
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dialogic Teaching and the Cultivation of Critical Awareness: An Exploration of the Socratic Approach in the EFL Classroom

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| ABSTRACT

Socratic pedagogy is an approach to teaching that encourages questioning mainstream practices without being judgmental, aiming to foster understanding, empathy, and more objective reflections on reality. This study investigates the impact of implementing Socratic pedagogy on student teachers' critical awareness skills during their participation in a Spoken English course at ESEF Berrechid, Morocco. Grounded in the principles of dialogic and reflective teaching, the research seeks to explore how sustained engagement with Socratic questioning can support the development of higher-order thinking, ethical reasoning, and culturally sensitive perspectives among future educators. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study involved first-year student teachers over the course of one academic year, providing them with continuous opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue, critical inquiry, and collaborative discussions. Data were collected through multiple sources, including individual interviews, focus group discussions, and detailed classroom observations, which documented students' verbal contributions, interactions, and responses to instructional prompts throughout the intervention. The findings reveal a significant enhancement in students' critical awareness of political, economic, and cultural dimensions that influence language teaching contexts. Participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of how policy decisions, institutional priorities, and socio-economic factors shape educational practices, and they developed the capacity to critically examine taken-for-granted assumptions within their learning environment. Additionally, students expressed a greater appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, recognizing the value of multiple perspectives in fostering a more equitable and effective classroom. Beyond knowledge acquisition, the intervention appeared to positively impact students' attitudes, encouraging them to express ideas confidently, engage in reflective discussions, and adopt a more questioning and inquisitive stance toward both theory and practice. Overall, the yearlong Socratic pedagogy intervention proved effective in cultivating critical reflection, awareness, and empathy among student teachers, suggesting its potential as a transformative approach in teacher education. The study highlights the importance of incorporating dialogic and inquiry-based teaching strategies into teacher preparation programs, not only to enhance linguistic and pedagogical competencies but also to foster socially aware, reflective, and ethically responsible future educators. These findings contribute to the growing body of research advocating for pedagogical approaches that bridge critical thinking, reflective practice, and cultural awareness in educational settings.

| KEYWORDS

Socratic pedagogy, critical awareness, dialogic teaching, teacher education, reflective practice, Spoken English, student teachers, Morocco, cultural diversity, qualitative research, inquiry-based learning, classroom observation

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

To understand the potential benefits of Socratic pedagogy in language teacher education, it is useful to consider the historical roots of structured learning and teaching, as well as the ways in which education has been shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces over time. Education has always been influenced by the prevailing societal context, and examining these

influences allows us to better appreciate the value of methods that promote critical reflection and questioning. Throughout history, formal education has served not only to transmit knowledge but also to socialize learners into the cultural, economic, and political norms of their societies. This historical perspective is crucial, as it highlights how teaching methods have evolved in response to societal needs, and why approaches that encourage independent thinking and critical inquiry continue to be relevant. One approach that has stood the test of time is the Socratic method, originating in Ancient Greece around 400 BC. Socrates, renowned as a philosopher and one of the earliest educators, introduced a methodology focused on questioning assumptions and fostering critical thinking. Through the work of his students, including Plato and Xenophon, Socratic pedagogy has been recorded, analyzed, and applied in educational settings for centuries, offering a systematic way to cultivate reasoning, reflection, and ethical awareness (Bartlett, 2008). His method, which relies on dialogue and thoughtful questioning, has influenced countless generations of educators and continues to inform modern pedagogical practices across disciplines.

Over time, educational trends have increasingly emphasized the importance of exploring multiple perspectives, encouraging critical inquiry, and challenging preconceived notions. Modern curricula in many countries aim to develop learners' ability to think independently, empathize with others, and engage in reflective discussion. Despite this, formal schooling often continues to constrain free thinking and the open expression of ideas, highlighting the need for teaching approaches that actively promote critical awareness, dialogue, and analytical reasoning. Language classrooms, particularly at advanced levels, offer a unique environment to cultivate these skills, given their focus on communication, interpretation of ideas, and engagement with diverse cultural and social issues. These classrooms provide students with opportunities to encounter differing perspectives, debate viewpoints, and critically assess information, which can directly influence their cognitive and social development. In the context of teacher education, enhancing critical awareness among student teachers is especially important, as their reflective practices will influence not only their own professional growth but also the learning experiences of future students. By nurturing critical awareness, teacher educators can prepare novice teachers to respond thoughtfully to the complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable challenges they will face in contemporary classrooms.

Research has shown that novice teachers benefit greatly from pedagogical approaches that encourage reflection on historical, cultural, and socio-political conditions, as these enable them to construct a well-informed professional identity and navigate the realities of contemporary education (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997). Developing reflective practices allows student teachers to become more aware of how their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and societal influences shape their beliefs about teaching and learning. Socratic pedagogy, with its emphasis on dialogue, questioning, and reasoned argumentation, provides a practical framework for fostering such critical awareness. By engaging student teachers in sustained reflective discussions and Socratic seminars, it becomes possible to question routine practices, examine the underlying assumptions of language teaching, and develop informed, thoughtful responses to complex educational challenges. Moreover, Socratic dialogue encourages learners to articulate their thoughts clearly, listen actively, and respond constructively, skills that are essential not only for classroom management but also for professional collaboration and lifelong learning.

