
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Moroccan EFL High School Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions towards Critical Thinking Skills: Kenitra's Directorate as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking, as a 21st century skill, has become a pertinent skill in modern education. Critical thinking was first debated by Greek philosophers, namely Plato and Socrates. Moroccan educators believe that critical thinking needs to be included in educational curricula. Within this framework, the aim of this study is to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards critical thinking skills in Moroccan school. The sample of the study consisted of 25 male and female EFL teachers who filled out an adopted questionnaire in Moroccan public schools, specifically in Kenitra's directorate in the academic year 2022/2023. This study is categorized within the pragmatic worldview. It adopts a mixed-methods design that implements both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather and analyse data. This research's philosophy choice is based on a justified and grounded theory. Quantitative and qualitative data obtained from 55 EFL teachers from different high schools that belong to Kenitra's directorate have been completely used to investigate and explore EFL teacher's perceptions and attitudes towards Critical Thinking significance in Moroccan high schools. Findings show that Moroccan teachers perceive critical thinking as of paramount significance in EFL classrooms. Clearly, respondents literally held positive attitudes towards critical thinking skills. Yet, they believe that teachers should receive more training in this regard, and EFL textbooks need to include tasks and activities that stimulate students to learn the core skills of critical thinking. This study has many pedagogical implications, among which are the indoctrination of critical thinking skills in students and the assurance of quality education at the tertiary level.

KEYWORDS

Critical thinking skills; Attitudes; Perceptions; Moroccan school.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The importance of critical thinking in education is growing in Morocco, although perceptions and attitudes towards this skill differ among educators. Facione (1986, p. 222) defines critical thinking as "the ability to properly construct and evaluate arguments," with a focus on the evaluation of information. Ennis (1992) views critical thinking as the mental process of assessing claims or arguments, emphasizing the importance of assessing information before acting. Scriven and Paul (1997) define critical thinking more broadly as "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to belief and action." According to Reid (2003; p. 32), attitudes "convey our assessment of something or someone," and they may be based on our perceptions, emotions, and past actions, and can affect how we act in the future. Reid (2006) identifies three aspects of attitudes: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive element refers to a person's beliefs or convictions about an attitude object. In fact, any field of study can benefit from learning and using the fundamentals of critical thinking, as it can be taught as a way of thinking. However, according to Halpern (2014), receiving a quality education does not ensure the

development of critical thinking. She argues that critical thinking needs to be clearly and actively nurtured. Investigating teachers' perceptions of critical thinking is of paramount importance. However, research is needed to determine how much teachers understand the value of teaching thinking, how they define critical thinking, and whether it is desirable to devote resources to teaching thinking skills rather than facts. The purpose of this study is to examine the comprehension of critical thinking concepts and individual teacher perceptions of critical thinking instruction among Moroccan high school instructors. To achieve this, the following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What are high school EFL educators' attitudes towards critical thinking skills?
2. How do high school EFL educators perceive critical thinking instruction?

2. Literature Review

In Morocco, critical thinking has received significant attention in recent years. The Ministry of Higher Education implemented a major educational reform in 2003 that was based on the modular approach, but a separate critical thinking module was never taught in Moroccan universities. However, in 2014, the ministry implemented a second reform to address the issues affecting university education, and several institutions seized the opportunity to add critical thinking to their curricula, as noted by Chouari (2016).

The importance of teaching critical thinking skills has been recognized in the field of education since the beginning of the 20th century. Dewey (1933) was among the first academics to write about the significance of teaching students and teachers to use critical thinking abilities. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, published in 1956, further popularized the concept of critical thinking in the latter half of the 20th century.

The job market in Morocco requires creative thinking, as noted by Ait Tejan and Sabil (2019) in their study, in which Moroccan employers considered creativity to be the most important skill. In August 2012, the Moroccan monarch emphasized the importance of encouraging students to use their creativity to fulfill their civic responsibilities and contribute to the nation's economy, society, and culture. However, according to Sahmi (2021), the collective tendency in Arab and Moroccan cultures glorifies the past and the group while viewing individualism, autonomy, and divergent thought as forms of deviation. Elhaysam (2002) also claimed that Arab society, in general, discourages creativity and encourages people to remain within their comfort zones, and this view applies to the Moroccan environment as well.

