

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING
IN ESL CLASSROOM: A SURVEY**

Nuraina Yusuf^{*a}, Parilah Mohd. Shah^b

^a SK Sri Pantai, Lahad Datu, Sabah, Malaysia

^b Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia,
Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: nuraina_yusuf@yahoo.com

Abstract

Critical thinking skill is the ability to analyse information clearly and rationally make judgements. This skill is deemed to be essential in today's world in order to be able to compete globally. Due to this external demand on educational system, students need to be equipped with efficient critical thinking skill. However, critical thinking skills need to be taught and developed over time. Hence, teachers play an important role to nurture these skills in students in the classroom, in this case, in ESL classroom. Teachers' perceptions are closely related to their behaviour and attitude towards the teaching of critical thinking in ESL classroom. Various literatures also reported teachers often experience barriers in implementing critical thinking skills in a language classroom. This study aims to explore teachers' perception of critical thinking and find out major barrier they perceived in teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom. This is a quantitative research and data was collected via survey. The survey contained 43 items using a five-point Likert scale. The number of participants involved in the study was 40 and they came from various primary schools in Lahad Datu, Sabah. Data collected was quantitatively analysed using SPSS application. This study found that teachers have positive perception on critical thinking in general and perceived student-related factors as the major barrier in teaching critical thinking. The positive perception opens a great opportunity for more effective methods and instructions in teaching of critical thinking in the classroom. Thus, might be able to remove the major barrier perceived, which is related to students and hope to benefit the students more. This study also hoped to provide sufficient information for future research in regard to the teaching of critical thinking in ESL classroom.

Keywords: Critical Thinking Skill, Critical Thinking Barriers, Primary Education, ESL.

Introduction

Educators and researchers have highlighted the importance of teaching thinking skill, dominantly in critical thinking. Critical thinking is referred to as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" Ennis (1985, p. 45). Lipman (1987) further explained that critical thinking is more than decision making process and problem solving. He defined critical thinking by three characteristics: self-corrective thinking, thinking with criteria, and thinking sensitively to context. Critical thinking is crucial in this modern world. It is an essential tool to compete in the global job market (Chen, 2016). This external demand on educational system aspired students in becoming more sophisticated and highly literate workers who are equipped with efficient thinking skills (Zohar, Degani & Vaaknin, 2001). Thus, policy makers in numerous countries including Malaysia recognised developing students' critical thinking as a major component in the education system.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

For this cause, Malaysia is preparing to face this 21st Century education challenge the global demand. Consequently, critical thinking skill is introduced and put as one of the education emphases in the education system. The purpose is to produce critical students who are able to compete in the global market. Although critical thinking is highly valued in the education system, it is seldom taught explicitly to students. In two different studies, it is found that tertiary students in Malaysia were unable to read critically in English (Philip & Hua, 2006) and produced shallow essays for English subjects (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012). It seemed like despite the many years of education in primary and secondary schools, students still do not have the sufficient critical thinking skills. For this reason, there is a need to change the way we teach in ESL classroom. Hence, teachers must develop critical thinking skills and learn how to implement it in the classroom. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic structure of educational system decreases teachers' opportunities to teach the skills and hinder students' development of those skills (Ozkan-Akan, 2003).

The points raised above are probable to form barriers of teaching critical thinking in primary school in Malaysia. According to Paul (1995, in Ozkan-Akan, 2003), teachers' perception, behaviours, and attitude sometimes became constraints in improving critical thinking skill among students. Teachers' perceptions and beliefs often reflected in their teaching practices and behaviour towards students. There are numerous studies carried out on different aspects of thinking skills, sometimes on different skills in ESL classroom, different level of students, along with their constraints. However, there is little evidence on the extent to which teachers actually engage in teaching critical thinking in the classroom. Most of the studies focused on tertiary and secondary education. There has been a minimal research on primary schools in Malaysia. In particular, little has been done to find out the perception of primary school teachers towards teaching critical thinking skills.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to find out primary school teachers' perception on critical thinking and factors that they perceived as barriers of teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom.

Research Questions

To facilitate this investigation, the research question formulated as follows:

1. What is the teachers' perception on critical thinking in general?
2. Which factor is perceived as a major barrier in teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom?

