

HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF CRITICAL THINKING CONCEPTS IN WRITING CLASS

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ABSTRACT This study explores high school English teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and their integration into English writing instruction, focusing on the Indonesian context. Critical thinking is a cornerstone of education, yet its implementation in writing classes remains underexplored, especially in secondary education. This qualitative study employs a case study design involving five high school teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that teachers conceptualize critical thinking as a combination of analytical skills, logical reasoning, and creative problem-solving. Strategies such as argumentative writing tasks, peer reviews, and open-ended questioning were employed to develop students' critical thinking in writing. However, challenges such as limited student readiness, time constraints, and insufficient resources impede effective implementation. The study further identifies contextual factors unique to the Indonesian educational setting, contributing to the broader understanding of critical thinking pedagogy in diverse environments. Implications suggest the need for professional development programs, curriculum reforms, and enhanced resource allocation to support critical thinking instruction. This research underscores the importance of integrating critical thinking into English writing curricula to equip students with essential skills for academic and real-world success. Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of these strategies and their adaptability across different educational contexts.

Keywords: critical thinking, writing instruction, high school education, qualitative research, Indonesian context

INTRODUCTION

Students' Critical thinking skills have become recognized as an essential skill in education, particularly in students' writing skills development (Amhar et al., 2022). Writing, as a cognitive and communicative process, requires logical reasoning, good presentation of an argument or idea organization, and evaluative judgment, which are core components of critical thinking (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Tahira et al., 2019). In the senior high school context, the role of the teacher is crucial in fostering these skills, as they are responsible for designing instructional strategies that integrate critical thinking abilities into English writing lessons. However, despite its importance, implementing critical thinking in English writing classrooms faces significant challenges. These challenges include varying levels of teacher understanding, limited resources, students' lack of a higher level of intelligence, teacher creativity, and parental involvement (Cáceres et al., 2020; Dwyer, 2023; Zainudin et al., 2019).

Previous research has explored teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in English language classrooms. First, a study conducted by Dali Youcef (2023) focuses on investigating Algerian university teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and the strategies they employ in integrating critical thinking into their courses. The findings reveal that while most teachers exhibit sound knowledge of critical thinking, they often lack the necessary support for its effective implementation, leading them to primarily focus on subject matter comprehension. In the same way, Yasir & Alnoori (2020), through their research regarding teacher perceptions of critical thinking among students in higher education in Iraq, stated that teachers' perceptions of critical thinking among students influence their behaviors in the classroom.

Moreover, Lombardi et al. (2022), who conducted research regarding how primary school teachers perceive the concept of critical thinking and what aspects within their professionalization, found that teachers consider the mapping of reasoning, group discussion, and active learning as practices that promote critical thinking among pupils. However, respondents indicate that despite previous exposure to the concept through project-based

learning and 'Philosophy for Children', they still need support through peer learning and exchanges of best practices to fully promote critical thinking among pupils. Meanwhile, teachers' perception regarding critical thinking in the Indonesian context was conducted by Anggraeny & Khongput (2022). The result revealed that teachers perceived skills, disposition, and knowledge as key attributes of critical thinking, and active learning activities were valued more than passive learning to promote students' critical thinking. This study also reveals that all teachers employed various teaching strategies to encourage students' critical thinking at a certain level.

Although previous studies have explored teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in various educational contexts, several gaps remain unaddressed. Research by Dali Youcef (2023) and Yasir & Alnoori (2020), primarily focused on university-level or higher education settings, indicating a need for further investigation at the secondary school level. Similarly, studies such as Lombardi et al. (2022) examined critical thinking in primary education, which emphasizes the need for ongoing support and collaboration among teachers. Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, it has been identified that the key components of critical thinking as perceived by teachers include skills, dispositions, and knowledge. However, their study offered a general overview without addressing specific language skills such as writing (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022). Moreover, while a growing body of literature (Madjid, Sulfiana & Lutfiyah, 2020; Siziah, 2021; Suryani, Putri & Khair, 2021; Wati et al., 2024) supports the strong correlation between critical thinking and writing skills, there remains a lack of research that directly explores how English teachers perceive and apply critical thinking concepts specifically in writing classes, particularly in Indonesian high school settings.