Sahmi (2021) claims that Moroccan high school pupils exhibit what appears to be a form of anxiety when it comes to changing or criticizing the dominant beliefs or expressing themselves freely. This is because, as Sahmi (2021) notes, the educational system in Morocco encourages dependency and memorization as well as stifles individual freedom and viewpoints that conflict with communal norms. According to Ettadli, the Moroccan educational system continues to place a strong focus on the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge (2017). Ghaicha and Mezourai (2018) also noted that Moroccan high school EFL teachers use traditional methods, such as lengthy teacher lectures, an excessive focus on providing students with sufficient knowledge, and dominance of teacher-student interactions. As a result, according to Hellalet (2021), pupils enter universities unable to apply higher-order thinking skills. The study assessed Moroccan university students' capacity for critical thought, as well as their capacity to articulate their opinions and back them up with relevant data. The study's findings showed that the participants had poor critical thinking skills and were unable to take a position and rally support.

Previous studies have mainly tackled textbooks and skills, while teachers' recognition about critical thinking attempts to be ignored. The majority of researchers who conducted textbook research used Bloom's taxonomy and critical dispositions (Jebbour 2016; Mrah, 2017; Jebbour, 2019). Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), which are connected to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, are also integrated (Bloom, 1956). The six stages of the cognitive domain identified by this taxonomy are knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Higher-order thinking abilities, or critical thinking abilities, are those that fall under the top three taxonomies stated above, namely analysis, synthesis, and assessment. To some extent, critical thinking also involves the lower-level taxonomies of knowledge, comprehension, and application. Bouziane (1997) provides a summary of earlier studies, including one that assessed sorts of comprehension questions found in Moroccan textbooks written in the three official languages of Morocco. Moroccan textbooks and exams reportedly solely include lower-order questions (Ezzaki, 1986). Es-salhi and Elfatihi (2019) conducted a second study on a different textbook and reached essentially the same conclusions, confirming that the studied textbook focuses mostly on lower-order thinking skills. Elboubekri (2013), who researched critical thinking in connection to intercultural competence, came to the same conclusion and recommends that textbook authors should include additional material that will help students learn critical thinking within the context of intercultural competence. However, he did not pay enough attention to textbook content.

Experiments were undertaken as part of another study series. The outcomes of exposing primary school students to Bloom's taxonomy as manifested in vocabulary use were studied by Benjelloun and El Kirat (2019), Rouijel, Bouziane, and Zohri (2019), and Bouanani (2014) examined the progress of university students' critical skills dispositions in writing as informed by reflective writing intervention. Teaching critical thinking today is guided by four major approaches (Abrami et al. 2008; Emerson, 2013). First, some teachers use the "mixed approach," which perceives critical thinking as a separate "unit within a course of other content." Second, some teachers use the "immersion approach" where critical thinking is "a by-product of instruction." Third, other teachers adopt the "general approach" which relies on explicit teaching of critical thinking. Lastly, some other teachers prefer to use the "infusion approach": in this approach, critical thinking skills are "embedded in the course content in an explicit way (Emerson, 2013, pp. 8-9).

Although there are plenty of approaches to teaching critical thinking, these approaches tend to be ineffective. Court (1991) points out five approaches to teaching critical thinking: (1) the process skills approach, (2) the problem-solving approach, (3) the logic approach, (4) the information-processing approach, and (5) the multi-aspect approach. Nevertheless, she explicitly attacks the ineffectiveness of these approaches to teaching critical thinking by claiming that they have weaknesses and are incomplete. For this reason, she mentions that "we need to employ the many useful approaches we have for teaching critical thinking; we must work to redesign schools so that they are less authoritative; and (3) we should make schools 'less examination driven'" (p.117).

According to Fahim & Bagheri (2012), studies conducted in countries such as Iran, Turkey, China, and Morocco are few and inadequate and cannot come up with clear conclusions about teaching and assessing critical thinking in Asia and Africa. Therefore, more research is needed in this field. In the Moroccan context, teachers encounter students' resistance and reasoning, for students are often asked to analyze thoughts by implementing analysis, logic, and reasoning, known as "Socratic questions".

3. Methodology

The present study was carried out on teachers of English as a foreign language belonging to Kenitra directorate. A total of 25 teachers aged between 20 and 50 participated in this study. Investigating the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards CT skills is theoretically founded as the data obtained will be more reliable and valid.

However, teachers have various perceptions and attitudes towards CT, and including these attitudes that teachers have and with many CT supporters will seemingly reveal interesting ideas concerning CT inclusion in educational curricula.