Literature Review

Critical Thinking and Its Importance

Critical thinking is defined as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" Ennis (1985, p. 45). Lipman (1987) further explained that critical thinking is more than decision making process and problem solving. He defined critical thinking by three characteristics: self-corrective thinking, thinking with criteria, and thinking sensitively to context. Kuhn (1999) identified critical thinking as metacognition, focuses on specific intellectual skills. Metacognition involved cognitive and metacognitive competencies. Cognition and metacognition are two types of knowledge that have essential roles in learning and monitoring the process of learning. Flavell (1979) suggested that cognitive strategies are invoked

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

to make cognitive progress, and metacognitive strategies are used to monitor it. Flavell also define metacognition as thinking about thinking, where one is aware about one's own cognitive process and product. It is the act of active monitoring in their action in order to achieve something. Kuhn (1999) believed that most educational philosophers used metacognition figures to defined critical thinking.

Undoubtedly, many researchers agreed that it is important to teach critical thinking to students (Zohar et al., 2001; Ozkan-Akan, 2003; Reynolds, 2016; Amin & Adiansyah, 2018). In 1910, Dewey expressed that the aim of education is to teach young people to think. Fast forward to 1958, Piaget stated that the main objective of education is to create people who are able to do new things, not only repeating what previous generations have done and secondly, to create minds that can be critical, not only accept. In the 1970's Edward de Bono also agreed that the fundamental of education is to teach young minds to think (Ozkan-Akan, 2003). The importance of teaching critical thinking in education has become prominence all over the world. This skill is needed to be instilled in students as it the demand of the current world (Zohar et al., 2001). In this digital era where information is at fingertips, students need to learn how to use the knowledge they gained to solve problems. It is very important that it has been an important aim in many countries including Malaysia where critical thinking skill is listed in education emphases and exam questions at all levels incorporate higher order thinking skill (Ministry of Education, 2012) and in Turkey as well (Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, 2013).

Critical thinking can help students to become autonomous learners. Reynolds (2016) stated that reflective thinking could yield students in becoming autonomous and socially responsible students. The teaching of critical thinking is essential for learning of all students in all academic tracks. It can be taught at all levels to increase learners' achievement (Sousa, 2001). Beyer (1988) argued that the teaching of critical thinking skills not just beneficial to students and teachers but also the society at large. This is teaching critical thinking skills would enable students in becoming autonomous learners and as well as systematic thinkers in the future. Critical thinking is developed through time and experience (Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, 2013). Hence, students need to be taught, trained, and nurtured to think for themselves.

Teaching Critical Thinking in ESL Classroom

Teaching of critical thinking is a repetitive topic in the educational field; specifically, in ESL domain. Critical thinking skills go hand in hand with ESL teaching. The theory of cognitive development is built upon the idea that social interaction is the mechanical source of cognitive development (Vygotskiĭ et.al 1978). Upon this basis several experts in the field have found out that critical thinking skills are in fact strongly related to the concept of ESL. Ayaduray and Jacobs (1997) proved that language learning and performance are in fact improved whence critical thinking teaching approaches are applied in the classrooms. This implied that critical thinking skills are in fact suitable and relevant in the ESL domain and therefore various related pedagogical approaches can be implemented to help students in developing these skills in ESL classrooms.

The research on the teaching of critical thinking in ESL classroom usually involves in one or two skills. In instance, Chen (2016) studied the importance of fostering higher order thinking to developed students' speaking skills. As critical thinking also included cognition and metacognition, it is also part of teaching reading skills. There are many strategies in reading that involved critical thinking. Marimuthu, Muthusamy and Veeravagu (2011) stated that learners

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

need to be aware of their understanding and what they can do about it. This is called self-monitoring. The same view is also echoed by Hassan (2017) where readers' metacognitive awareness towards reading influenced their reading behaviour. Knowing a strategy helps learners to make conscious and intended decision in their reading. Philip and Hua (2006) found that tertiary students in Malaysia are struggling to read critically because they were not trained to think that way. Thus, critical thinking skills are important in ESL classroom to enable students in becoming independent learners and effective language learners.

