



# Exploring ESP University Students' Critical Thinking Skills through Films

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**Purpose:** Critical thinking as a new educational trend has been much discussed and proposed by theorists and educators in the recent decades and particularly in foreign language settings (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991; Halpern, 2004; Liaw, 2007). The changing economic context has placed new demands on higher education as employers are in demand of new skills and abilities in future graduates among which critical thinking skills (McNair, 1997; Avis, 2010). So, if we aspire to prepare our future graduates for the workplace and life, ESP teachers are not to be different to this new demanding situation. Thus, the purpose of the study was to embark in a new teaching learning experience with the aim of exploring the use film as a content material to help ESP students enhance their critical thinking skills along language learning.

**Study design/methodology/approach:** The study is the report of a qualitative action research that aimed at exploring how critical thinking skills could be enhanced within first year ESP students through the study of film viewing and analysis. Data was mainly gathered by means of interviews, classroom observations and students' artifacts.

**Findings:** The study revealed that the participants were able to enhance their critical thinking skills after the film viewing and analysis experience. The study also suggested that film, as a content material can be an effective teaching tool to engage students to analyze, interpret and discuss. Thus, providing insight into a useful teaching approach that can help English language learners enhance their critical thinking skills.

**Originality/value:** The integration of films in the ESP context is a promising teaching learning experience for students and English language teachers, offering them the opportunity to stimulate the language teaching learning process and a prosperous approach promoting reflection, analysis, evaluation and judgment. I also believe that this study is a modest contribution that defies Atkinson's skepticism (1997) about the 'teachability' of critical thinking skills in the EFL context. Thus, refuting his claims that critical thinking is "social practice" (Ibid, p.72) which is culture specific and cannot be applicable in non-western contexts as it is acquired unconsciously through socialization during childhood.

## Introduction

English language learning has long been centered on the development of language competences. However, as English is gaining the position of the world's lingua franca and the world is witnessing great advances in technology, then the learning of English is geared toward enabling learners to become better communicators in the world of education, economic, business, commerce, tourism.... To this end, English language teachers are called to go beyond centering their teaching on language competences, grammar or vocabulary as it does not 'prepare students for real life in the real world of economic globalization and information technology' (Liaw, 2007, p.48). They are rather encouraged to enhance their students' ability to think and reflect to enable them to communicate effectively in international settings (Lipman, 2003). As held by Kabilan (2000), to be able to communicate effectively requires the ability to think critically and creatively using the target language. This implies that language development and thinking grow together and nurture one another.

For instance, when language learners are engaged to think critically, their language skills are also enhanced because they will be encouraged to use language that is more complex and as

their language development progresses, their ability to think critically develops. Hence, this confirms the interrelatedness between language development and thinking skills as argued by Piaget (1971) and Vygotsky (1962) whose ideas have become the foundation of much research in cognitive development and in the field of education. There seems to be an agreement among EFL practitioners that it is essential to assist EFL learners in developing their critical thinking skills while being engaged in learning the target language (Odenwald, 2010).

Researchers, who have explored this, argue that this can only be possible through the use of appropriate materials and activities that promotes thought and active learning in the classroom such as debates, discussion, written assignment or questioning techniques (Widdowson, 1990; Lipman, 2003; Shirkani & Fahim, 2011). In view of the claims above, the study aimed to explore how the use of film as a source of content material along the use of critical analysis activities for film analysis in an ESP setting can be an effective teaching material to enhance

ESP students' critical thinking skills. To this end, a new ESP course was designed that adopted film as a content material and was implemented to tease out to what extent a film-based course in an ESP setting contributes to enhancing ESP students' critical thinking skills. Thus, the study had two major goals:

Examine whether or not film as a content material can provide a forum for cultivating critical thinking skills.

Explore from the perspectives of the students how effective this new film-based teaching approach is in the ESP had enhanced their critical thinking skills.