This research fills these gaps by examining Indonesian high school English teachers' perceptions of critical thinking, specifically within the context of writing instruction. Given the strong correlation between critical thinking and writing skills, exploring this relationship further is essential to bridge the gap in the current literature. As mentioned by Wati et al. (2024), Critical thinking skills support students' writing skills to clearly articulate ideas, construct arguments, and present evidence. Furthermore, this idea of a positive correlation between students' critical thinking and writing skills is also supported by Madjid et al. (2020), Aziz et.al. (2021), Siziah (2021), and Suryani et al. (2021). These findings underlie the importance of integrating critical thinking into writing instruction and highlight the potential to enhance students' written expression. Accordingly, this study seeks to address these gaps by focusing specifically on how teachers perceive critical thinking concepts in writing classes. This finding contributes to a deeper understanding of its application in Indonesian education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Thinking in Education

Critical thinking is regarded as a crucial skill in modern education as it enables students to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information effectively. As highlighted by Tahira et al. (2019), Critical thinking involves logical reasoning, the presentation of coherent arguments, and the evaluative judgment necessary for cognitive and communicative processes such as writing. Scholars such as Dwyer (2023) have defined critical thinking as a purposeful, metacognitive process, with self-regulatory judgment that is essential for problem-solving and decision-making. In the context of writing, these skills manifest in the ability to organize ideas, construct sound arguments, and provide evidence-based conclusions.

Research conducted by Amhar et al. (2022) underlines the role of critical thinking in enhancing students' writing skills. This research demonstrates that students who possess strong critical thinking abilities are better equipped to produce clear and well-structured written outputs. This connection forms the basis of integrating critical thinking instruction into writing curricula, emphasizing the role of teachers as facilitators in this process.

Teachers' Perception of Critical Thinking

There have been previous studies exploring teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and its integration into the classroom. For instance, Dali Youcef (2023) explored Algerian university teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and the strategies employed in teaching it. The findings revealed that while teachers generally exhibited a strong understanding of critical thinking concepts, their implementation was often limited by institutional constraints and a focus on subject-matter knowledge. Similarly, Yasir & Alnoori (2020) examined teacher perceptions of critical thinking among students in Iraqi higher education. Their research found that teachers' understanding of critical thinking significantly influenced their classroom practices, shaping how they engaged students in higher-order thinking activities.

Moreover, Lombardi et al. (2022) shifted the focus to primary education. It investigates how teachers perceive critical thinking and its practical application. They found that active learning strategies, such as group discussions and reasoning exercises, were considered effective in promoting critical thinking. However, the study highlighted a need for additional support and professional development to equip teachers with the skills and resources necessary for fostering critical thinking among younger students.

Critical Thinking in the Indonesian Context

Within Indonesia, Anggraeny & Khongput (2022) conducted a pivotal study exploring teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in English language classrooms. They identified skills, dispositions, and knowledge as fundamental components of critical thinking, with active learning strategies being more effective than passive ones in cultivating these skills. While the study provided valuable insights into general teaching practices, it did not specifically address critical thinking in writing classes.

Zainudin et al. (2019) further emphasized the challenges of teaching critical thinking in Indonesia, citing limited teacher creativity, insufficient resources, and lack of parental involvement as significant barriers. These findings underscore the complexity of implementing critical thinking instruction in contexts with constrained educational infrastructure.

The Relationship Between Critical Thinking and Writing Skills

The correlation between critical thinking and writing has been well-documented in the literature. Wati et al. (2024) highlighted that critical thinking skills directly support students' ability to articulate ideas, construct arguments, and provide evidence in their writing. This positive relationship is further corroborated by Siziah (2021), Madjid et al. (2020), and Suryani et al. (2021), who collectively argue that integrating critical thinking into writing instruction not only enhances students' written communication but also their overall cognitive development.