In the context of ESEF Berrechid, integrating Socratic pedagogy into the Spoken English course offers an opportunity to enhance student teachers' ability to analyze, reflect, and critically engage with the social, cultural, and political dimensions of language education, ultimately contributing to the formation of reflective and socially responsible educators. Implementing this approach allows student teachers to become more conscious of their own assumptions and biases, to understand the influence of broader societal forces on educational practices, and to appreciate the value of diverse perspectives in shaping inclusive and effective learning environments. By equipping future teachers with these skills, Socratic pedagogy can play a pivotal role in bridging theory and practice, ensuring that student teachers are prepared not only to teach language effectively but also to foster critical thinking and empathy in their own classrooms.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Socratic pedagogy

Socratic pedagogy is a teaching approach that places dialogue, inquiry, and reflection at the center of the learning process. Unlike traditional methods of instruction, which often focus on the transmission of information from teacher to student, Socratic pedagogy encourages learners to actively engage with ideas, critically examine assumptions, and collaboratively construct knowledge. The approach is grounded in the methods of Socrates, as documented in the Platonic dialogues, and is based on the principle that meaningful learning occurs when students are invited to question, reason, and reflect on the world around them. It emphasizes that no single perspective should dominate the discussion, and that all participants have the opportunity to contribute to the understanding of complex issues. By fostering an environment in which questioning is valued over memorization and reflection is encouraged over passive acceptance, Socratic pedagogy develops both the intellectual and ethical capacities of learners, helping them to become thoughtful, autonomous, and socially aware individuals.

At the heart of Socratic pedagogy is the concept of the Socratic seminar, a structured and purposeful form of classroom dialogue. In a seminar, participants engage in extended discussions with the primary aim of deepening understanding rather than winning an argument or proving a point. Students are encouraged to listen attentively to the contributions of their peers, respond with reasoned arguments, and express their ideas clearly and respectfully. The seminar is typically arranged in a way that supports open interaction, often with participants seated in a circular formation to promote equality and inclusivity in

communication. This structure ensures that every student has the opportunity to participate and that ideas are considered on their merit rather than the assertiveness of the speaker. Additionally, supportive mechanisms, such as peer assistance or written notes, can be employed to encourage participation from students who may be less confident in speaking, ensuring that all voices are valued and respected. Through these strategies, Socratic pedagogy promotes a sense of community within the classroom, where learners feel safe to share their perspectives, take intellectual risks, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

Socratic pedagogy is not only about the exchange of ideas but also about cultivating critical thinking and reflective reasoning. The teacher's role is to facilitate this process by asking strategic, open-ended questions that challenge students to examine assumptions, consider multiple viewpoints, and develop logical and well-supported conclusions. This method encourages students to go beyond surface-level understanding, to connect theoretical concepts with real-life situations, and to explore the broader social, cultural, and political dimensions of the subject matter. In the context of teacher education, these skills are particularly vital, as future educators must navigate complex classroom dynamics, respond to diverse student needs, and make informed pedagogical decisions. By participating in Socratic dialogue, student teachers learn to engage thoughtfully with content, communicate effectively, and develop an ethical and socially responsible approach to teaching.

Moreover, Socratic pedagogy aligns with contemporary educational philosophies that value constructivist and postmodern principles, recognizing that knowledge is constructed through interaction and that multiple interpretations can coexist. It challenges students to move beyond rote learning and encourages them to consider perspectives that differ from their own, thereby enhancing empathy, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning. The process of sustained questioning, critical discussion, and reflective analysis equips learners with cognitive flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to think independently. These attributes are not only essential for academic success but also for professional competence and personal growth.

Finally, Socratic pedagogy contributes to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual respect, inclusivity, and collaborative learning. It fosters a supportive environment where students feel empowered to express their ideas, engage with differing opinions, and co-construct knowledge in a manner that promotes both individual and collective growth. In teacher education, implementing Socratic methods provides student teachers with practical experience in facilitating discussions, guiding inquiry, and promoting reflective thinking—skills that they can later transfer to their own classrooms. By emphasizing dialogue, reflection, and critical inquiry, Socratic pedagogy prepares learners not only to become knowledgeable and skilled educators but also to contribute meaningfully to the creation of inclusive, thoughtful, and socially aware learning communities.

2.2 Socratic approach in teacher education

The Socratic approach in education is a method grounded in dialogue, inquiry, and critical reflection, which encourages learners to actively engage with ideas and challenge assumptions rather than passively receiving knowledge. Originating from the practices of Socrates as recorded in the Platonic dialogues, this approach emphasizes the importance of questioning, reasoning, and considering multiple perspectives to reach deeper understanding. In the context of teacher education, Socratic pedagogy provides a structured framework for student teachers to develop critical awareness, reflective judgment, and a stronger sense of professional identity from the earliest stages of their preparation. By promoting collaborative inquiry, this method allows learners to examine not only educational theories and classroom practices but also the broader social, cultural, and political factors that shape teaching and learning. Importantly, the teacher's role is that of a facilitator who guides discussion through thoughtful questions, encourages dialogue, and allows students to construct their own understanding through reasoning, reflection, and discussion. This emphasis on active participation positions students as co-creators of knowledge, fostering ownership of their learning and cultivating skills that are essential for both professional and personal growth.