After deciding on the topic and the target population to investigate, the researcher designed a questionnaire to collect data from Moroccan teachers of English. To measure the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards critical thinking skills, the researchers developed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The questionnaire is divided into three main sections. The first section elicits the participants' demographic information, and the second section obtains quantitative data related to CT. The last section of the questionnaire yields qualitative data about how CT skills and professional programs can be improved. To abide by research ethics, the researcher explained on the first page of the questionnaire that the participants' honest responses will result in valid findings and therefore help come up with insights and implications that can improve their teaching of CT. The questionnaire included socio-academic characteristics such as age, gender, and number of years spent teaching, in addition to other open questions that aim to obtain teachers' suggestions and opinions. Data was collected on the basis of a self-administered Google Form sent via email, WhatsApp, and Facebook teachers' group.

The selection of the questionnaire to be used is theoretically informed. According to Creswell (2012), "surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals" (p.06). Definitely, the questionnaire will help the researchers identify EFL teachers' perceptions and beliefs towards CT skills in Morocco. To achieve a satisfying degree of validity, reliability, objectivity, and to ensure that the results attained can be generalizable across and are representative of the whole population, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect and analyze data. The choice of mixed-methods design to collect and analyze data is theoretically grounded. It is pinpointed that researchers stress the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem (see Rossman & Wilson, 1985). In the same vein, Creswell (2014) stated that "mixed methods research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches" (p.32). The researcher therefore utilized a well-designed questionnaire that yielded both quantitative and qualitative data about Moroccan teachers of English attitudes, perceptions, and satisfaction with CT. The questionnaire provided data to account for and gain a deep understanding of the teachers' views about CT assets in the EFL classroom and how they can be implemented to meet students' needs and expectations.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic information of the study's respondents:

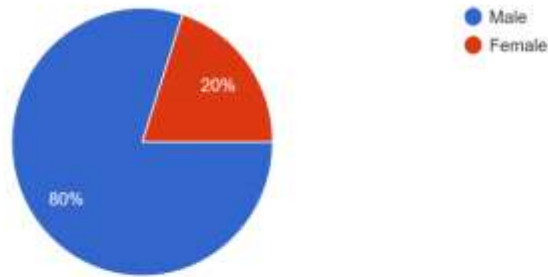
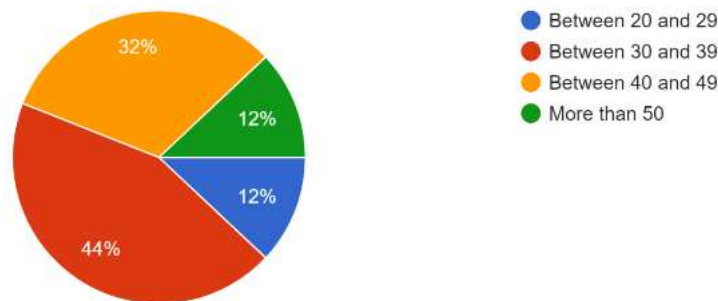


Figure 1. Gender distribution of the teachers

1.1 Characteristics of the respondents:

| Gender | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Male | 20 | 80% |
| Female | 5 | 20% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

Figure N° 1 shows that the number of males exceeds the number of females in this study. Males are 20 with a percentage of 80 % from the respondents, whereas females are 9 and represent a percentage of 20 % which means that males are the dominant gender in this study.

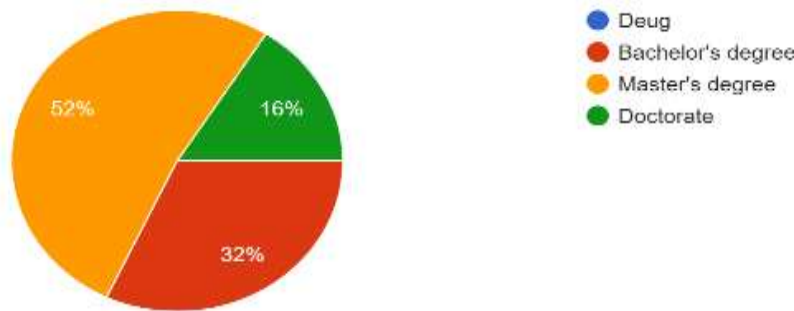


1.2 Figure 2 Age distribution of the teachers

| Age | Number | Percentage |
|-------|--------|------------|
| 20-29 | 3 | 12% |
| 29-39 | 11 | 44% |

| | | |
|--------------|----|------|
| 39-49 | 8 | 32% |
| More than 50 | 3 | 12% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