Research Gaps and Current Study

Despite these valuable contributions, significant gaps remain in the understanding of how high school teachers perceive and apply critical thinking concepts in senior high school writing classes, particularly in Indonesia. While existing studies have primarily focused on higher education or general teaching practices, little attention has been paid to the intersection of critical thinking and writing instruction at the secondary level. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring senior high school teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in writing classes, examining their strategies for implementation, and identifying the challenges they face. By addressing these issues, the current research contributes to the broader discourse on critical thinking in education and offers practical insights for improving teaching practices in Indonesian schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

Type, Design, and Population of the Research

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore teachers' perceptions of critical thinking concepts in writing classes. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding subjective experiences, perspectives, and social phenomena in depth (Lim, 2025). Moreover, the exploratory nature of this research aligns with the goal of investigating complex and context-specific perceptions of teachers.

The research design employed a case study to provide a comprehensive understanding of how senior high school teachers perceive and implement critical thinking strategies in their writing classrooms. Case studies are particularly effective for examining phenomena within real-life contexts and generating nuanced insights (Yin, 2018).

Afterward, the population for this study consisted of senior high school English teachers in Yogyakarta and Central Java. Using purposive sampling, five teachers with at least three years of experience in teaching writing were selected from urban and rural schools. Purposive sampling is ideal for qualitative research as it ensures participants are knowledgeable and experienced in the subject under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020).

Techniques of Data Collection and Instruments

In addition, to conduct this research, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** This method allows participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific issues. Based on prior literature, an interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to ensure relevance and comprehensiveness (Taherdoost, 2022).
2. **Classroom Observations:** These were conducted to complement the interviews and capture teachers' actual practices in integrating critical thinking into writing instruction. A structured observation checklist was used to document teaching strategies, student engagement, and the classroom environment.

The interview questions were designed to explore three main dimensions: teachers' understanding of critical thinking, strategies for integrating critical thinking into writing instruction, and perceived challenges. For classroom observations, the checklist focused on indicators such as the use of open-ended questions, encouragement of student reasoning, and the integration of argument construction activities.

Operational Definitions

Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information to form reasoned judgments and articulate coherent arguments (Dwyer, 2023). Additionally, writing skills are the capacity to organize ideas, construct arguments, and present evidence in written form (Suparsa et al., 2023).

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. This method involves coding the data, identifying patterns, and organizing them into themes (Heriyanto, 2018). The steps followed include:

1. **Familiarization:** Transcribing interviews and reviewing observation notes to gain an initial understanding of the data.
2. **Coding:** Generating initial codes to represent meaningful segments of data.
3. **Theme Development:** Grouping related codes to form themes that address the research objectives.
4. **Interpretation:** Synthesizing themes to provide insights into teachers' perceptions and practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Teachers' Understanding of Critical Thinking

Through the transcript of the interviews with the five teachers, it is obtained the key themes of teachers' understanding of critical thinking. It can be seen in Table 1 below

Table 1: The key themes derived from the analysis of teachers' understanding of critical thinking

Theme	Description
Analytical Skills	Emphasizing students' ability to analyze and evaluate arguments.
Logical Reasoning	Highlighting the importance of structured and coherent thinking.
Creative Problem-Solving	Encouraging innovative approaches to writing challenges

Teachers in this study demonstrated a consistent understanding of critical thinking as a combination of analytical skills, logical reasoning, and creative problem-solving. For example, one teacher explained, *"It's not just about finding the correct answer. It's about teaching students how to defend their opinions logically."* Another added, *"Good writing means the student has thought deeply before they start composing."*

While all teachers recognized these core attributes, some nuances were evident. Teacher C emphasized that critical thinking involves evaluating perspectives, stating, *"When students read an article, I ask them what they agree or disagree with, and why. That starts their thinking."* Meanwhile, Teacher E pointed to the creative aspect, describing critical thinking as *"an opportunity for students to express ideas differently, not just repeating what they read in books."* However, the emphasis on creativity and emotional engagement adds a local flavor, which shows how teachers in Indonesian classrooms blend Western academic constructs with local pedagogical intuitions.