Therefore, three research questions guided the research throughout to meet the purpose of the study.

RQ1: What are ESP students' perceptions of the integration of film in their ESP classroom as a new content material in enhancing their critical thinking skills?

RQ2: To what extent are the students able to develop their critical thinking skills by the treatment of film viewing and analysis?

RQ3: What critical thinking skills the students acquire through the study of film viewing and analysis?

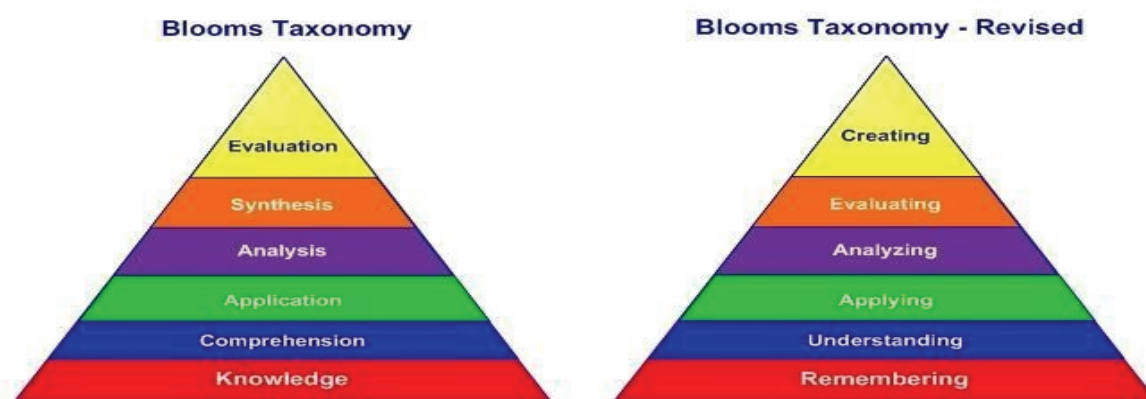
### **Literature review:**

The Greek philosopher Socrates 2500 years ago alluded to the principle of questioning and enquiring and set the pillars of the tradition of developing critical thinking skills which denoted at that time the ability to "reflectively question" that is to explain and distinguish between facts and opinions (Paul & Elder, 2005). In Socratic teaching, the focus is on the importance of asking deep questions that trigger thinking before accepting ideas as worthy (Ibid). Thus, a number of definitions emerged from the philosophical tradition that enumerates the qualities and characteristics of the critical thinker by emphasizing the qualities and standard of thought (Bàez, 2004; Lai, 2011). Facione (1992) viewed "critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretations, analysis, evaluation, and inference" (p.3).

Unlike the philosophical perspective to critical thinking which failed to answer the question as to what actions and behaviors a critical thinker can perform; the cognitive psychological approach focused on "how people actually think" (Lai, 2011, p.5) that is the focus is on the skills and tasks performed by the critical thinker and how they shape thinking. Halpern (1998) contended that 'critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills and strategies that increase the probability of desirable outcome' (p.8). Therefore, the psychological branch is more concerned with identifying the intellectual skills one performs while thinking. In addition to the

philosophical and psychological approach to the concept of critical thinking, educators were also interested in understanding the cognitive domain of human being and they provided a definition of critical thinking from their perspective. In this context, the educationalist John Dewey (1933) is considered among the first who introduced thinking skills in the field of education.

His notion of “reflective thinking” denotes that thinking skills is the ability to mediate and reflect on complex issues in order to come up with a sound conclusion and solution based on critical judgment and that though without reflection is “uncritical thinking”. However, Benjamin Bloom (1956) was the most cited in the educational field for the taxonomy of critical thinking that he devised after long years of classroom observation and experimentation (Lai, 2011). He proposed six levels of learning within the cognitive domain that the most basic skills to the more complex levels of thinking: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. A taxonomy that was revised by Anderson (1990), Bloom’s former student. The reason behind this revision was to add some relevance for the 21<sup>st</sup> century students and teachers (Krathwohl, 2002).