Past Related Studies

Zohar, Degani, and Vaaknin (2001) conducted a study on 40 junior high and high school teachers in Israel on their perception of about teaching higher order thinking to low achieving students. The study found that higher order thinking is inappropriate for low achieving students because it required more demanding cognitive task and these students were capable of. Another noteworthy finding of the study was how traditional or not the teachers' view of teaching and learning should be also affecting the level of appropriateness of teaching of critical thinking for students. Teachers who had more traditional opinion of teaching and learning would be more likely to think that higher order thinking is equally not appropriate for low achievers and high achievers

Ozkan-Akan (2003) in his study on public high school teacher in Turkey found that there were several student related constraints and the most common was that students do not feel comfortable with the questions or issues that do not have an obvious answer. Apart from that, teachers preferred lecture to as teaching instruction as they were pressured to cover content in a short time. The same study also found that teachers believed that not all students can perform higher order thinking skills. They concerned that some students would not be able to handle these types of questions and activities well. Ozkan-Akan (2003) also classified external factors such as administrative and societal pressure on teachers as constraints in teaching critical thinking.

In a local study conducted by Choy and Cheah (2009), the significant findings include tertiary education students were unaware that they need to think critically caused they were not exposed to this form of thinking and found it confusing when they were encouraged to do so. The study also found that lecturers from institutions of higher learning in the country were more focused on students acquiring knowledge and learning to reason and analyse rather than reflecting and making appraisals of the material they learn. This particular study found that the teachers perceived students applied critical thinking but in reality, not all elements were present.

Aliakbari and Sadeghdaghighi (2013) found that the biggest barrier in teaching critical thinking was students' characteristics. The study of 100 English educators from universities and schools in Iran described students' characteristics as students' own attitude towards their thinking made it difficult to teach the skill in classroom. Apart from that, students were not tolerant with the difficulty of thinking. The same study found that the second biggest barrier is teachers' self-efficacy and lack of knowledge in teaching critical thinking. Their insufficient knowledge on what critical thinking is made it hard for them to plan teaching and learning as well as evaluating students. The teachers in the study also lack of knowledge on how to promote critical thinking to their students. Another barrier identified was faculty resistance.

In a study conducted by Reynolds (2016), teachers believed that critical thinking skills are necessary to be taught in the classroom, but they were ill-prepared to teach the skill.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Reynolds also found that teachers felt that covering the curriculum content was more important than teaching critical thinking skills. Critical thinking was neglected as teaching of content came first as it is required for the assessment. Another teacher-related factor in the study was they were unable to plan critical thinking activities in the classroom due to overabundance of extra-curricular activities and clerical work.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research design was selected for this study to explore teachers' perception of critical thinking and barriers they perceived in teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom in Lahad Datu, Sabah. Data was collected from teachers teaching primary schools in the district. The participants were selected due to demographic similarities, convenience and accessibility to the researcher.

Respondents

There were 40 respondents for the survey comprises of teachers who are teaching English in primary schools in the district. The respondents for this study are selected through convenience sampling procedure. They were representative of each school during a course conducted by the Lahad Datu District Education Office with the respondents' willingness and availability to participate. Among the 40 respondents, 13 (32.5%) were males and 27 (67.5%) were females.

Instrument

The instrument for this study was adopted and adapted from Reynolds (2016) which was taken from a study conducted by Ozkan-Akan (2003). There were two sections of the survey. The first section contained 6 items to find out participants' demographic information. The second section contained 43 items using a 5-point Likert scale. This instrument had been used in multiple published studies; therefore, the validity of the instruments is assured. The overall reliability of the 43 items in Reynolds (2016) revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .826. The adapted 43 items in this survey scored .922 using the same reliability test.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the survey was distributed, oral permission was acquired from the District Education Office through the Language Officer. The researcher was allowed to conduct the study and given a 20 minutes slot during one of the courses for English teachers conducted by the district office. The researcher informed participants about the purpose of the research and explained briefly on how to go about the questionnaire. There were 43 teachers from 43 schools in the district was present during the day. Out of 43 survey forms distributed, 40 were returned to the researcher.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Findings

Table 1

Participants Profile

	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	13	32.5
	Female	27	67.5
Age	21-25 years old	5	12.5
	26-30 years old	15	37.5
	31-35 years old	3	7.5
	36-40 years old	5	12.5
	41-45 years old	5	12.5
	46-50 years old	4	10.0
	51-55 years old	3	7.5
Length of Teaching Experience	1-5 years	18	45.0
	6-10 years	6	15.0
	11-15 years	4	10.0
	16-20 years	4	10.0
	20 years and above	8	20.0
English Optionist	Yes	29	72.5
	No	11	27.5
School Location	Rural	31	77.5
	Urban	9	22.5

Table 1 shows the participants' profile in frequency and percentage. Majority of participants are female by 67.55% compared to male only 32.5%. The largest age group of the participants are range from 26-30 years old by 37.5% compared to other age groups. Based on years of teaching experience, the largest group has 1-5 years of teaching experience. This implied that most of the participants are new to the teaching profession. The second largest group for teaching experience has 20 years and above of experience. Majority of the participants are English optionist (72.5%). This means that the majority of the participants are trained and certified English teachers. Out of 40 schools involved, 31 schools are considered as rural school and only 9 are urban school.