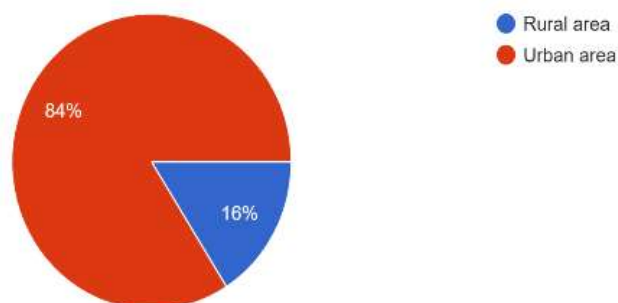
In figure N° 2 the majority of the respondents were between 29 and 49 years old with a percentage of 76%. The least percentage 24% is represented by the teachers aging between 20 and 29 years old and more than 50 years old. The category aging between 29 and 39 years refers to young adults, meaning that they have a respectable year of working experiences. The second category is of those between 39 and 49 years represents experts in the domain of education with long experience who can offer guidance and advice. The last category, which is of those aging more than 50 years, refers to experts in the domain of ELT.



1.3 Figure 3. Teachers' Educational Background

| Educational background | Number | percentage |
|------------------------|--------|------------|
| Deug | 00 | 00% |
| Bachelor's degree | 8 | 32% |
| Master's degree | 13 | 52% |
| Doctorate | 4 | 16% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

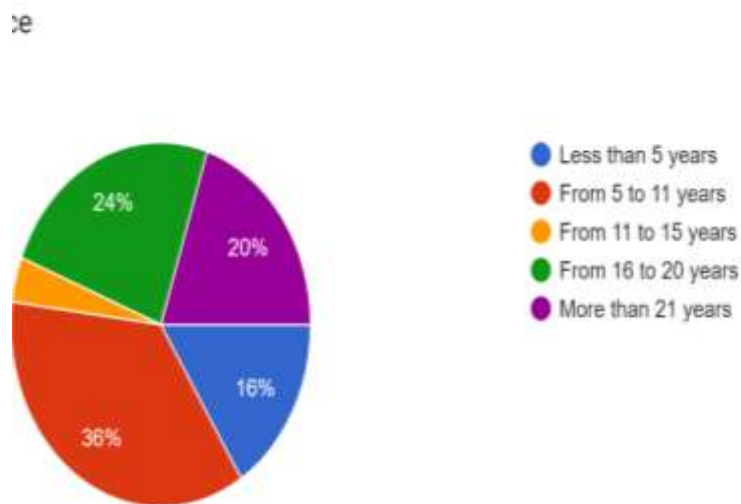
Figure N° 3 displays the educational background of respondent teachers. The majority of them hold a Master's degree with 52% of the overall respondents. Next, 32% of those respondents are Bachelor's degree holders, while 16% of them are Doctorate holders.



1.4 Figure 4. Working Place of Teachers by Location of schools

| School Location | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------|------------|
| Rural area | 21 | 84% |
| Urban area | 4 | 16% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

The figure above N° 4 shows the working place of the respondents by their school location. As it is clear from the table above, 84% of the respondent teachers work in rural areas, while 16% work in urban areas. The results demonstrate that the numbers of teachers who work in rural areas represent the majority in this study.

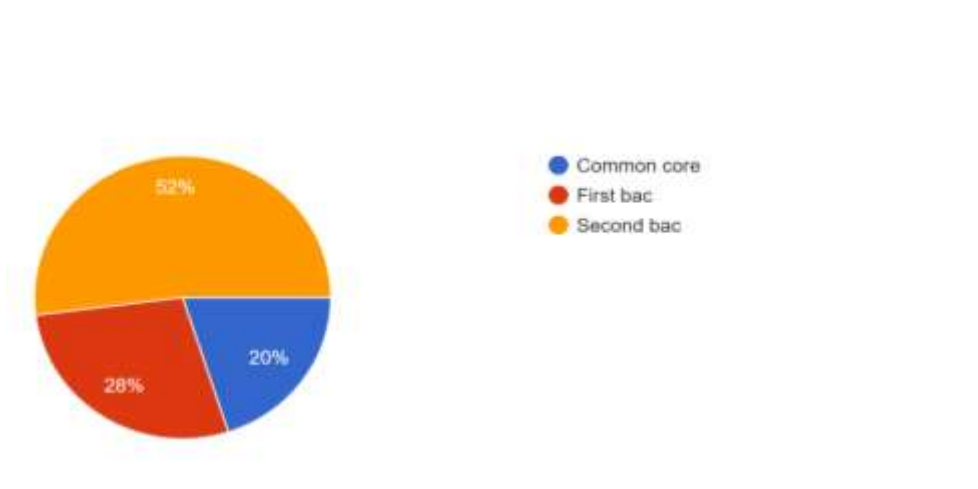


1.5 Figure 5. Teachers' Years of Experience

| Years of Experience | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Less than 5 years | 4 | 16% |
| From 5 to 11 years | 9 | 36% |