**Figure 1: Old and New Version of Bloom’s Taxonomy**

(<https://thepeakperformancecenter.com/.../blooms-taxonomy/blooms-taxo>)

The original six categories of Bloom taxonomy were renamed from nouns to verbs reflecting the nature of thinking and the last two categories synthesis and evaluation reversed on the basis that the ability to evaluate precedes the ability to synthesize. The revision also concerned the renaming of the ‘knowledge’ category to ‘remembering’. It was then assumed that this new categorization can help teachers “decide where and how to improve the planning of curriculum and the delivery of instruction” (Krathwohl, 2002, p.218). Therefore, Anderson (1990)’s new taxonomy is the following: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating offering a more comprehensible addition that made it possible for the different categories to overlap. Therefore, the educationalist was more concerned with identifying and categorizing specific thinking skills to enable teachers to decide when and why to teach and focus on particular skills.

Reviewing the literature on what critical thinking is, it is evident that it is a concept over which there is much contention given the different approaches and definitions proposed and that it is a highly acclaimed objective in higher education. Indeed in 2004, the partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, better known as the P21 (2011) Framework for the 21 Century Skills has included critical thinking skills as one of the learning and innovation skills that must be integrated in postsecondary levels curricula to prepare students for their post-secondary education and the workplace.

Yet, despite its recognized importance in the field of education, little empirical evidence is provided to educators to decide the ways to teach and enhance their students' critical thinking skills (Marin & Halpern, 2011) and triggered a debate over its integration into subject courses and over how learning to think critically can be best achieved (Ennis, 1991). Thus, a number of teaching methods and techniques are suggested and implemented by practitioners to nurture students' critical thinking skills considered crucial for students' future careers beyond higher education and no single method has emerged as the best.

### ***Why are critical thinking skills necessary to ESP students?***

Theorists like Vygotsky (1962), Dewey (1933) and Piaget (1971) have long advocated the interrelatedness between thinking and language development. A number of researchers and educators have also called for the importance of promoting these skills in the EFL classroom (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991; Chappel & Curtis, 2000; Shirvani & Fahim, 2011; Alnofoie, 2013; Hughes, 2014). Their studies have provided empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of teaching and infusing critical thinking skills in the English language classroom. Thus refuting Atkison's (1997) skepticism about the success and applicability of critical thinking in the EFL context.

For instance, Hughes (2014) argued that language teachers are in a position that enables them to develop their students' critical thinking skills alongside their language competencies. This lies on the premise that the communicative approach to language teaching and learning whose main objective is to engage students in 'authentic' communication involving personalization, investigation and problem-solving requires students to think critically (Ibid). Therefore, language learning and critical thinking do not clash. Indeed, the use of authentic texts in the English language classroom entails that that students are engaged to comprehend a text whether written or visual analyzing facts from opinions and expressing their attitude towards that particular text.

In this line of thought, Shirkanin and Fahim (2011) argued that the promotion of critical thinking skills in the EFL context depends on two major factors, choice of materials and type of activities used to introduce and teach the materials; materials that can be "analyzed, discussed, synthesized and argued about" (p.1092). In addition to the choice of materials, the type of activities and tasks used in class should be organized in the form of group work, project based work, students' led presentations, debate, group discussions...that are appropriate to enhance active learning and engagement (Ibid).

For instance learners will be triggered to reflect about something only if they can see some meaningful in the materials they are introduced to (Shirvani & Fahim, 2011; Martinez & Nino, 2013). In this context, Baéz (2004) used critical thinking tasks such as puzzles, word games and pictures where the focus was on inferring information from oral and written texts, distinguishing facts from opinions and explaining and discussing issue from different perspectives.