Socratic methods are particularly valuable in courses that integrate pedagogical and educational content, such as Spoken English courses in language teacher preparation programs. These courses often include topics such as language acquisition, teaching methodologies, classroom management, and learner diversity, providing an ideal setting for reflective and critical discussion. Through structured dialogue and questioning, student teachers are encouraged to relate theoretical concepts to real-life teaching experiences, examine the implications of pedagogical decisions, and critically analyze educational contexts. For instance, discussions may focus on how classroom resources, cultural diversity, student motivation, or socio-economic conditions influence teaching and learning processes. This connection between theory and practice allows pre-service teachers to envision themselves as future educators, engage with the realities of school life, and begin developing the strategic and reflective skills necessary to address challenges in diverse educational settings. In addition, the Socratic approach promotes a classroom culture where students learn to listen attentively, respond thoughtfully, and engage in civil discourse, creating a safe space for exploring sensitive or complex issues without fear of judgment or exclusion.

The early years of teacher preparation are crucial for shaping teacher identity, professional competence, and critical awareness. Student teachers bring with them prior experiences as learners, which influence their emerging beliefs and attitudes toward teaching. Socratic pedagogy leverages these experiences by providing opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and inquiry, encouraging students to critically examine their assumptions, explore multiple perspectives, and consider the ethical, cultural, and social dimensions of education. By participating in sustained, structured discussions, student teachers develop the ability to analyze complex issues, make informed decisions, and communicate their ideas clearly and confidently. This method also fosters empathy, collaboration, and a sense of community, as students engage respectfully with one another and learn from differing

viewpoints. Furthermore, the skills and habits developed through Socratic dialogue—critical thinking, reflective reasoning, and intellectual openness—are transferable to future teaching practices, equipping pre-service teachers to create inclusive, reflective, and socially aware classroom environments. Ultimately, Socratic pedagogy not only enhances intellectual and professional development but also contributes to the cultivation of thoughtful, ethically responsible, and reflective educators capable of navigating the challenges of contemporary educational contexts with insight and confidence.

2.3 Critical Awareness

Critical awareness is a central concept in this study because it underpins the development of reflective and analytical capacities in student teachers, which is the primary objective of the Socratic pedagogy applied in the intervention. It can be defined as the ability to critically engage with ideas, events, and experiences while consciously avoiding narrow, subjective, or biased perspectives. This capacity requires learners to reflect on their own assumptions, values, and preconceptions while simultaneously examining the broader social, cultural, political, historical, and ideological contexts that shape human behavior and institutional practices. In the context of teacher education, critical awareness enables pre-service teachers to analyze the complexities of educational settings, consider the implications of their pedagogical choices, and understand the multiple factors that influence student learning outcomes. By cultivating this awareness, student teachers are better prepared to navigate classroom dynamics, recognize systemic inequalities, and appreciate the diverse needs and backgrounds of their learners.

Developing critical awareness also involves recognizing and avoiding logical fallacies or reasoning errors that can hinder objective reflection. It requires connecting conceptual knowledge to real-life situations, allowing learners to see how abstract theories and educational principles manifest in everyday classroom practices. For example, understanding how socio-economic factors, cultural diversity, and political decisions impact the allocation of resources, teaching approaches, and student engagement is an essential part of this reflective process. Critical awareness is not only cognitive but also ethical and social in nature, as it encourages learners to consider the consequences of their decisions on the students they teach and the communities they serve. It fosters an ability to question dominant narratives, challenge assumptions about what constitutes "good teaching," and engage with multiple perspectives to develop nuanced and informed judgments. In this sense, critical awareness aligns closely with Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness, which emphasizes the importance of questioning one's historical and social conditions, recognizing contradictions in the world, and taking informed action to transform educational and social realities.

In teacher education programs, especially in the early stages of pre-service training, fostering critical awareness is crucial for the development of professional identity. Student teachers bring with them prior experiences as learners and observers of education, which shape their emerging beliefs about teaching and learning. Socratic pedagogy provides an ideal framework to nurture this awareness, as it encourages continuous dialogue, questioning, and reflection. Through structured discussions and seminars, pre-service teachers are prompted to analyze educational content from multiple angles, examine their assumptions, and relate theoretical knowledge to practical classroom contexts. These discussions may explore topics such as learner diversity, classroom management, curriculum design, language acquisition, or the socio-political dimensions of education. By engaging in this reflective process, student teachers not only acquire knowledge but also develop the capacity to think critically, reason ethically, and act responsibly in professional contexts.

Furthermore, critical awareness helps student teachers understand that education is not neutral; it is shaped by power relations, cultural norms, and social inequalities. Recognizing these influences allows them to approach teaching with empathy, sensitivity, and a commitment to fostering equitable learning environments. The process of reflection inherent in critical awareness encourages pre-service teachers to continuously examine their practice, adapt to diverse student needs, and consider the broader implications of their pedagogical choices. It also promotes intellectual openness and a willingness to learn from others, which are essential qualities for collaborative and effective teaching. By integrating critical awareness into teacher education, students are prepared to engage thoughtfully with the challenges of contemporary classrooms, develop innovative solutions to pedagogical problems, and contribute meaningfully to the improvement of educational practices.