| | | |
|---------------------|----|------|
| From 11 to 15 years | 1 | 4% |
| From 16 to 20 years | 6 | 24% |
| More than 21 years | 5 | 20% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

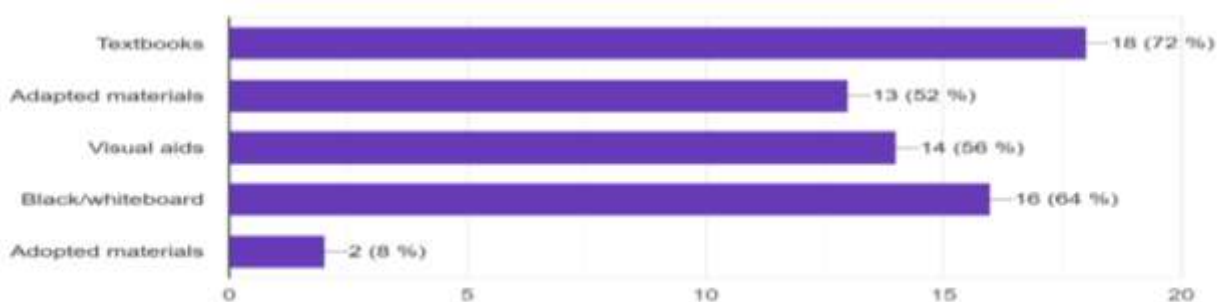
The chart above shows that teachers between 5 and 11 years constitute the majority of the respondent teachers (36%). Teachers with 16 and 20 years constitute 24% of the respondents. Teachers who have more than 21 years teaching experience represent 20%. Teachers with less than 5 years teaching experience constitute 16% of the overall respondents. Lastly, teachers with between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience constitute 4%.



1.6 Figure N° 5 Teaching Levels

| Teaching Levels | Number | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------|------------|
| Common core | 5 | 20% |
| First baccalaureate | 7 | 28% |
| Second baccalaureate | 13 | 52% |
| Total | 25 | 100.0 |

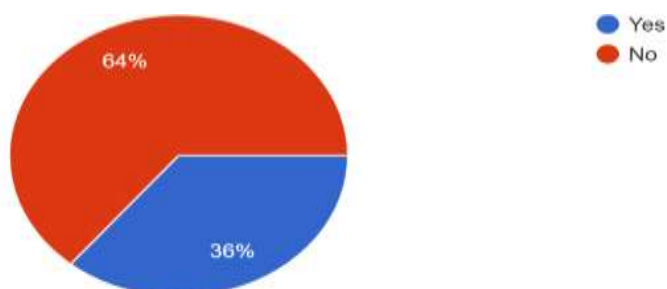
Figure N° 5 indicates the levels taught by respondent teachers, namely common core, First baccalaureate and second baccalaureate. For common core level, respondents constitute 20%. First baccalaureate level represent 28% of the respondents, while second baccalaureate level constitute 52%. Clearly, first baccalaureate and second baccalaureate teachers represent the majority of this study population, while common core level constitutes lowest percentage. This high percentage can be explained as an indicator of baccalaureate teachers' interest in the subject matter of this research.



1.7 Figure 6: Teaching Materials used by Teachers

| Teaching Materials | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| Textbooks | 18 | 72% |
| Adapted materials | 15 | 60% |
| Visual aids | 14 | 56% |
| Black/whiteboard | 16 | 64% |
| Total | 25 | 100 |

The figure above N° 6 illustrates teaching materials used by respondent teachers. First, Textbooks constitute 72%. Second, Black/whiteboard represents 64%. Third, adapted materials constitute 60% of the overall responses. Last, visual aids represent 56%. This shows that respondent teachers implement textbooks in parallel with other teaching materials.



1.8 Figure 7: Teachers' training in critical thinking

| Teachers' training in critical thinking | Number | Percentage |
|---|--------|------------|
| Yes | 9 | 36% |
| No | 16 | 64% |
| Total | 25 | 100 |

The figure N° 7 illustrates the degree of teachers' training in critical thinking. Clearly, 64% of the teachers are not trained to implement critical thinking in their teaching, while 36% of the teachers are trained to do so.