With the same objective of fostering students' thinking skills in the EFL classroom, Chapple and Curtis (2000) used content-based instruction as an appropriate framework for developing thinking skills. Similarly, Martinez & Nino (2013) introduced critical thinking activities through music to strengthen students' critical thinking skills.

While in a different context, Khatib, and Shakouri (2013) demonstrated how critical thinking skills is best nurtured through literature reading. As put by Tung & Chang (2009) literature reading is "a process that requires readers to recall, retrieve and reflect on their prior experiences or memories to construct meaning of the text" (p.291), therefore enabling learners to exercise the skills of 'explanation' 'analysis' 'synthesis', 'interpretation', 'inference'...

So, in view with this thought, film as a visual and not written text like literature also requires viewers like readers to recall, retrieve information and reflect on their prior knowledge and experiences to construct meaning about what they are watching. Indeed, many scholars have also recommended film as an effective teaching material in English language classroom (Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Eken, 2003; Anderson, 2008; Lip, 2009; Kaiser, 2011, Bahloul & Graham, 2012; Thaler, 2014). Film integration in EFL classes has proved effective in fulfilling several instructional goals that range from fostering language skills (King, 2002), increasing learners' motivation for language learning (Seferoglu, 2008; Ismaili, 2013) to developing learners' critical thinking skills (Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Eken, 2003).

### ***Why Films in the EFL classroom?***

Film is considered as an audio visual and popular material in which “audiences of all ages participate” (Anderson, 2008, p.8) providing pleasure and enjoyment. Film also contributes to intercultural learning as it “exposes students to the target culture, with its sociolinguistic, socioeconomic, socio-political and educational issues” (Istanto, 2009, p.280). Film also provides an excellent ground for the development of receptive/productive competences and critical thinking skills as the moving image can act as stimuli to speaking and listening and the understanding of narrative and point of view (Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Eken, 2003).

### ***How to enhance critical thinking through films?***

The full potential of film in the English language setting can be fully explored provided that it is well thought out and appropriate activities are used. As advocated by Voller and Widdows (1993) film as a visual text is a rich content material compared to written texts. However, “as with any text, it is not primarily the difficulty of the language that determines whether the students can benefit from it, so much as the suitability of the tasks they have to do” (p.343). In this line of thought, Eken (2003) proposed a framework for performing in-class collaborative student-led workshops where the students were asked to design activities and tasks they could use in class while analyzing the film from a literary and dramatic perspective.

In a different context, Chappel and Curtis (2000) also used film as a content-based approach and the students were asked to conduct presentations on social issues arising from the suggested film and write their own film review for the films. In the same vein, Anderson (2008) explored the use of film in teaching writing, and he documented the teaching practices of writing instructors teaching composition. It was reported that he used a framework of four different critical analysis activities (narrative, cultural, cinematic, and rhetorical) to teach writing through film enhanced students' composition skills and thinking skills.

In view with the above-asserted arguments, I used film as an instructional content material in my ESP context to enhance my students' critical thinking skills. I adopted Anderson (2008) analytical framework (narrative, cultural, cinematic and rhetorical) for film analysis and designed instructional activities for my students to tease out to what extent this approach could enhance their critical thinking skills.

### **Methodology**

The current study is ‘a small-scale intervention’ (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.186) conducted by me as a teacher researcher over a five-week period with 20 participants enrolled in First year at the Higher Institute of Audiovisual and Cinema in an English for specific purpose course (ESP). The designed course for my ESP students using film was a new teaching approach in the researched context. A framework of critical analysis activities was provided to assist them in



their analysis of the suggested film. Their written responses to the different critical analysis activities were useful data to conduct a “close examination of the effects of such intervention”.

Therefore, with the aim of finding out how a group of Tunisian ESP students could develop their critical thinking skills by means of film viewing and analysis, I adopted Lewin's (1946, cited in Cohen et al. 2007) the four-stage codification of action research, “planning, acting, observing and finally reflecting” (pp.304-305).