Finally, critical awareness is a lifelong skill that extends beyond the classroom. It equips future educators with the ability to engage in reflective practice, to assess the effectiveness and relevance of educational policies, and to respond thoughtfully to social, cultural, and political developments that affect schooling. In the context of this study, the cultivation of critical awareness through Socratic pedagogy empowers student teachers to not only become skilled practitioners of language teaching but also socially conscious professionals capable of making a positive impact on their students, their institutions, and the wider community. The ability to critically examine reality, question assumptions, and understand multiple dimensions of educational practice is fundamental to forming competent, reflective, and responsible teachers who can navigate complex and dynamic teaching environments.

2.4 The Role of Dialogue in Developing Critical Awareness

Dialogue in educational settings plays a fundamental role in fostering critical awareness by transforming classrooms into spaces of inquiry and reflection rather than mere knowledge transmission. Buber (1970) argues that genuine dialogue, grounded in the "I-Thou" relationship, promotes mutual recognition and understanding, allowing learners to engage with ideas collaboratively

rather than being treated as passive recipients. Similarly, Freire (2005) emphasizes that dialogue is central to the development of critical consciousness, or conscientization, enabling learners to examine social, cultural, and political realities and to become active agents of change. When dialogue is embedded in classroom practice, students are encouraged to question assumptions, explore multiple perspectives, articulate their reasoning, and connect learning to real-world situations. In this way, dialogue becomes a powerful tool for cultivating critical awareness, as learners are not only processing information but also reflecting on the broader contexts and implications of that information.

The effectiveness of dialogue in developing critical awareness depends on the intentional design and facilitation of discussions. Matusov and Pease-Alvarez (2006) highlight that critical dialogue goes beyond cooperative group work; it involves sustained, purposeful inquiry in which participants critically examine assumptions, consider the influence of social and institutional power structures, and engage in reflective reasoning. Classroom studies demonstrate that traditional teacher-centered methods often limit meaningful interaction and reduce opportunities for students to develop critical skills (Alexander, 2008). In contrast, when educators implement dialogic practices—such as open-ended questioning, structured debates, and reflective discussion—students have the chance to reason collectively, challenge preconceived notions, and explore issues from multiple angles. This process is particularly relevant in language classrooms, where learners encounter cultural, social, and political dimensions of communication that require nuanced understanding and critical reflection.

Embedding dialogic approaches in teacher education programs is essential for cultivating critical awareness among pre-service teachers. Garcia, Arias, and Brodsky (2009) assert that dialogue paired with reflective practices helps learners interrogate their positionality, consider diverse perspectives, and develop the capacity to act ethically and responsibly in social and educational contexts. In EFL classrooms, dialogic practices guide student-teachers to examine the role of language in identity, culture, and power dynamics, equipping them to become reflective practitioners rather than passive implementers of methodologies. WestEd (2013) further demonstrates that structured dialogic interventions in language education can enhance understanding of equity, voice, and agency, preparing learners to navigate complex sociocultural realities. Thus, integrating dialogue into teacher training programs fosters critical awareness, enabling future educators to think deeply, question assumptions, and make informed pedagogical decisions that are socially and culturally conscious.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of dialogic teaching, particularly through the Socratic approach, in cultivating critical awareness among EFL student teachers at ESEF Berrechid in Morocco. This research aims to examine how Socratic dialogue, which relies on questioning, reasoning, and reflective discussion, contributes to the development of learners' capacity for critical thinking and awareness of social, cultural, and educational realities. By focusing on the interactional nature of dialogue, the study seeks to understand how student teachers engage in reflective inquiry that challenges assumptions, encourages multiple perspectives, and promotes intellectual autonomy. Another objective is to investigate how the implementation of the Socratic approach within Spoken English courses shapes learners' attitudes toward language learning and teaching, helping them move beyond rote learning toward a more reflective and participatory mode of engagement. The study also aims to analyze how dialogic teaching fosters awareness of power relations, inequalities, and ideologies present within educational and societal contexts, thereby nurturing a sense of social responsibility among future teachers. Furthermore, it seeks to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of Socratic pedagogy as a meaningful and transformative learning tool that enhances their professional identity and pedagogical insight. Ultimately, this study intends to provide pedagogical implications and practical recommendations for integrating dialogic and Socratic methods into teacher education programs, emphasizing their potential to create more reflective, empowered, and critically aware educators who can navigate and contribute thoughtfully to the ever-evolving landscape of language education.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Research design

The present study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore how dialogic teaching grounded in the Socratic approach contributes to the cultivation of critical awareness among EFL student teachers at ESEF Berrechid in Morocco. This design is chosen for its ability to capture the complexity and depth of human experiences in their natural settings, providing a deep understanding of how learning, reflection, and dialogue interact in authentic classroom contexts. Since the focus of this research lies in examining processes rather than measuring numerical outcomes, the qualitative case study framework allows the researcher to investigate the participants' evolving thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions as they engage in Socratic dialogue. It also makes it possible to examine the contextual factors such as cultural, institutional, and linguistic influences that shape the participants' engagement and the development of their critical awareness within the Moroccan EFL context.