Table 2

General Perception

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Critical thinking skills are needed for daily problem solving.	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	8 20.0%	13 32.5%	18 45.0%	4.20
Critical thinking skills are needed for the subjects to be learned better.	0 0.0%	2 5.0%	5 12.5%	19 47.5%	14 35.0%	4.13
Critical thinking skills are needed to transfer knowledge between	0 0.0%	1 5.5%	8 20.0%	18 45.0%	13 32.5%	4.08

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

subjects.						
Learning the content is more important than critical thinking skills.	1	5	15	12	7	3.48
	2.5%	12.5%	37.5%	30.0%	17.5%	
There is no need to spend time on critical thinking skills as they are learned naturally.	2	11	11	15	1	3.05
	5.0%	27.5%	27.5%	37.5%	2.5%	
Overall findings						3.79

Table 2 shows the participants' general perception of critical thinking skill. The overall mean score for this section is 3.79. This indicates that participants had a positive perception of critical thinking skill in general. The first three items have mean score above 4, thus the teachers involved agreed that critical thinking skill is important. However, 47.5% of the sample viewed learning the content is more important than learning critical thinking skills. There was a divided perception on whether or not to spend time to actually spend time to learn this skill as it is believed to be learned naturally.

Table 3
Teacher-related Barriers

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Teachers usually use lecturing (chalk and talk) strategy.	0	8	17	13	2	3.23
	0.0%	20.0%	42.5%	32.5%	5.0%	
Standardised tests do not stress critical thinking skills.	1	9	15	12	3	3.18
	2.5%	22.5%	37.5%	30.0%	7.5%	
Teachers do not provide sufficient time for critical thinking in class.	0	10	9	19	2	3.33
	0.0%	25.0%	22.5%	47.5%	5.0%	
Pre-service programmes do not stress improving critical thinking skills.	2	13	10	14	1	2.98
	5.0%	32.5%	25.0%	35.0%	2.5%	
Teachers are not given information on improving critical thinking skills when the first start teaching.	0	10	15	12	3	3.20
	0.0%	25.0%	37.5%	30.0%	7.5%	
In-service programmes do not stress improving critical thinking skills.	0	14	11	12	3	3.10
	0.0%	35.0%	27.5%	30.0%	7.5%	
Teachers believe only certain students can perform higher order thinking.	0	3	9	19	9	3.85
	0.0%	7.5%	22.5%	47.5%	22.5%	
Teachers are uncomfortable with questions that have no obvious answer.	1	9	12	15	3	3.25
	2.5%	22.5%	30.0%	37.5%	7.5%	
Teachers feel a need to cover content.	1	0	10	22	7	3.85
	2.5%	0.0%	25.0%	55.0%	17.5%	
Teachers do not have enough resources.	0	4	11	16	9	3.75
	0.0%	10.0%	27.5%	40.0%	22.5%	
Teachers do not have enough time to get prepared for developing activities toward critical thinking skills.	0	3	8	21	8	3.85
	0.0%	7.5%	20.0%	52.5%	20.0%	
Overall findings						3.42

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Table 3 shows participants perception on teacher-related barriers. The overall mean for this section is 3.42. This shows that teacher-related factor as a barrier in teaching critical thinking is inconclusive. The items in this category came out with variety of opinions. Majority of the participants agreed that teachers do not provide sufficient time for critical thinking in class (52.5%) and did not have ample time to prepare activities that involved this skill (72.5%). Teachers also perceived that not having enough resources (72.5%) and the need to cover the content (60.5%) also the barriers. Apart from that, 70% agreed that the belief that only some students can perform higher order thinking skill by teachers also become the teacher-related barrier. 55% agreed that teachers themselves are uncomfortable with questions that have no obvious answer. However, majority (42.5%) were neutral about chalk and talk method in the classroom. The result also showed there is a divided opinion on some opinions including whether or not standardized test stress on critical thinking, and pre-service and in-service programmes do not stress on critical thinking.