Table 1: Teacher's responses to different items in the questionnaire

| Items | | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Implementing critical thinking does not frighten me at any moment | Strongly disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Disagree | 2 | 8% |
| | Neutral | 1 | 4% |
| | Agree | 15 | 60% |
| | Strongly agree | 6 | 24% |
| I think critical thinking is crucial in EFL classroom | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Neutral | 1 | 4% |
| | Agree | 17 | 68% |
| | Strongly agree | 7 | 28% |
| I think that Moroccan EFL textbooks incorporate critical thinking tasks | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Disagree | 8 | 32% |
| | Neutral | 4 | 16% |
| | Agree | 12 | 48% |
| | Strongly agree | 1 | 4% |
| I believe that critical thinking enables the students to learn how to solve problems | Strongly disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 15 | 60% |
| | Strongly agree | 9 | 36% |
| I think that future teachers must be prepared to be models of critical thinkers | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 3 | 12% |
| | Agree | 11 | 44% |
| | Strongly Agree | 11 | 44% |
| I think teachers should engage the students in meaningful discussions for better understanding of the subject matter | Strongly disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 10 | 40% |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|----|-----|
| I think that my students use logical arguments to defend their points of view | Strongly disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Disagree | 4 | 16% |
| | Neutral | 3 | 12% |
| | Agree | 12 | 48% |
| | Strongly agree | 5 | 20% |
| Teachers have to integrate critical thinking skills in their teaching methods, materials and assessment | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 16 | 64% |
| | Strongly agree | 9 | 36% |
| I think that implementing critical thinking skills is a challenging matter of thing | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 7 | 28% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 4 | 16% |
| I think that students have barriers to critical thinking, regardless of the strategies I use | Strongly disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Disagree | 2 | 8% |
| | Neutral | 2 | 8% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 6 | 24% |
| I think that my students use subjective standards to assess thinking | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Neutral | 4 | 16% |
| | Agree | 16 | 64% |
| | Strongly agree | 4 | 16% |
| I deem that critical thinking can enrich students' input | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 16 | 64% |
| | Strongly agree | 9 | 36% |
| I believe that critical thinking can be implemented inside schools and Outside its walls | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 18 | 72% |

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|----|-----|
| | Strongly agree | 7 | 28% |
| Students understand better when working collaboratively in groups or pairs | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 2 | 8% |
| | Agree | 8 | 32% |
| | Strongly agree | 15 | 60% |
| Critical thinking is an asset for both the teachers and the students | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 11 | 44% |
| I think that critical thinking is crucial for the students to read well | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Neutral | 2 | 8% |
| | Agree | 11 | 44% |
| | Strongly agree | 10 | 40% |
| I think that the students are usually objective when it comes to thinking and reasoning | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 13 | 52% |
| | Neutral | 7 | 28% |
| | Agree | 2 | 8% |
| | Strongly agree | 3 | 12% |
| I think that the students must learn how to question and reflect on their own thoughts | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 1 | 4% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 9 | 36% |
| | Strongly agree | 15 | 60% |
| I believe that it is the teachers' responsibility to promote critical thinking in their students | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 4 | 16% |
| | Neutral | 8 | 32% |
| | Agree | 8 | 32% |
| | Strongly agree | 5 | 20% |
| Critical thinking can be used to achieve better learning outcomes | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0% |
| | Agree | 16 | 64% |
| | Strongly agree | 9 | 36% |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|----|-----|
| Critical thinking tasks develop students analytical ability | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0% |
| | Agree | 11 | 44% |
| | Strongly agree | 14 | 56% |
| Critical thinking makes language learning Meaningful | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 1 | 4% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 10 | 40% |
| Critical thinking engages students' higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis and evaluation) | Strongly disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 00% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 00% |
| | Agree | 14 | 56% |
| | Strongly agree | 11 | 44% |

The first item on the questionnaire aims to investigate teachers' acceptance of implementing critical thinking in their teaching. Respondent teachers seem to hold positive attitudes towards critical thinking, as 60% of them agreed that they are not afraid to implement it in their teaching, and 24% of the target sample share the same attitude. This indicates the teachers' readiness to adopt critical thinking in their teaching.