Data was obtained by means interview, classroom observation and compilation of students' worksheets and written production (artifacts) to explore how a group of Tunisian ESP students responded to the new pedagogical intervention and to what extent they developed their critical thinking skills through the film viewing and analysis experience.

Indeed, the use of these three data collection instruments were meant to triangulate the information collected. The classroom observation helped to track students' development of their critical thinking skills by focusing on their interaction in class and in relation to the different critical analysis activities. The focus was on students' utterances that demonstrated the skill of ‘interpretation, analysis, evaluation and judgment. A computer-aided qualitative data analysis software was used (CAQDAS). This software offers huge storage capacities and easy coding and archiving options (Dornyei, 2007). Thus after transcribing my data orthographically, a word document file was imported into ATLAS.ti 7, which allowed the transcription, coding, archiving and exploration of data into SPSS package or MS Excel spreadsheets. The students' ‘talk’ was coded into four codes, utterances evoking explanation, utterances evoking interpretation, utterances evoking analysis and utterances evoking evaluation and judgment which is in line with Anderson (2000)'s categorization of critical thinking skills.

Since the students were asked to respond individually and in a written form to the different questions related to the analysis of the film from a narrative, cultural, cinematic and rhetorical perspective, then their responses were analyzed and assessed using a checklist adapted from Anderson (2000) revised taxonomy of critical thinking. The adapted checklist contained six criteria for assessing the development of students' critical thinking skills for film analysis. A four-point rating scale was entered against each criterion in the checklist to validate whether or not their written answers reflected evidence of the enhancement of their thinking skills.

By the end of the pedagogical intervention, an interview was conducted with the participants to investigate their perceptions on the integration of film in their ESP courses and the enhancement of their thinking skills. The qualitative data obtained from the students' interview responses aimed to identify their attitudes towards the implementation of film viewing and analysis as a new approach to English language teaching in enhancing critical thinking skills. Thus, themes emerging from their responses were categorized according to a coding process (Patton, 2002) that summarized their views into two dominant codes: participation opportunities (PO) critical thinking opportunities (CTP) which made the analysis more “structured and organized” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 94)

## Results

### *Students' perception of the pedagogical intervention*

The findings in relation to the students' perceptions of the usefulness of film viewing and analysis for the enhancement of their thinking skills were derived from data obtained through eleven open-ended interview questions conducted at the end of the five-week pedagogical intervention and were grouped into common categories and themes as presented in the table 4.1 below.

**Table 1: Students' perceptions of the film viewing and analysis approach (S=20)**

| Themes                                  | Respondents |
|---|-------------|
| Speaking opportunities                  | 20          |
| Relevance of the film topic their lives | 20          |
| Self-confidence                         | 13          |
| Self-reflection                         | 11          |
| Considering alternatives                | 12          |
| Analysis                                | 15          |

A thematic analysis of their interview responses revealed that though the interviewees acknowledged that learning through film is a new approach in their ESP context, they all agreed that it provided them with a meaningful context that triggered them to speak and communicate with their peers.

*S6: "listening to my friends opposing views especially about Neil's suicide made aware that everyone has his or her own way of seeing things, that there is no right or wrong answer, it's your job to defend your idea without condemning others' viewpoints. I for myself condemned Neil' suicide while some of my friends see it as Neil' right to decide what to do with his life"*

*S9: "my cultural analysis part was different from my classmates which means that we have different ways of seeing and reading"*

As shown in table 1 the interviewees had a positive attitude toward the integration of film in their ESP context. First, they reported that this is approach offered them more speaking opportunities and increased their confidence to interact and share ideas with their peers. They also asserted that use of film and the critical activities to analyze the film triggered them to think critically by giving their own self-reflection analysis and interpretations based on their own personal, social, and cultural background. This finding corroborates with studies conducted by Sefroglu (2008), Ismaili (2013), and Mirvan (2013) who reported that films provide learners with a motivation to learn and can foster teacher-student discussions, thus providing learners with more opportunities to use English in class.