Teachers' Strategies for Critical Thinking in Writing

Further findings are about what strategies the teachers employed to integrate critical thinking in their writing classes. The table below outlines the strategies teachers reported in their writing instruction.

Table 2: The strategies teachers reported using to integrate critical thinking into writing instruction

Strategy	Example Practice
Open-Ended Questions	Teachers asked students to analyze a prompt and justify their reasoning.
Argumentative Writing Tasks	Teachers assigned essays that require claims supported by evidence and analysis.
Peer Review Activities	Teachers facilitated the collaborative evaluation of peers' writing.

To foster critical thinking in writing, teachers employed diverse student-centered strategies, including argumentative writing tasks, peer review, brainstorming, and open-ended questioning (Table 2). Teacher D, for example, required students to write persuasive essays on current social issues. She explained, *"It's not about being right; it's about presenting strong reasoning. Students must learn to support claims, not just state them."* Moreover, open-ended questions were widely used across classrooms. Teacher B said, *"I never ask for yes or no answers. I ask why, or how. That way, students are trained to think before they write."* Peer review also emerged as a key method. Teacher A noted, *"When students comment on each other's writing, they realize what makes an argument strong or weak."*

Interestingly, some teachers customized strategies based on students' levels. Teacher C used project-based writing, such as mock newspaper articles, because she believed, *"Creative formats make students less afraid to express opinions, especially those who struggle with formal essays."* These practices reflect both global trends in critical thinking pedagogy and local adaptation to classroom realities.

Challenges in Promoting Critical Thinking

The following analysis reveals the challenges teachers face in promoting critical thinking to their students, especially in writing classes. Table 3 shows these challenges.

Table 3: The challenges teachers face when fostering critical thinking in writing class instruction

Challenges	Description
Student Readiness	Limited prior exposure to critical thinking activities.
Time Constraints	Insufficient time to cover the curriculum and integrate critical thinking.
Resource Limitations	Lack of access to materials supporting critical thinking pedagogy.

Despite their commitment, teachers encountered significant challenges. Student readiness was a common concern. As Teacher D explained, *“Many students are used to memorization. When asked to think critically, they freeze.”* Similarly, Teacher A observed that some students expected model answers, showing a reluctance to engage in independent thinking. Time constraints were also widely reported. Teacher B lamented, *“The curriculum moves fast. Sometimes I must sacrifice writing depth to finish the units.”* Teacher C added that critical thinking takes time, saying, *“You can’t rush it. But with exams and deadlines, it’s hard to go deep.”*

Additionally, resource limitations, such as the lack of updated texts or digital tools, were highlighted by Teachers A and E. One noted, *“I want students to read multiple sources and analyze perspectives, but we only have one outdated textbook.”* Another commented on limited parental support, saying, *“Some parents think critical thinking is only useful for university, not for high school.”*

Individual Teacher

Apart from finding the core themes above, researchers also found different findings from each respondent. These findings can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The key findings from the five teachers interviewed in the study

Teacher ID	Key Understanding of Critical Thinking	Strategies Employed	Challenges Faced
Teacher A	Focused on logical reasoning and argumentation.	Argumentative writing, peer reviews.	Limited resources and student readiness.
Teacher B	Emphasized analytical skills and innovative thinking.	Open-ended questions, collaborative work.	Time constraints and curriculum demands.
Teacher C	Highlighted evaluation and creative problem-solving.	Critical analysis tasks, project-based learning.	Lack of training in critical pedagogy.
Teacher D	Viewed critical thinking as essential for structured writing.	Structured debates and evidence-based essays.	Student motivation and readiness.
Teacher E	Defined critical thinking as blending reasoning with creativity.	Brainstorming sessions, reflective writing.	Parental support limitations.