The study involves first-year student teachers enrolled in a Spoken English course, as this environment naturally supports discussion, interpretation, and reflection. Over the course of one academic year, the researcher will implement dialogic and Socratic-based teaching strategies that promote inquiry, questioning, and collaborative meaning-making. Data will be collected

using various qualitative tools, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective journals. These tools are designed to complement each other and ensure data triangulation, which increases the credibility and reliability of the findings. Classroom observations will provide insights into interactional patterns, questioning techniques, and student participation. Interviews and reflective journals will reveal participants' internal reflections and interpretations of their learning experiences, while focus group discussions will offer a shared space for participants to reflect collectively on the effectiveness of dialogic teaching and how it influences their awareness and thinking processes.

Data analysis will follow a thematic approach, focusing on identifying recurring themes related to critical awareness, dialogic interaction, and pedagogical transformation. The analysis will explore how participants question assumptions, explore multiple viewpoints, and develop a deeper understanding of social, cultural, and educational issues through dialogue. The researcher will adopt an interpretive stance, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through interaction between the participants and the researcher. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation will be carefully respected throughout the study. Overall, this qualitative design aligns with the principles of constructivist and dialogic learning, emphasizing the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through communication and reflection. By situating the investigation in a real EFL classroom context, this design not only captures the transformative power of the Socratic approach but also offers practical insights for teacher education programs that aim to prepare reflective, open-minded, and critically aware educators who can respond thoughtfully to the complexities of modern education.

3.3 participants

The participants in this study were selected through convenience sampling, as they consisted of pre existing groups of first year student teachers enrolled in the English Studies program at the Higher School of Education and Training (ESEF) in Berrechid, Morocco. This sampling method was considered appropriate since the researcher had direct access to these intact groups through their regular teaching duties, and because the participants represented a highly relevant population for exploring the impact of dialogic and Socratic pedagogy on the cultivation of critical awareness in EFL classrooms. Convenience sampling enabled the researcher to work within an authentic educational environment without disrupting the natural flow of classroom activities, thereby allowing the study to observe genuine classroom interactions and learning experiences. The participants, who were engaged in a Spoken English course, provided a rich context for the implementation of Socratic dialogue and inquiry based discussions, as this course inherently emphasizes communication, reflection, and expression of ideas.

The group comprised both male and female students, typically aged between eighteen and twenty two, with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Most of them spoke Arabic and Amazigh as their first languages and had studied French as a second language before beginning their English studies. This multilingual and multicultural composition made the group particularly suitable for an exploration of how dialogic and Socratic teaching strategies can enhance awareness, open mindedness, and sensitivity to different perspectives. The participants were in the early stage of their teacher education program, a period that is crucial for developing professional identity, pedagogical thinking, and reflective skills. Working with such a group allowed the researcher to investigate how questioning, reasoning, and dialogue can stimulate the development of a critical understanding of language, education, and the broader sociocultural contexts in which teachers operate.

Throughout the academic year, participants engaged in a series of dialogic sessions and Socratic discussions designed to encourage them to articulate their ideas, challenge assumptions, and collaboratively construct meaning. These sessions promoted inquiry, reflection, and active participation, which are essential components of both dialogic teaching and critical pedagogy. The learning environment was designed to be open and respectful, where all voices were valued and students were encouraged to share their thoughts freely without fear of being judged. Ethical considerations were carefully maintained, as participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the research and consented voluntarily to take part. Their identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in the analysis and reporting of data. The researcher also ensured that participation in class discussions and research activities did not affect students' academic evaluation or performance. Overall, this group of first year student teachers provided an ideal context for exploring the relationship between Socratic dialogue and the development of critical awareness, offering valuable insights into how future educators can be empowered through reflective, discussion based learning practices.

3.4 Research instruments

The research instruments used in this study were carefully selected to gather comprehensive and reliable data that would allow for an in depth exploration of how dialogic and Socratic pedagogy can foster critical awareness among first year student teachers in the English Studies program at ESEF Berrechid. The study relied primarily on a combination of qualitative tools, including classroom observation, semi structured interviews, and reflective journals. Classroom observation served as the primary data collection instrument, as it enabled the researcher to capture the natural dynamics of the teaching and learning process and to document how students interacted, responded to questions, and engaged in reflective discussions during Socratic and dialogic sessions. Through systematic observation, the researcher was able to note patterns of participation, the use of questioning techniques, and the ways in which learners articulated their ideas and built upon one another's contributions.

Observation also allowed the researcher to assess the extent to which students demonstrated signs of developing critical thinking, open mindedness, and awareness of multiple perspectives within classroom discourse.

In addition to classroom observation, semi structured interviews were conducted with a selected number of participants to gain deeper insight into their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with the dialogic and Socratic approach. The interviews provided an opportunity for students to express their reflections on how these methods influenced their thinking, their confidence in speaking English, and their ability to engage critically with different viewpoints. The semi structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes while maintaining focus on the main research objectives. Students' responses were recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis, which helped identify recurring patterns related to critical awareness, dialogue, and reflective learning.

Reflective journals were also used as a valuable source of data to complement classroom observations and interviews. Throughout the semester, students were asked to write short reflections after selected sessions, describing what they had learned, how they perceived the discussions, and whether the questions raised during class had led them to reconsider their previous beliefs or opinions. These journals encouraged self evaluation and provided a space for students to articulate their inner thoughts and evolving perspectives. They served not only as a pedagogical tool but also as an important instrument for understanding how learners processed and internalized the dialogic experience over time.