Table 4

Student-related Barriers

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Students are afraid of making mistakes.	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	2 5.0%	22 55.0%	15 37.5%	4.28
Students expect each question has right answer.	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	22 55.0%	17 42.5%	4.40
Students perceive the teachers as authority.	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	32 80.0%	7 17.5%	4.15
Students perceive the textbook as authority.	0 0.0%	3 7.5%	10 25.0%	23 57.5%	4 10.0%	3.70
Students prefer activities and tasks with simple factual questions and answers.	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	5 12.5%	22 55.0%	12 30.0%	4.13
Students lack needed background knowledge for improving critical thinking skills.	0 0.0%	2 5.0%	4 10.0%	16 40.0%	18 45.0%	4.26
Students lack interest in critical thinking activities.	0 0.0%	3 7.5%	5 12.5%	21 52.5%	11 27.5%	4.00
Students lack experience in improving critical thinking skills in school.	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 12.5%	25 62.5%	10 25.0%	4.13
Students are impatient with the difficulty of critical thinking.	0 0.0%	2 5.0%	5 12.5%	18 45.0%	15 37.5%	4.15
Overall findings						4.13

Table 4 shows participants' perception on the students-related barriers in teaching critical thinking. The overall mean for this section is 4.13. This indicates that participants agreed that student factor is a major barrier. All of the items in this section are heavy on 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' side.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Table 5

Curriculum-related Barriers

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Curriculum stresses only the acquisition of facts, ideas, and concepts.	0 0.0%	5 12.5%	8 20.0%	19 47.5%	8 20.0%	3.75
Curriculum does not give importance to critical thinking skills.	2 5.0%	11 27.5%	11 27.5%	13 32.5%	3 7.5%	3.10
Curriculum is not conducive to critical thinking.	1 2.5%	13 32.5%	14 35.0%	10 25.0%	2 5.0%	2.98
Subject content is highly structured.	0 0.0%	1 2.5%	12 30.0%	24 60.0%	3 7.5%	3.73
Curriculum leads to memorisation of knowledge.	0 0.0%	4 10.0%	10 25.0%	19 47.5%	7 17.5%	3.73
My subject is not appropriate to develop critical thinking skills.	4 10.0%	17 42.5%	12 30.0%	6 15.0%	1 2.5%	2.58
Subject content is too loaded.	0 0.0%	4 10.0%	14 35.0%	18 45.0%	4 10.0%	3.55
Textbooks do not provide activities for improving critical thinking skills.	0 0.0%	11 27.5%	14 35.0%	12 30.0%	3 7.5%	3.18
Teaching is very much textbook dependent.	0 0.0%	8 20.0%	13 32.5%	12 30.0%	7 17.5%	3.45
Overall findings						3.34

Table 5 shows curriculum related barriers. The overall mean score for this section is 3.34. Based on the result, curriculum-related factor is not a major barrier in teaching critical thinking. There was not a significant difference of opinions for all of the items included in this section except for one. Majority (52.5%) of the ESL teachers disagreed that their subject is not appropriate to develop critical thinking skill.

Table 6

External Factors Barriers

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Teachers fear administrative disapproval.	0 0.0%	5 12.5%	9 22.5%	17 42.5%	9 22.5%	3.75
No time is allocated for critical thinking activities outside of school.	0 0.0%	2 5.0%	13 32.5%	15 37.5%	10 25.0%	3.83
Improving critical thinking skills is not included in observations.	1 2.5%	14 35.0%	16 40.0%	8 20.0%	1 2.5%	2.85
Observers force teachers to cover content.	0 0.0%	5 12.5%	9 22.5%	16 40.0%	10 25.0%	3.78
Improving critical thinking skills has not been established as one of the school priorities.	1 2.5%	10 25.0%	7 17.5%	14 35.0%	8 20.0%	3.45
Administrators do not provide support	1 2.5%	5 12.5%	12 30.0%	13 32.5%	9 22.5%	3.60