Beyond the overarching themes, this study also uncovered nuanced variations in how each teacher perceived and implemented critical thinking in their writing instruction. These individual insights add depth to the broader patterns and illustrate how context, experience, and personal philosophy shape teaching practices. Teacher A emphasized logical reasoning as central to critical thinking. She described it as “guiding students to think step-by-step before putting their ideas on paper,” which aligns with her frequent use of argumentative writing tasks. She also relied heavily on peer reviews, believing they helped students “see writing from a

reader's point of view." However, she noted that "many students still expect to be told exactly what to write," indicating challenges with promoting student independence. Additionally, she expressed concern over limited resources, such as access to diverse reading materials that could stimulate critical thinking.

Meanwhile, Teacher B highlighted the importance of analytical skills and innovation in student writing. She shared that open-ended questions were her main tool, as they "allow students to explore different angles without fearing they are wrong." Her use of collaborative tasks aimed to "build mutual learning," especially among students with different writing abilities. Nevertheless, she struggled with curriculum constraints, stating, "Sometimes I have to choose between finishing the textbook and doing something meaningful." Teacher C approached critical thinking through a problem-solving lens, frequently using project-based tasks and reflective essays. She viewed critical thinking as "the ability to challenge assumptions in a text and offer alternatives." However, she admitted that her lack of training in critical pedagogy limited her ability to scaffold these activities effectively. She emphasized the need for more workshops or sharing forums where teachers could "learn from each other's experience."

Teacher D framed critical thinking as essential for "structured, coherent writing." She regularly used structured debates and evidence-based essays, encouraging students to "back every claim with solid facts." However, she noted that low student motivation and readiness often impede this process. She commented, "They can form opinions, but struggle to justify them in writing — it takes time and practice." Teacher E defined critical thinking as the balance between reasoning and creativity, stressing the value of brainstorming and reflective writing. She noted that "students enjoy writing more when they feel their opinions are valid," and this engagement drives deeper thinking. Still, she pointed out the lack of parental support, saying, "Some parents think writing essays is a waste of time compared to preparing for exams." These individual teacher profiles illustrate how perceptions of critical thinking are filtered through unique pedagogical beliefs and contextual constraints. Despite the differences, all five teachers demonstrated a clear commitment to nurturing their students' thinking abilities through writing, even in the face of structural and institutional barriers.

Discussion

Table 1 shows that teachers perceive critical thinking in writing classes primarily as the development of analytical skills, logical reasoning, and creative problem-solving. These core components reflect the teachers' understanding that critical thinking is essential for helping students construct arguments, evaluate evidence, and express ideas clearly in writing. This aligns with the research objective of exploring how high school teachers conceptualize and apply critical thinking in writing instruction. These perceptions also support the definition of critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, and Anggraeny & Khongput's (2022) findings that Indonesian teachers view critical thinking as a combination of skill, disposition, and knowledge. However, this study adds a more specific contribution by focusing on how these perceptions are realized in actual writing classrooms at the high school level, a context that has received limited attention in previous research.

In addition, Table 2 also reveals that teachers implement a range of active learning strategies to promote critical thinking in writing, including open-ended questions, argumentative writing tasks, and peer review activities. These classroom practices are designed to encourage students to analyze prompts, justify their reasoning, and evaluate each other's work, all of which contribute to developing critical thinking skills through writing. These strategies are in line with the principles of active learning emphasized by Zainudin et al. (2019), who argue that such methods are essential for fostering higher-order thinking in EFL contexts. In particular, the use of argumentative writing tasks resonates with Wati et al. (2024), who

found that critical thinking directly supports students' ability to construct arguments, organize ideas, and present evidence in writing. Thus, the implementation of these strategies in high school writing classrooms not only reinforces prior research but also illustrates how they are being adapted in the Indonesian secondary education context.

