = 3.84) surpass the pre-test scores ($\bar{x}$ = 21.21, s.d = 3.35). Consequently, it is deduced that there is a noticeable enhancement in the critical thinking scores of the experimental group following the implementation of critical thinking activities over a seven-week period, underscoring the enduring nature of critical thinking as a lifelong process. In addition to the test results, participants completed a student questionnaire after the implementation phase. This aimed to capture the students' reflections on the critical thinking activities conducted throughout the spring semester. The analysis of these reflections identified a need for more challenging activities to be developed, reinforcing the importance of fostering critical thinking in the classroom setting. Another way to say this: The variety of new activities incorporated into the course shows that those critical thinking activities were as challenging as they were supposed to be. Notably, the activities that emerged as particularly demanding include assumption tasks (15.2%) and the creation of poetry (14.1%). Following closely in terms of difficulty are problem-solving activities (8.1%), distinguishing between fact and opinion (7.1%), engaging in deduction-induction exercises (6.1%), supporting ideas (6.1%), identifying suitable characters (6.1%), composing a story (5.1%), crafting a diary entry (4%), introducing new characters to existing works (4%), participating in class discussions (4%), empathizing by placing oneself in a character's position (4%), constructing dialogues (3%), designing book covers (3%), devising alternate endings (3%), collaborative pair work (2%), group activities (1%), finding new titles (2%), applying literary works in real-life contexts (1%), and formulating discussion questions based on works (1%).

Table 2 pertains to the impact of activities on students' a) literary appreciation, b) real-life understanding, c) cognitive skills, and d) creativity in generating original ideas. The data presented in Table 2 suggests that critical thinking activities were notably influential in enhancing students' appreciation of literature. Except for composing diary entries, students expressed that all activities contributed to their understanding of the content in the Literary Criticism course. Notably, class discussions garnered the highest mean, closely trailed by supporting ideas and narrative composition.

Table 2. Contribution of Activities

Activities	a x̄	b x̄	c x̄	d x̄
1. Class discussion	4.50	4.38	4.62	4.53
2. Supporting ideas	4.24	4.21	4.44	4.38
3. Writing a story	4.24	3.97	4.35	4.47
4. Relating works to real life	4.18	4.32	4.47	4.47
5. Writing new endings	4.12	4.00	4.21	4.35
6. Adding characters	4.09	3.97	4.26	4.35
7. Writing a dialogue	4.06	3.68	4.21	4.29
8. Induction-deduction	4.00	3.85	4.12	4.15
9. Pair work	3.97	3.97	4.12	4.03
10. Generating questions	3.94	4.09	4.24	4.00
11. Group work	3.94	3.91	4.15	4.12
12. Problem solving	3.91	3.85	4.29	4.41
13. Assumption	3.91	3.85	4.29	4.09
14. Finding a new title	3.88	3.97	4.29	4.38
15. Designing a cover	3.79	3.65	4.18	4.26
16. Writing a poem	3.62	2.97	3.79	3.71
17. Fact and opinion	3.53	3.44	4.09	3.97
18. Writing a diary entry	2.71	2.76	3.65	3.68

In examining the impact of critical thinking activities on students' comprehension of real-life scenarios, Table 2 illustrates that excluding activities such as composing a diary entry (x̄ = 2.76), writing poetry (x̄ = 2.67), and assumption tasks (x̄ = 3.38), which weren't specifically designed to emphasize real-life connections, students conveyed that critical thinking activities played a role in enhancing their understanding of real life. Notably, the highest reported value pertained to class discussions (x̄ = 4.38), affirming the efficacy of class discussions in Literary Criticism courses as a conduit between real-life experiences and literature. Following closely, the second-highest value was associated with activities directly linking works to real-life contexts (x̄ = 4.32), emphasizing the intentional integration of real-life perspectives through literary exploration. The data findings from Table 2 regarding the impact of critical thinking activities on students' thinking processes reveal that these activities within the Literary Criticism course effectively stimulated cognitive engagement. The mean values for all activities are notably high, with the highest reported value attributed to class discussions (x̄ = 4.62), underscoring the utility of such discussions. Subsequently, the activity of relating literary works to real-life situations (x̄ = 4.47) emerges as the second-highest value, encouraging students to engage in thoughtful exploration of connections between literature and real-life experiences through diverse activities. Table 2 further reveals that nearly all critical thinking activities, such as class discussions (mean = 4.53), supporting ideas (mean = 4.38), narrative composition (mean = 4.47), connecting works to real-life (mean = 4.47), crafting new endings (mean = 4.35), and introducing characters (mean = 4.35), significantly contributed to students' ability to generate original ideas. The lowest reported value associated with diary writing (mean = 3.68) suggests that personal diary entries may not resonate favorably with many students, implying a need for a more diverse range of engaging tasks. This underscores the importance of providing students with challenging activities to foster creativity. The outcomes of the student questionnaire following the implementation affirm that most participants found the critical thinking activities to be challenging, aligning with one of the study's objectives to stimulate cognitive engagement. Students expressed interest in the activities, citing their originality, practical utility, and enjoyment. Increased motivation was noted, particularly when activities involved collaborative pair and group work. Additionally, an overwhelming consensus emerged regarding the positive impact of activities on students' understanding and appreciation of literature, as well as their enhanced comprehension of real-life situations. These findings strongly support the overarching goals of critical thinking education, aiming to cultivate individuals capable of critical problem-solving in real-life scenarios and utilizing literature as a tool for deeper understanding. The study substantiates the effectiveness of critical-thinking instruction, with almost all students attesting to the activities' role in fostering thoughtful consideration and original idea generation.