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
for improving critical thinking skills.	2.5%	12.5%	30.0%	32.5%	22.5%	
Society does not value critical thinking skills	0	3	10	18	9	3.83
Teachers fear parental disapproval for teaching critical thinking skills.	0.0%	7.5%	25.0%	45.0%	22.5%	
The anxiety of the standard based assessment does not lend itself to the improvement of student critical thinking skills.	1	6	14	14	5	3.40
	2.5%	15.0%	35.0%	35.0%	12.5%	
	0	3	14	16	7	3.68
	0.0%	7.5%	35.0%	40.0%	17.5%	
Overall findings						3.57

Table 6 shows external factors barrier and the mean score for this section is 3.57. This indicates that external factor is not a major barrier in teaching critical thinking. The third item, 40% of the teachers were neutral about the inclusion of critical thinking in observations.

Table 7

Overall Items Mean Ranking

Item	Mean
Students expect each question has right answer.	4.40
Students are afraid of making mistakes.	4.28
Students lack needed background knowledge for improving critical thinking skills.	4.25
Critical thinking skills are needed for daily problem solving.	4.20
Students perceive the teachers as authority.	4.15
Students are impatient with the difficulty of critical thinking.	4.15
Students lack experience in improving critical thinking skills in school.	4.13
Students prefer activities and tasks with simple factual questions and answers.	4.13
Critical thinking skills are needed for the subjects to be learned better.	4.13
Critical thinking skills are needed to transfer knowledge between subjects.	4.08
Students lack interest in critical thinking activities.	4.00
Teachers believe only certain students can perform higher order thinking.	3.85
Teachers do not have enough time to get prepared for developing activities toward	3.85
Teachers feel a need to cover content.	3.85
Society does not value critical thinking skills.	3.83
No time is allocated for critical thinking activities outside of school.	3.83
Observers force teachers to cover content.	3.78
Teachers fear administrative disapproval.	3.75
Curriculum stresses only the acquisition of facts, ideas, and concepts.	3.75
Teachers do not have enough resources.	3.75
Curriculum leads to memorisation of knowledge.	3.73
Subject content is highly structured.	3.73
A student perceives the textbook as authority.	3.70
The anxiety of the standard based assessment does not lend itself to the improvement	3.68
Administrators do not provide support for improving critical thinking skills.	3.60

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Item	Mean
Subject content is too loaded.	3.55
Learning the content is more important than critical thinking skills.	3.48
Improving critical thinking skills has not been established as one of the school	3.45
Teaching is very much textbook dependent.	3.45
Teachers fear parental disapproval for teaching critical thinking skills.	3.40
Teachers do not provide sufficient time for critical thinking in class.	3.33
Teachers are uncomfortable with questions that have no obvious answer.	3.25
Teachers usually use lecturing (chalk and talk) strategy.	3.23
Teachers are not given information on improving critical thinking skills when the first	3.20
Textbooks do not provide activities for improving critical thinking skills.	3.18
Standardised tests do not stress critical thinking skills.	3.18
Curriculum does not give importance to critical thinking skills.	3.10
In-service programmes do not stress improving critical thinking skills.	3.10
There is no need to spend time on critical thinking skills as they are learned naturally.	3.05
Pre-service programmes do not stress improving critical thinking skills.	2.98
Curriculum is not conducive to critical thinking.	2.98
Improving critical thinking skills is not included in observations.	2.85
My subject is not appropriate to develop critical thinking skills.	2.58

Table 7 shows mean score for all items in descending order. The strongest score of mean 4.40 is for item 'students expect each question has right answer'. This implicates that the teachers agreed that students do expect concrete answers. The weakest item in mean score is item 'my subject is not appropriate to develop critical thinking skills'. The respondents in this study disagreed with the statement and thought their subject, English language is, in fact, appropriate to develop critical thinking skills among students. Out of the total 43 items, 11 items have mean score above 4.00. The 11 items consist of 8 items from students-related factors and 3 items from general perception. Only 4 items scored mean of below 3.00 and 2 items are from teacher-related factors and 2 from curriculum-related factors.