The second item focuses on the importance of critical thinking in the EFL classroom. It is clear that the majority of the respondents (68%) agree that critical thinking is of paramount importance in the EFL classroom, with 24% of the respondents holding the same assumption.

The third item addresses whether Moroccan EFL textbooks incorporate critical thinking skills tasks. While 48% of the target sample responded that EFL textbooks involve tasks that involve critical thinking, 32% of them disagreed with that assumption. This shows that there should be more inclusion of critical thinking tasks and activities in EFL textbooks in the Moroccan context.

The fourth item highlights the idea of whether critical thinking enables students to learn how to solve problems. The responses demonstrated that the majority of respondent teachers (60%) hold a positive attitude towards CT as a skill that enables students to solve learning problems, with 36% of the respondents supporting that assumption. Briefly, critical thinking has the capacity to provide students with the necessary skills to solve problems.

This study unveils many interesting insights and premises. 44% of the participants explicitly support the idea that future teachers must be prepared to be models of critical thinkers. Additionally, 44% of the target sample held the assumption that CT skills are of quality for future generations.

The sixth item addresses the idea that teachers should engage students in meaningful discussions for better understanding of the subject matter. It is clear that 56% of respondent teachers hold similar attitudes concerning students' understanding of the subject matter as one of the lower-order thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Also, 40% of them support the idea that engaging students in meaningful discussions and so on can stimulate students to better understand the thought subject matter.

The seventh item stresses the extent to which students use logical arguments to defend their points of view. It seems clear that 48% of respondent teachers support logical argumentation to be used in ELT in the Moroccan context, with 20% of them fully agreeing with the assumption, as they believe that logical argumentation enables students to defend their ideas and opinions.

This study delineates teachers' urge for the integration of critical thinking skills in their teaching methods, materials, and assessment. So, 64% of the teachers support the idea because they convincingly believe that critical thinking skills are crucial when it comes to one's teaching methodology, teaching materials, and students' assessment, especially when used wisely.

The ninth item demonstrates that implementing critical thinking skills in the classroom is a challenging task. The results revealed that 56% of the respondents support this idea, possibly because 64% of those respondents admitted to never having received training in critical thinking skills. The implementation of critical thinking skills in EFL is widely discussed in the literature, and results have shown that more work and research are needed on this topic.

The tenth item shows that 56% of the respondent teachers agree that students face barriers to thinking critically, regardless of the strategies used by teachers. 24% of them also held the same perception, which suggests that our educational system is still in the process of adopting critical thinking skills in the curriculum.

In the eleventh item, 64% of the respondent teachers believe that their students use subjective standards to assess their thinking. Additionally, 16% of the target sample held the same assumption. This study revealed that critical thinking enables students to enrich their input massively. Critical thinkers are knowledge seekers who analyze, process, and evaluate data. However, the majority of the respondents (64%) had a positive attitude, as they believe that critical thinking skills feed one's input through comprehension and knowledge. 36% of the participants also confirmed the idea that critical thinking skills have the capacity to provide students with useful skills and strategies to boost their ways of thinking.

The twelfth item shows that 72% of the respondents support the idea that critical thinking can be implemented inside and outside the school. Additionally, 28% of the participants held the same perception that critical thinking is useful whether students use it in or outside class.

In the thirteenth item, the results showed that 60% of the teachers responded that students understand better when working collaboratively in groups or pairs. Besides, 32% held the same attitude, which emphasizes the idea of engaging students in collaborative learning to improve learning outcomes. Additionally, the overwhelming majority (56%) of the participants confirm that critical thinking is an asset for both teachers and students. In a recent similar study by Laabidi (2021), the participants had positive attitudes about the usefulness of critical thinking in teaching and learning.

In the fifteenth item, 44% of the participants agreed, and 40% strongly agreed that critical thinking is crucial for students to read well. This makes it clear that students who are good thinkers are excellent readers.

The sixteenth item's results demonstrated that the majority (52%) of the respondents disagreed with the idea that students are usually objective when it comes to thinking and reasoning, while 28% of them were neutral.

The seventeenth item reveals that 60% of the respondents strongly agree that students must learn how to question and reflect on their own thoughts. 36% of them also held the same attitude. Respondent teachers (32%) also reported that they believe it is the teacher's responsibility to promote critical thinking in their students. However, other participants and an equal number remained neutral, as they believe that teachers should receive training in critical thinking to apply it in their classes.

Although the majority of the surveyed teachers did not receive training in CT, 60% of them support the idea that CT can be implemented to achieve better learning outcomes. This nevertheless shows the significance of CT in the EFL teaching and learning process. Furthermore, 36% of the teachers strongly support that idea.