Following the implementation, the interview with the instructor revealed that the critical-thinking activities had achieved remarkable success in fostering active student participation in class discussions and reshaping the classroom into a student-centered space. The instructor affirmed the utility of these activities in facilitating students' understanding and appreciation of literature, acting as a conduit between literary works and real-life contexts. Additionally, the instructor acknowledged the challenging nature of the activities, recognizing their ability to prompt students to delve into deep and reflective thinking.

4.2 Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the application of critical thinking in the Literary Criticism course with the aim of developing and implementing a literature-based critical thinking program intending to bring about an educational transformation in the current educational landscape. This study's importance lies in emphasizing the crucial role of integrating critical thinking into the Moroccan education system, thereby raising awareness among teachers and students about the pivotal impact of critical thinking in literature education.

Beyond the initial objectives, this study has yielded additional advantages. Foremost among these is the demonstration that critical thinking levels among students can be heightened through the incorporation of literature and diverse critical thinking activities. Traditionally, literature has been viewed as a passive medium wherein educators convey facts to students. However, this study underscores the transformative potential of literature when infused with an emphasis on critical thinking in literature courses, turning it into an active and engaging process. Moreover, by identifying barriers to critical thinking in the current educational landscape, such as an emphasis on memorization, limited and non-challenging classroom activities, and a scarcity of thought-provoking questions, this study provides substantial evidence that it is feasible to enhance students' critical thinking levels through a meticulously devised program. This finding aligns with the results of several previous studies (Long & Pederson, 1992; Combs, 1992; Özçınar, 1996; Baker & Delmonico, 1999; Derry et al., 2000; Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga et al., 2009). The T-test results reveal a significant disparity between pre- and post-critical thinking outcomes attributable to the implementation of the critical thinking program. The introduced critical-thinking activities not only prompted students to engage in analytical thinking but also transformed them into creative individuals, requiring them to solve problems and generate original ideas, thus diverging from mere rote memorization. This transformative effect contributed to an enhanced understanding and appreciation of literature, echoing findings from analogous studies conducted by Boomstroom (1992), Chaffe (1999), Derry et al. (2000), Ruggerio (2002), Halvorsen (2005), Paul & Elder (2006), and Gillies & Khan (2008). Regarding the instructor's perspective, there was notable contentment with the study's transformative impact on the classroom, shifting it toward a more student-centered environment where students actively engaged in critical thinking. The study provides compelling evidence supporting the significance of reflective practice in activating students' critical thinking skills (Şahinel, 2001; Carroll, 2007), emphasizing the pivotal role of the instructor in enhancing critical thinking (Derry et al., 2000; Gillies & Khan, 2008). Moreover, the study contributed significantly to the instructor's professional development by highlighting the expectation that ideal instructors guide students to utilize and generate information rather than merely transmitting it. In this dynamic process, the instructor played a crucial role in facilitating students to generate new ideas, establish connections with real-life contexts, and independently pursue truth. Consequently, the study's outcomes suggest that it yields fruitful results not only for students but also for instructors.