Despite employing effective strategies, teachers in this study face several significant challenges when promoting critical thinking in writing classes. The main barriers include limited student readiness, time constraints, and insufficient teaching resources, as can be seen in Table 3. For instance, Teachers A and D noted difficulties due to students' lack of prior exposure to critical thinking tasks, while Teacher B emphasized how rigid curriculum demands restrict the time available for in-depth writing activities. These challenges are consistent with previous studies, such as Dali Youcef (2023), who found that institutional constraints and emphasis on content delivery often hinder critical thinking integration in higher education. Similarly, in the Indonesian context, Zainudin et al. (2019) identified teacher creativity, classroom time limitations, and resource gaps as major obstacles to fostering critical thinking. Additionally, Teacher E reported a lack of parental support, reflecting the broader socio-cultural factors that can affect student engagement. These findings emphasize the need for systemic support, including improved training, curriculum flexibility, and access to teaching materials, to enable teachers to fully integrate critical thinking into writing instruction.

The study contributes to existing literature by addressing a specific gap: the limited understanding of how critical thinking is perceived and practiced in Indonesian high school writing instruction. While earlier research (Yasir & Alnoori, 2020; Lombardi et al., 2022; Dali Youcef, 2023) has explored teacher perceptions in primary or tertiary settings. This study focuses explicitly on the secondary level, which offers a clearer picture of teachers' conceptual and pedagogical approaches in writing classrooms. Moreover, by identifying both effective practices and recurring obstacles, this research offers practical insights for educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher training programs. Supporting teachers through professional development workshops, peer learning communities, and curriculum adjustments that embed critical thinking objectives in writing tasks could enhance instructional effectiveness. These steps are crucial to equipping students with the reasoning and communication skills essential for academic achievement and real-world success.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the understanding of critical thinking among Indonesian high school English teachers and their strategies for integrating it into writing classes, despite various contextual challenges. The findings reveal that teachers perceive critical thinking as a multifaceted construct encompassing analytical skills, logical reasoning, and creative problem-solving. These elements are implemented through practices such as argumentative writing, peer review, and open-ended tasks, all of which align with active learning principles. By focusing on the high school level within the Indonesian context, this study addresses a gap in the literature that has largely emphasized primary or tertiary education. It also offers insights into how teachers translate their understanding of critical thinking into classroom strategies and the barriers they encounter, such as time constraints, resource limitations, and student readiness.

However, this study is not without limitations. The small sample size of five teachers and the focus on specific regions (Yogyakarta and Central Java) may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts in Indonesia. Additionally, the reliance on interviews and observations may not fully capture the students' perspectives or long-term learning outcomes. Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of critical thinking instruction in writing classes or expand the sample to include a wider range of schools, including vocational or religious-based institutions. Further studies might also examine students' perceptions and

actual writing performance to gain a more comprehensive view of how critical thinking develops through writing instruction.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This guide was used to explore teachers' understanding of critical thinking, the strategies they employed to integrate it into writing instruction, and the challenges they encountered in classroom practice.

Teachers' Understanding of Critical Thinking

1. What do you understand by the concept of critical thinking?
2. In your opinion, why is critical thinking important for students, especially in English writing classes?
3. What do you consider to be the key elements or characteristics of critical thinking?
4. Have you ever received any training or participated in workshops related to teaching critical thinking? If so, in what context?

Strategies for Integrating Critical Thinking into Writing

5. How do you integrate critical thinking into your English writing instruction?
6. Do you use any specific activities or techniques to encourage students to think critically while writing? Could you give some examples?
7. To what extent do you think these strategies are effective in improving students' critical thinking?
8. Do you assign tasks such as argumentative writing, peer review, or brainstorming in your writing class? How do you implement them?
9. How do you provide feedback that encourages students to think more critically in their writing?

Challenges in Teaching Critical Thinking

10. What are the main challenges you face in promoting students' critical thinking in writing classes?
11. How do your students typically respond to tasks or activities that require critical thinking?
12. Do you think the current curriculum supports the development of critical thinking in writing classes? Why or why not?
13. How much support do you receive from the school or others (e.g., parents, fellow teachers, school leadership) in implementing critical thinking instruction?

Closing

14. In your opinion, what is needed to improve the integration of critical thinking in writing instruction?
15. Do you have any personal reflections or significant experiences related to encouraging students' critical thinking that you would like to share?