Discussion

Teachers' General Perception of Critical Thinking Skill

The result suggested that teachers have positive perception of critical thinking skill in general. The first three items have mean score above 4.0, thus the teachers involved agreed that critical thinking skill is important. The finding was also found in Ozkan-Akan (2003) research and Reynolds (2016). Thus, teachers agreed that improving students' critical thinking skill is an important goal in education. This particular school of thought that was developed by Piaget (1958) where the main objective of education is to create people who are able to do new things, not only merely repeating. Hence, acknowledging literature that said critical thinking skill will benefit the society at large (Beyer, 1988). On the contrary, Aliakbari and Sadeghdaghighi (2013) found that the tertiary education teachers in their study were not aware of the importance of the skills. The different levels of students taught, and the location could help explain this situation.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

There was a divided perception on whether or not to actually spend time to learn this skill as it is believed to be learned naturally. This is understandable as Kuhn (1999) explained that there were two opinions on the matter: critical thinking is an innate capability that will grow over time; and critical thinking skill needed practice to be developed. However, there is as strong evidence that this particular set of skill needs to be taught, not leave to chances. According to Sousa (2001) critical thinking skills required guided instruction and does not occur naturally. Other research echoed this literature. Participants in Ozkan-Akan (2003) would like to emphasise in teaching critical thinking skill rather explicitly rather than leaving the skills to be developed naturally. In a study conducted by Choy and Cheah (2003) also found that teachers established the importance of teaching this skill to enhance students' learning.

However, 47.5% viewed learning the content is more important than learning critical thinking skills. This finding is consistent with Reynolds (2016). Despite the positive perception of the importance of critical thinking skill, teachers found content is more important. One of the possible explanations to this is teachers might think critical thinking skills is a tool for students to obtain the ultimate goal which is better learning outcomes (Choy & Cheah, 2003).

Barriers in Teaching Critical Thinking in ESL Classroom

The subscales measured by the survey were teacher-related, student-related, curriculum-related, and external factors. There was only one area that was statistically significant was student-related barriers which mean score was 4.13, the only subscale that scored more than 4. The findings implied that student-related factor is perceived as the major barrier of teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom. The other three areas explored found there were no statistically significant findings. However, some of the items in each section were more significant than other thus will be discussed further.

Student-related Barrier. The major barrier in teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom in this study was student-related factor. 8 out of 9 items in this subsection have mean score above 4.00. The finding was consistent with Ozkan-Akan (2003) and Aliakbari and Sadeghdaghighi (2013). Teachers have the impression that students are afraid of being incorrect and prefer activities with simple factual question and answers. All of the studies have one thing in common which is the nature of English language as second language. The language barrier could explain the student-related constraint in teaching critical thinking. Majority of the schools involved are from rural area and literature found that level of proficiency of students from rural school is lower than urban schools (Talif & Edwin, 1990; Maarof et al. 2003). Consequently, their achievements in the subject are lower. In a study conducted by Zohar et al. (2001) it is found that the higher order thinking is inappropriate for low achieving students as it required more demanding cognitive task that these students could do. Sometimes students might have the ideas, but they just do not have the language to express their thoughts.

External Factor Barrier. One item that seemed to be getting mixed opinion in this section was improving critical thinking skills is not included in observations. There is no literature could be found to support this statement and the situation cannot be compared to other studies due to the difference of system being used to observe teachers. In this case, it could be assumed that different schools have different method or ways of observing their teachers. There are possibilities that some observers may or may not be looking at critical thinking skills of the lesson depending on their objectives.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Teacher-related Barrier. There are two items in this section have distinct result from other research: the participants agreed that pre-service and in-service programmes stressed on improving critical thinking skill. This finding is contrary to Ozkan-Akan's (2003) and Reynolds' (2016) findings. This indicates the different structure of pre-service and in-service teacher training programme of the countries in the studies involved. Apparently, the teachers agreed that the training they received stresses on improving critical thinking skill. Hence, there are other barriers that hinder them to effectively teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom.

Curriculum-related Barrier. Participants had different opinions on the curriculum-related barrier. Thus, resulting in statically insignificant result. One item that the teachers agreed upon is they believed that the subject content (English Language subject in this case) is highly structured. As a result, there is a little room to teach critical thinking in the classroom (Ozkan-Akan, 2003). Despite teaching ESL learners, the teachers involved still believed that their subject is appropriate to develop critical thinking skills.

Limitation

Critical thinking skill is an abstract concept and complex. There are many interpretations of what critical thinking skill really is. Thus, the findings in this study should be considered in conjunction with the context of the study. The scope of this study is limited to the data collected from Lahad Datu primary schools' teachers who are included as the sample cannot be generalised to the whole population. Secondly, the study is limited to the four barriers: teacher-related, student-related, curriculum-related and external factor related. There could be other factors that are affecting teachers' perception on teaching critical thinking skill in ESL classroom.