Drawing from the qualitative and quantitative data, it can be inferred that this study serves as a noteworthy model within the Turkish context, applicable to any literature course. It indicates that the practice of critical thinking can be effectively disseminated throughout the education system, especially if the goal is to equip graduate students with robust critical thinking abilities.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this research has yielded comprehensive insights into the integration of critical thinking within the Literary Criticism course, significantly contributing to the broader discourse on literature education. Through the meticulous design and implementation of a literature-based critical thinking program, the study has effectively demonstrated that diverse critical thinking activities can markedly elevate students' critical thinking levels. The transformation of the classroom into a more student-centered environment, where students actively engage in analytical thinking and creative problem-solving, stands as a testament to the success of this endeavor. The study has not only reaffirmed the significance of reflective practice in activating critical thinking skills but has also underscored the pivotal role of the instructor in guiding students toward active information utilization and generation. Moreover, the research has provided valuable insights into the professional development of the instructor, highlighting the evolving role of ideal educators in fostering a learning environment that goes beyond the mere transmission of information. The positive feedback from both students and the instructor emphasizes the feasibility of integrating critical thinking practices into literature education. This study serves as a noteworthy example within the Turkish context, offering a roadmap for other literature courses seeking to enhance critical thinking abilities. The broader implication is that effective critical thinking practices can be disseminated systematically throughout the education system, paving the way for graduates equipped with essential skills for analytical thinking, creativity, and a profound understanding of literature and its connections to real-life contexts.

5.1 Pedagogical implications

The pedagogical implications derived from this research carry profound implications for literature educators, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers alike. Firstly, the study advocates for a paradigm shift in the perception of literature as a passive subject, emphasizing the potential for literature courses to serve as active spaces for critical thinking development. Educators can draw upon the rich repertoire of critical thinking activities employed in this study to cultivate an environment where students are not just recipients of information but are actively engaged in analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, and the generation of

original ideas within the literary context. Secondly, the role of the instructor emerges as pivotal in shaping the educational experience. The study accentuates the instructor's responsibility to transcend the traditional role of information transmitter, urging educators to become facilitators who guide students in active information utilization and production. As a result, literature instructors can rethink their instructional approaches, placing a heightened emphasis on facilitating the development of critical thinking skills through innovative teaching methods and thoughtful questioning and encouraging students to explore the intricate connections between literature and real-life experiences. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of reflective practice for instructors. Continuous reflection on teaching strategies, learning outcomes, and the incorporation of critical thinking activities can enhance educators' effectiveness in fostering critical thinking skills among students. Professional development initiatives for literature instructors should prioritize strategies that encourage ongoing self-assessment and adaptation, ensuring that educators remain responsive to the evolving needs of their students and the broader educational landscape. Curriculum designers can leverage the insights from this study to revitalize literature curricula. By intentionally integrating a diverse array of critical thinking activities that challenge students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate literary works, curriculum developers can create a more dynamic and enriching learning experience. This approach aligns with the broader educational goals of fostering well-rounded individuals equipped with the cognitive skills necessary for success in various academic and real-world contexts. Finally, educational policymakers should take note of the transformative potential of critical thinking education highlighted in this research. The study provides compelling evidence supporting the integration of the development of critical thinking skills into the national curriculum. Policymakers may find inspiration in this research to advocate for systemic changes that prioritize critical thinking across all educational levels, contributing not only to academic achievement but also to the cultivation of individuals capable of analytical thinking, creativity, and a profound understanding of literature and its implications in real life.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted within the specific context of a Literary Criticism course, and as such, the generalizability of the findings to other courses or disciplines may be limited. The nature of critical thinking activities and their effectiveness may vary in different academic contexts, and caution should be exercised when extrapolating these results to broader educational settings. Secondly, the study's duration was relatively short, spanning a specific period within a semester. The short-term nature of the investigation may not fully capture the long-term impact of the critical thinking program on students' skills and attitudes. A more extended study could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained effects of such interventions. Another limitation lies in the potential influence of external factors on the outcomes. Student engagement and receptiveness to critical thinking activities could be influenced by factors such as prior academic experiences, individual learning styles, or external pressures. These external variables were not comprehensively addressed in the study, and future research might consider a more nuanced examination of these factors. The study's reliance on self-report measures, such as student questionnaires and instructor interviews, introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants may have been inclined to provide responses that they perceived as favorable to the research objectives, potentially affecting the accuracy of the reported data. Incorporating objective measures or triangulating data from multiple sources could enhance the robustness of future studies.

Furthermore, the absence of a control group in this study limits the ability to establish a direct causal link between the critical thinking program and the observed outcomes. While the study reports significant differences in pre- and post-critical thinking results, the lack of a comparative group prevents definitive conclusions about the exclusive impact of the intervention. Lastly, the study primarily focused on quantitative and qualitative data from students and the instructor, potentially overlooking other stakeholders' perspectives, such as parents or administrators. A more comprehensive examination involving diverse perspectives could provide a richer understanding of the multifaceted impact of the critical thinking program. These limitations, though noteworthy, do not diminish the study's significance. They rather underscore areas for further exploration and refinement in future research endeavors aimed at advancing our understanding of critical thinking integration in literature education.

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