Altogether, these three instruments formed a triangulated research design that strengthened the validity and reliability of the findings. Observation captured real classroom behaviors, interviews revealed personal and emotional dimensions of students' engagement, and reflective journals offered access to their ongoing intellectual and attitudinal development. The integration of these instruments ensured that the study provided a holistic understanding of how dialogic and Socratic teaching practices contribute to shaping critical awareness in future teachers, while also reflecting the authentic and transformative nature of classroom learning in the Moroccan EFL context.

4. Results

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of dialogic teaching through the Socratic approach had a profound, multifaceted, and lasting impact on the development of critical awareness among the first year student teachers at the Higher School of Education and Training in Berrechid. Analysis of classroom observations, semi structured interviews, and reflective journals revealed that students became progressively more engaged in discussions and more willing to challenge assumptions, both their own and those of their peers. Over the course of the academic year, participants demonstrated a growing capacity to consider multiple perspectives when reflecting on issues related to language learning, teaching practices, and broader educational, social, and cultural contexts. This ability to evaluate ideas critically was particularly evident in the way students listened attentively to the contributions of others, built upon peer arguments, and articulated more nuanced opinions rather than providing simple or memorized responses. Classroom observations further illustrated that repeated participation in Socratic dialogue encouraged learners to adopt a reflective stance, to question routine practices and assumptions, and to explore alternative viewpoints in a systematic and thoughtful manner. These behaviors indicate that the dialogic and Socratic methods fostered intellectual curiosity, critical inquiry, and a willingness to engage with complexity rather than accept surface level explanations or predetermined solutions.

Moreover, the study revealed that students developed a significant degree of self awareness and a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities as future educators. Through continuous dialogue and structured reflection, participants became more conscious of how social, economic, and cultural factors influence educational practices and language learning outcomes. Many students reported in interviews and reflective journals that classroom discussions challenged their prior assumptions and encouraged them to recognize their own biases, limitations, and areas for growth. They expressed an increasing appreciation for the importance of empathy, open mindedness, and tolerance when working with learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio economic backgrounds. Reflective journal entries provided rich evidence of these shifts, as students described specific moments when engaging with Socratic questioning or peer perspectives prompted them to reconsider preexisting beliefs about teaching, learning, and cultural diversity. These findings suggest that the development of critical awareness through dialogic teaching extends beyond intellectual engagement to influence ethical sensitivity, professional judgment, and the ability to navigate complex classroom and societal contexts.

In addition to fostering critical awareness and self reflection, the study demonstrated notable gains in students' communication, collaborative, and metacognitive skills. Over time, participants became more confident in expressing ideas, asking meaningful questions, and participating in constructive debate. Even students who were initially quiet or hesitant gradually contributed more actively, demonstrating that the dialogic environment created a safe and supportive space for learning. Observations indicated that students increasingly engaged in active listening, responded thoughtfully to their peers, and worked collaboratively to extend discussions rather than dominate them. They were also able to recognize imbalances in participation and took initiative to include less vocal classmates in the dialogue, reflecting the development of cooperative and leadership skills within the classroom community. Semi structured interviews further revealed that students viewed these interactions as critical to their own professional growth, as the experience of responding to diverse perspectives and justifying their ideas strengthened their capacity for reflection, ethical reasoning, and decision making.

The triangulation of data from classroom observation, interviews, and reflective journals underscores that dialogic teaching combined with Socratic questioning creates a learning environment that promotes holistic development. Students were not only able to acquire knowledge about language teaching theories and practices, but they were also empowered to engage critically with content, collaborate effectively with peers, and reflect on their own cognitive, social, and cultural assumptions. This reflective and participatory approach also contributed to the shaping of their emerging professional identities, providing them with a foundation for thoughtful and responsive teaching in future classrooms. Overall, the results suggest that integrating dialogic and Socratic pedagogical methods in teacher education can have transformative effects on learners, enabling them to develop critical awareness, ethical sensitivity, and professional competence while fostering a culture of inquiry, dialogue, and mutual respect. These findings highlight the potential of Socratic approaches not only as a method for enhancing academic and cognitive skills, but also as a vehicle for nurturing the reflective, socially conscious, and critically engaged educators needed in contemporary EFL classrooms and beyond.

5. Discussion

5.1 Development of Critical Awareness through Socratic Dialogue

The findings of this study indicate that the use of Socratic dialogue in the EFL classroom had a profound effect on enhancing critical awareness among first year student teachers at ESEF Berrechid. Students became progressively more engaged in classroom discussions and demonstrated an increasing willingness to question assumptions, challenge preconceived ideas, and reflect on both their own perspectives and those of their peers. Classroom observations revealed that participants moved from simply recalling information to actively analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing ideas related to language learning, teaching methodologies, and broader educational and social contexts. This reflects Mayer's (1986) assertion that critical awareness develops most effectively when learners are actively engaged in the subject matter and encouraged to relate abstract concepts to real life experiences. By linking theoretical aspects of language teaching to practical classroom scenarios, students were able to critically examine the influence of political, economic, and cultural factors on teaching practices and the learning process.