The majority of the students (56%) reported that CT tasks develop their analytical ability. Analysis is a higher-order thinking skill according to Bloom's learning taxonomy. Therefore, teachers should assign tasks that encourage students to analyze thoughts. Needless to say, CT thinking makes language learning meaningful. This is seen in the responses that show that 56% confirm the importance of how CT seems to make language learning easy to grasp, especially when taught in a meaningful context.

The majority of the respondents (56%) reported that CT engages students' higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. 44% of them held the same attitude, too, as they believe that the more the student uses those skills, the more thoughtful he/she becomes.

This study displays a plethora of interesting insights and ideas. The participants explicitly claimed that syllabus designers must integrate soft skills in language textbooks to prepare students for life in general. For them, textbooks and teacher training need to foster CT. Additionally, they suggested that CT should be taught as part of English textbooks' skills. They argued that CT is crucial in teaching and learning languages, and teachers should expose students to exercises that can help develop their CT skills.

Another insight that this study unveils is that CT is essential when it comes to political state of affairs, and must be encouraged by promoting books or novels that stress different political ideologies. They also believe that CT protects one's thinking against dogma and ideologies.

The participants convincingly argued that CT can be reached even with students who are not motivated to come to school and learn. Besides, the majority of the respondents agree on the idea that CT helps students set and achieve their goals. Yet they reported that the problem is how teachers can use it in their teaching with low-achievers or students who are not motivated to come to school. Clearly, CT boosts students' self-confidence.

The last item of the questionnaire tackles teachers' suggestions and insights on how to promote critical thinking in the EFL classroom in Morocco. The coding process of teachers' responses and feedback provided us with very interesting insights that can assist us in getting an overall understanding of how to boost and implement CT practices in Moroccan high schools. The teachers' responses, as Table 3 shows, seem to have four common themes: adapting textbooks, training teachers/students on how to implement CT, implementing CT tasks and activities, and better understanding of English.

Table 2: Moroccan teachers of English suggestions on how to promote CT in EFL classroom

| <u>Themes</u> | <u>Frequency</u> |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Implementing CT tasks and activities | 9 |
| 2. Training teachers/students on implementing CT | 7 |
| 3. Adapting textbooks | 3 |
| 4. Better understanding of English | 2 |

The five extracts below display the teachers' suggestions concerning how to improve CT practices among teachers in Morocco:

- "Change the curriculum and include activities to promote this skill." (Teacher 16)
- "More training on how to implement CT in Moroccan classrooms." (Teacher 3)
- "Change the curriculum and textbooks, and train teachers to take account of this variable." (Teacher 1)
- "Students should have a basic understanding of English." (Teacher 6)
- "We should give more importance to communication skills in which students express themselves and give their opinions. And there should be connections between what students study and real-life situations." (Teacher 21)

The participants stated the need for using tasks and activities that include CT skills. They argue that this kind of task will engage students in the teaching/learning process. They also believe that training teachers/students on how to implement CT is of paramount significance in the EFL classroom in Morocco. Clearly, they hope for changing the curriculum and textbooks and training teachers on how to implement CT professionally. Respondent teachers totally indicated the need for students to have a better understanding of English to make it easy for teachers to implement CT with them.

5. Conclusion

The study aimed at investigating high school teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards CT. It mainly attempted to investigate whether high school teachers, who belong to Kenitra's directorate, had positive or negative perceptions of critical thinking skills as well as to explore the extent to which high school teachers implement critical thinking in their instruction. Using a five-point Likert scale, the findings clearly indicate that the respondent teachers had positive attitudes towards CT skills, believing that it is of paramount importance in EFL classrooms in Morocco. The respondent teachers suggested that they need training on how to teach critical thinking to the students as well as the adoption of textbooks that include activities and tasks which necessitate the use of critical thinking skills. Besides, there is a strong belief among the study's participants that critical thinking is an asset in their classrooms. One valuable contribution of this paper is that it highlights Moroccan high school teachers' positive attitudes towards critical thinking as a crucial 21st century skill, so we can say that critical thinking is one aspect to improve EFL teaching practices in the Moroccan context in particular and the teaching practices in general. The findings of this study are not without limitations. As far as it is a case study, the findings are not broadly applicable. Therefore, including other Moroccan high schools from other directorates in other studies can demonstrate a variety of perceptions and attitudes towards critical thinking teaching practices among Moroccan EFL high school instructors.

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