Recommendation

This study collected data solely from survey with close-ended questions. The researcher recommended some open-ended questions to gain more information and clarification from participants as well as other factors that they might perceived as barriers in teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom. The data collected was from primary school English teachers' perspective. Another broader context such as teachers' subject area and different level of students will be more helpful in further understanding teachers' perception on barriers in teaching critical thinking skill.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate primary school teachers' perception on critical thinking and factors that they perceive as barriers of teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom. It is found that teachers have positive perception on critical thinking skills and the major barrier in teaching critical thinking in ESL classrooms are related to students. The overall finding of this study found that teachers have positive perception on critical thinking in general. Thus, opening a great opportunity for more effective teaching of critical thinking methods and instructions in the classroom, and hope to benefit the students more. When barriers that teachers experienced in teaching critical thinking can be removed, it would be easier to improve teaching strategies that nurture critical thinking skills in students. This study hopes to help curriculum designers, policy makers, educators, supervisors, and other relevant party by providing insight of the barriers that might hinder teachers from teaching critical thinking in ESL classroom.

References

- Aliakbari, M., & Sadeghdaghighi, A. (2013). Teachers' perception of the barriers to critical thinking. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1-5.
- Amin, A. M., & Adiansyah, R. (2018). Lecturers' perception on students' critical thinking skills development and problems faced by students in developing their critical thinking skills. *Jurnal Pendidikan Biologi Indonesia*, 4(1), 1-10.
- Ayudaray, J., & Jacobs, G. M. (1997). Can learner strategy instruction succeed? The case of higher order questions and elaborated responses. *System*, 25(4), 561-570.
- Beyer, B. K. (1988). *Developing A Thinking Skills Program*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Chen, M. (2016). Theoretical Framework for Integrating Higher-order Thinking into L2 Speaking. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(2), 217. doi:10.17507/tpls.0602.01
- Choy, S., & Cheah, P. (2009). Teacher perceptions of critical thinking among students and its influence on higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 20(2), 198-206.
- Ennis, R. H. (1985). A logical basis for measuring critical thinking skills. *Educational leadership*, 43(2), 44-48.
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 906-911.
- Hassan, F. (2017). Metacognitive strategy awareness and reading comprehension. *The English Teacher*, 18.
- Ismail, N., Hussin, S., & Darus, S. (2012). ESL students' attitude, learning problems, and needs for online writing. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 12(4).
- Kuhn, D. (1999). A developmental model of critical thinking. *Educational Researcher*, 28(1), 16-26.
- Lipman, M. (1987). Critical thinking: What can it be?. *Analytic Teaching*, 8(1).
- Maarof, N., Osman, K., Yamat, H., & Yunus, M. (2003). Keupayaan penguasaan kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar Melayu dalam arus globalisasi. *Prosiding Seminar Kebangsaan Arus Perdana*, 11, 226-266.
- Marimuthu, R., Muthusamy, C., & Veeravagu, J. (2016). Metacognitive strategy training through the cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA) as a way to improve reading comprehension performance among students of an English language course at UiTM Penang. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 7(1), 30.
- Ministry of Education. (2012). *Educational Development Plan 2013-2025*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Ozkan-Akan, S. (2003). Teachers' perceptions of constraints on improving student thinking in high schools. Masters Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Department of Social Sciences. Retrieved November 13, 2013
- Philip, B., & Hua, T. K. (2017). Metacognitive strategy instruction (MSI) for reading: Co-regulation of cognition. *e-Bangi*, 1(1).
- Reynolds, S. W. (2016). *Determining and exploring teachers' perceptions on the barriers to teaching critical thinking in the classroom: A survey study* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Sousa, D. A. (2001). *How the brain learns* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON BARRIERS OF TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Talif, R. & Edwin, M. (1990). A comparative study of the achievement and the proficiency levels in English as a second language among learners in selected rural and urban schools in Peninsular Malaysia. *The English Teacher*, 19 , 48–57.

Vygotskiĭ, L. S., Cole, M., Stein, S., & Sekula, A. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zohar, A., Degani, A., & Vaakin, E. (2001). Teachers' beliefs about low-achieving students and higher-order thinking. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 469-485.