Reflective journal entries and interview responses provided additional evidence of students' growing critical consciousness. Many participants noted that Socratic questioning helped them recognize the limitations of their prior knowledge, question normative practices in education, and consider alternative viewpoints in a structured and systematic way. This aligns with Freire's (2005) concept of critical consciousness, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing one's social and historical context to develop a deeper understanding of societal and educational structures. Students reported that engaging with different perspectives allowed them to see issues from multiple angles, challenging ingrained biases and assumptions that may have previously gone unquestioned. Through this reflective process, learners developed an enhanced awareness of how classroom decisions, teaching approaches, and learning outcomes are intertwined with broader social and cultural realities, fostering both intellectual and ethical growth.

Furthermore, the data suggest that Socratic dialogue facilitated the development of higher order thinking skills, including reasoning, analysis, and problem solving. Students were observed formulating questions, defending their positions, and constructing arguments grounded in evidence, which indicates the development of a systematic approach to critical thinking. The dialogic nature of the sessions encouraged students to engage in sustained inquiry rather than seeking immediate answers, cultivating patience, open mindedness, and tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. This process of questioning and reflection also encouraged learners to examine their own cognitive processes, recognize logical fallacies in reasoning, and approach issues with greater objectivity. In essence, the Socratic method provided a structured yet flexible framework in which learners could actively interrogate assumptions, explore multiple perspectives, and develop the cognitive and reflective capacities necessary to become thoughtful and critically aware educators. Overall, the findings strongly suggest that Socratic dialogue is a highly effective pedagogical tool for fostering critical awareness, intellectual engagement, and ethical reflection in teacher education programs, particularly in contexts such as Moroccan EFL classrooms where students are preparing to navigate complex linguistic, cultural, and social dynamics.

5.2 Impact of Dialogic Teaching on Professional Identity and Collaborative Skills

In addition to promoting critical awareness, the findings of this study indicate that dialogic teaching through Socratic questioning significantly contributed to the development of students' professional identity and collaborative competencies. From the beginning of the academic year, students were gradually introduced to a learning environment that encouraged reflection, dialogue, and shared responsibility for the construction of knowledge. Classroom observations and interviews revealed that participants became increasingly confident in expressing their ideas, asking thoughtful and probing questions, and engaging in sustained discussions that required both listening and active participation. Even students who were initially quiet or hesitant demonstrated a marked increase in their willingness to participate, suggesting that the dialogic format created a psychologically safe and inclusive space in which all voices could be heard. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective, which highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative engagement as central

mechanisms for cognitive and professional development. Students learned to value the contributions of their peers, consider alternative viewpoints, and incorporate these perspectives into their own understanding, thereby strengthening both their professional awareness and interpersonal skills.

The study also demonstrated that dialogic teaching fostered students' awareness of their emerging identities as future teachers. Participants reported that engaging with Socratic dialogue allowed them to envision themselves as educators responsible for facilitating learning, promoting understanding, and supporting diverse learners. This corresponds with Beltman et al. (2015), who emphasize that professional identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by both personal and contextual factors. The reflective and participatory nature of Socratic dialogue enabled students to examine their own beliefs, values, and assumptions about teaching while simultaneously observing and learning from the reasoning and experiences of others. Students expressed that these experiences helped them anticipate the challenges of classroom teaching, including managing diverse learners, addressing cultural differences, and making informed pedagogical decisions. Such reflective engagement is critical in pre-service teacher training, as it provides a foundation for developing the ethical, cognitive, and social competencies necessary to navigate complex classroom realities.

Moreover, the study highlighted significant gains in collaborative and metacognitive skills among the participants. As students engaged in dialogue, they learned to listen attentively, respond constructively, and foster an environment of mutual respect and inquiry. They also developed the capacity to identify imbalances in participation, encouraging peers who were less vocal to contribute, and thereby creating an inclusive learning community. Interviews and reflective journals suggested that this collaborative engagement not only enhanced students' confidence but also their ability to work effectively in groups, negotiate ideas, and support collective problem solving. These skills are particularly important for future language teachers, who must continuously collaborate with colleagues, engage with learners, and adapt to dynamic educational contexts. Additionally, the reflective processes embedded in dialogic teaching encouraged students to think metacognitively about their own learning, strategies, and approaches, further reinforcing the alignment between their emerging professional identity and practical teaching competence. Overall, the findings suggest that dialogic teaching, when combined with Socratic methods, provides a holistic approach that nurtures cognitive, social, and professional development simultaneously, supporting pre-service teachers in becoming critically aware, collaborative, reflective, and ethically responsible educators prepared to meet the challenges of contemporary EFL classrooms.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of dialogic teaching through the Socratic approach on the development of critical awareness among first year student teachers at ESEF Berrechid. The findings indicate that integrating Socratic questioning into the Spoken English classroom created a rich learning environment in which students actively engaged with content, reflected critically on their assumptions, and considered multiple perspectives on educational, social, cultural, and political issues. Through sustained participation in dialogue, students developed the ability to reason critically, question routine practices, and articulate nuanced and evidence-based ideas. The study demonstrates that critical awareness is not only an intellectual skill but also an ethical and social competence, as students became more conscious of their responsibilities as future educators and the broader impact of teaching decisions on diverse learners.

