

Enhancing Critical Thinking Competence Of Future English Teachers Through Collaborative Learning

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Abstract: This article explores how collaborative learning serves as a transformative pedagogical approach for enhancing critical thinking competence among future English teachers. As global educational reforms emphasize inquiry, autonomy, and problem-solving, teacher education programs must prepare pre-service teachers to engage in complex reasoning, evaluate evidence, justify instructional decisions, and support students' cognitive growth. Collaborative learning—rooted in social constructivist theory—creates dynamic environments where teacher candidates interact, negotiate meaning, analyze pedagogical cases, co-construct knowledge, and reflect critically on their learning processes. The article proposes an integrated model for incorporating collaborative learning into English teacher preparation, outlines practical strategies for educators, and highlights implications for curriculum designers and researchers. The study concludes that collaborative learning significantly strengthens analytical reasoning, reflective judgment, communicative competence, and professional decision-making—core components of critical thinking essential for future English teachers.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, critical thinking competence, future English teachers, teacher education, higher education, instructional innovation, social constructivism, ELT methodology, pedagogical development.

Introduction: In the context of contemporary educational reforms, the development of critical thinking competence has become a central objective of higher education and teacher preparation programs. For future English teachers, critical thinking is not limited to language proficiency but encompasses the ability to analyze pedagogical situations, evaluate instructional decisions, solve complex problems, and foster learners' higher-order thinking skills. As English language classrooms increasingly emphasize learner autonomy, inquiry-based learning, and communicative competence, pre-service teachers must be equipped with cognitive and reflective abilities that support effective and flexible teaching practices.

Despite the growing recognition of critical thinking as a key professional competence, its systematic development within English teacher education remains methodologically insufficient. Traditional teacher-centered approaches often prioritize content transmission over active engagement, reflection, and

collaborative meaning-making. As a result, future English teachers may lack opportunities to practice analytical reasoning, argumentation, and reflective judgment in authentic pedagogical contexts. This gap highlights the need for instructional approaches that actively engage teacher candidates in meaningful cognitive interaction.

Collaborative learning, grounded in social constructivist theory, offers significant potential for addressing this challenge. Through structured group interaction, discussion, problem-solving, and joint reflection, collaborative learning creates conditions in which knowledge is co-constructed and higher-order thinking is stimulated. In English teacher education, collaborative learning not only enhances communicative competence but also promotes critical analysis, perspective-taking, and professional decision-making. However, the integration of collaborative learning specifically as a means of developing critical thinking competence in future English teachers has not

been sufficiently systematized.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of collaborative learning in enhancing the critical thinking competence of future English teachers and to propose an integrated pedagogical model for its effective implementation in teacher education programs. The scientific novelty of the study lies in conceptualizing collaborative learning as a structured mechanism for developing analytical reasoning, reflective judgment, and pedagogical decision-making within English language teacher preparation. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the improvement of ELT methodology, curriculum design, and instructional practices in higher education.

Aim of the Study. The main aim of this study is to examine the pedagogical potential of collaborative learning in enhancing the critical thinking competence of future English teachers. Although critical thinking is recognized as a core outcome of modern teacher education, recent studies reveal that its development within ELT programs is often unsystematic and insufficiently supported by appropriate instructional strategies¹. In many higher education contexts, teacher preparation still relies heavily on transmissive teaching models, which limit opportunities for analytical reasoning, reflection, and professional judgment. Therefore, this study aims to identify how structured collaborative learning activities can foster analytical thinking, evaluative skills, and reflective decision-making among pre-service English teachers, and to propose methodological recommendations for integrating collaborative pedagogy into ELT methodology courses².

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of collaborative learning on critical thinking development. Mixed-methods design is widely acknowledged as particularly effective in educational research, as it allows for the combination of measurable learning outcomes with in-depth exploration of learners' cognitive and reflective experiences³. The research follows a quasi-experimental design, employing pre-test and post-test measurements alongside qualitative data collection.

The participants were pre-service English teachers enrolled in undergraduate ELT methodology courses at a higher education institution. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were actively engaged in teacher training and had comparable academic backgrounds. This sampling strategy ensured that the participants possessed sufficient linguistic competence and pedagogical knowledge to meaningfully engage in collaborative learning activities. Participation was voluntary, and ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were strictly observed.

The collaborative learning intervention was implemented over the course of one academic semester. Instructional activities were systematically designed in alignment with social constructivist principles and critical thinking frameworks⁴. The intervention included:

Structured group discussions focused on pedagogical texts, lesson plans, and classroom scenarios;

Collaborative problem-solving tasks requiring participants to analyze teaching challenges and propose evidence-based solutions;

Peer feedback sessions, where participants critically evaluated each other's lesson designs and instructional decisions;

Reflective group projects, encouraging collective reflection on learning experiences and teaching practices.

Each activity required participants to justify opinions, evaluate alternatives, and negotiate meaning within groups, thereby activating higher-order cognitive processes essential for critical thinking development⁵.

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple data collection tools were employed to ensure methodological triangulation:

Critical Thinking Assessment Tests were administered before and after the intervention to measure changes in analytical, evaluative, and inferential skills.

Reflective Journals allowed participants to document their cognitive processes, challenges, and insights gained through collaborative learning.

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted to capture participants' perceptions of collaborative learning and its influence on their professional thinking.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using comparative statistical procedures to identify significant differences between pre-test and post-test results. Qualitative data from journals and interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns related to cognitive engagement, reflection, and professional growth⁶. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthened the validity and reliability of the research outcomes.

RESULTS

The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in participants' critical thinking competence following the collaborative learning intervention. Post-test results revealed higher levels of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation compared to pre-test scores. These findings demonstrate that collaborative learning activities requiring discussion, justification, and joint decision-making effectively stimulate higher-order cognitive processes⁷.

Qualitative findings further revealed increased reflective awareness and pedagogical sensitivity among participants. Reflective journals indicated that group interaction encouraged learners to reconsider assumptions, analyze multiple perspectives, and engage in deeper professional reasoning. Interview data confirmed that participants perceived collaborative learning as intellectually demanding yet pedagogically valuable.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are consistent with recent research highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative learning in fostering critical thinking skills across higher education contexts²⁷. From a social constructivist perspective, collaborative interaction serves as a cognitive catalyst that promotes meaning-making, reflection, and deeper understanding⁴.

In the context of English teacher education, collaborative learning functions not only as a cognitive development tool but also as a professional training mechanism. By collaboratively analyzing pedagogical cases and instructional challenges, pre-service teachers engage in authentic professional reasoning similar to real classroom decision-making processes⁸. This supports the argument that collaborative pedagogy contributes to both intellectual and professional

competence in ELT programs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that collaborative learning is an effective and pedagogically justified approach for enhancing the critical thinking competence of future English teachers. Through structured interaction, cooperative problem-solving, and reflective dialogue, pre-service teachers develop analytical reasoning, evaluative judgment, and reflective decision-making skills essential for effective English language teaching.

The study recommends that ELT teacher education programs systematically integrate collaborative learning strategies into methodology courses. Such integration can significantly improve the quality of teacher preparation and contribute to the development of reflective, analytical, and professionally competent English teachers capable of meeting contemporary educational demands¹⁸.

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