Furthermore, the study revealed that dialogic teaching fostered the growth of students' professional identity, collaborative abilities, and metacognitive skills. Participants gained confidence in expressing their ideas, actively participating in discussions, and supporting their peers, reflecting the development of essential social and professional competencies. The reflective and interactive nature of the Socratic method allowed students to recognize the value of dialogue, empathy, and open mindedness, creating an inclusive classroom culture where all voices were acknowledged and respected. This demonstrates that dialogic teaching not only enhances cognitive and analytical capacities but also nurtures social, ethical, and professional dimensions of teacher preparation.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the Socratic approach and dialogic pedagogy hold significant potential for teacher education programs, particularly in EFL contexts, by promoting critical awareness, reflective thinking, ethical sensitivity, and collaborative competence. By creating a learning environment that encourages inquiry, reflection, and discussion, pre-service teachers are better equipped to navigate complex classroom dynamics, understand the social and cultural implications of their teaching, and develop a thoughtful and socially conscious professional identity. These findings underscore the importance of integrating dialogic and Socratic methods into teacher training programs, providing future educators with the skills, awareness, and reflective mindset necessary to foster meaningful learning experiences in diverse educational contexts.

6.1 Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study carry significant pedagogical implications for teacher education programs, particularly in the context of EFL classrooms such as those at ESEF Berrechid. First, integrating dialogic teaching and Socratic questioning into pre-service teacher training can serve as an effective strategy to cultivate critical awareness, reflective thinking, and analytical skills. Educators and teacher trainers are encouraged to design courses that allow students to engage in sustained dialogue, actively

question assumptions, and explore multiple perspectives, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of language teaching, learning processes, and broader social, cultural, and political contexts. The study also highlights the importance of creating safe and inclusive classroom environments in which all students feel empowered to contribute, express their ideas, and respond to diverse viewpoints without fear of judgment.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the Socratic method can support the development of professional identity by encouraging pre-service teachers to reflect on their roles, responsibilities, and future practices. Teacher education programs should provide structured opportunities for students to analyze real-life teaching scenarios, discuss ethical dilemmas, and consider how socio-cultural and economic factors influence educational settings. This reflective practice allows trainees to develop empathy, tolerance, and sensitivity towards diverse learners, preparing them to navigate complex classroom dynamics effectively. Additionally, collaborative dialogue fosters communication, leadership, and cooperative skills that are essential for professional growth and for promoting inclusive and participatory learning environments in future classrooms.

Finally, the findings imply that teacher educators should move beyond traditional, transmission-oriented methods of instruction and adopt interactive, discussion-based approaches that encourage student-centered learning. By embedding Socratic dialogue within language courses, instructors can help learners develop not only cognitive and analytical skills but also metacognitive, social, and ethical competencies that are central to effective teaching. Such an approach emphasizes that teacher education is not merely about transmitting knowledge but about preparing reflective, critically aware, and socially conscious educators capable of fostering meaningful learning experiences for their students. Overall, these implications highlight the transformative potential of dialogic teaching in shaping well-rounded, thoughtful, and competent language teachers.

6.2 Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of Socratic dialogue and dialogic teaching in cultivating critical awareness among first year student teachers at ESEF Berrechid, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research. First, the study involved a relatively small and specific sample of pre-service teachers, all enrolled in the same institution and drawn from pre-existing groups. While this convenience sampling facilitated access and data collection, it also limits the generalizability of the results. The findings may not necessarily reflect the experiences or outcomes of pre-service teachers in other EFL contexts, in different universities, or with more diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, the pre-existing group dynamics, including students' prior relationships, social hierarchies, and classroom familiarity, may have influenced the quality of participation, engagement, and dialogue, making it difficult to attribute changes solely to the intervention.

Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative research instruments, including classroom observations, individual interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective journals. While these tools offered rich, in-depth insights into students' experiences, perceptions, and thought processes, the absence of quantitative measures or pre- and post-intervention assessments limits the ability to objectively evaluate the degree of development in critical awareness, collaborative skills, or professional identity. Moreover, qualitative data is inherently subject to interpretation, which can introduce researcher bias despite efforts to ensure reliability and credibility. The use of self-reported reflections and interviews also carries the possibility that participants presented socially desirable responses rather than entirely authentic accounts of their experiences, particularly in the context of a teacher-student relationship.

Third, the intervention was conducted over the span of one academic year. While this duration allowed for observable development in students' critical awareness and dialogic engagement, it may not have been sufficient to capture the long-term sustainability of these skills or their transferability to actual classroom practice once participants become professional teachers. The outcomes may also have been influenced by contextual factors, including the specific instructor's teaching style, available classroom resources, class size, and the broader institutional culture. These contextual variables may have contributed to the success or limitations of the intervention, and their impact cannot be fully isolated in this study.

Finally, individual differences among participants, such as prior educational experiences, language proficiency, motivation, learning preferences, personality traits, and prior exposure to reflective or dialogic practices, may have affected the degree to which students engaged with the Socratic approach and benefited from it. Some students may have naturally been more inclined towards critical thinking or verbal participation, while others may have faced challenges in articulating their ideas or engaging in open discussion, potentially creating uneven development within the group. Future studies should consider these individual factors, as well as how they interact with pedagogical interventions, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of dialogic teaching. Overall, while this study offers meaningful insights, these limitations suggest that its findings should be interpreted with caution and serve as a foundation for further research in diverse contexts, with larger and more varied samples, and with longitudinal designs that examine the persistence of critical awareness and professional skills over time.

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