### ***Students' development of critical thinking skills from the teacher's perspectives***

The aim of using the checklist was to assess the students' responses to the different critical analysis activities done in class and the focus was on identifying the development of their critical thinking skills for particular criteria set in the checklist to answer research question two. In the checklist, there were six criteria for assessing the students 'development of critical thinking skills. Each student's answer to the different critical analysis activities on the were analyzed and validated with this checklist by the researcher which tracked the students' development of CTS from lesson one to lesson five. In this line, the percentage results of the students' development of critical thinking skills for criterion one after doing the different critical analysis activities from lesson one to five are presented in Table 4.2 below:

**Table 2: Students' Development of criteria 1 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1-5 based on students' written responses for the Critical analysis activities**

| Lessons<br>(L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis             | Rating |     |     |     |
|----------------|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|
|                |  | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4   |
| (L1)           | 1. The student can remember and recognize what they have observed in the film. |        | 25% | 10% | 65% |
| (L2)           | 1. The student can remember and recognize what they have observed in the film. |        | 50% | 45% | 5%  |
| (L3)           | 1. The student can remember and recognize what they have observed in the film. | 10%    | 30% | 60% |     |
| (L4)           | 1 The student can remember and recognize what they have observed in the film.  | 5%     | 55% | 40% |     |
| (L5)           | 1. The student can remember and recognize what they have observed in the film. |        | 30% | 55% | 15% |

Table 2 shows the percentage rating results of the students' development of critical thinking skills in lesson one, two, three, four and five and after doing the narrative analysis activities. As shown in the table above the percentage number of students who scored 3 in the scale increased from lesson one to five. In other words, the percentage number of students who can remember quite a bit and recognize what they have observed in the film increased from 10% in lesson one to 55% in lesson five and obtained the scoring number three. Here is how one of the students expressed her views about the main characters in the film:

*S4: "If we look at the main characters in the film, I can see that Neil Perry and Todd who is his roommate are very obedient to their parents, however Charlie is their complete opposite, he is rebellious, while Knox is romantic, and Cameron is very serious. We have characters with very opposing personalities"*

*(Excerpt Lesson 1: Student 4, narrative analysis activity)*

**Table 3: Students' development of criteria 2 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1 written responses for the Critical analysis activities.**

| Lessons<br>(L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis                                    | Rating |     |     |     |
|----------------|---|--------|-----|-----|-----|
|                |   | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4   |
| (L1)           | 2.The student can summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their words  |        | 25% | 15% | 60% |
| (L2)           | 2. The student can summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their words |        | 45% | 40% | 15% |
| (L3)           | 2.The student can summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their words  | 10%    | 30% | 55% | 5%  |
| (L4)           | 2.The student can summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their words  | 5%     | 55% | 40% |     |



|      |  |  |     |     |     |
|------|--|--|-----|-----|-----|
| (L5) | 2.The student can summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their words |  | 30% | 55% | 15% |
|------|--|--|-----|-----|-----|

Table 3 shows the percentage ratings of the students' development of critical thinking skills in lesson one, two, three, four and five and after doing the narrative analysis activities. As to criterion two set in the checklist and as represented in the table above, the rating percentage of the students who scored 3 in the scale increased from lesson one to five. In other words the percentage number of students who showed a bit of improvement in their thinking skills and who were able to summarize the major points and events they have seen in the film using their own words increased from 15% in lesson one to 55% in lesson five and obtained the scoring number three on the scale. From the other sample below, this is how one student presented the plot of the film:

*S7: "the film is about a new English teacher who comes to Welton Academy with a new teaching method and who inspired his students with his teaching method calling them to look at things from different perspectives and encouraging them to seize the day before it becomes too late"*

*(Excerpt Lesson2: Student 7, narrative analysis activity)*

**Table 4: Students' development of criteria 3 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1 written responses for the Critical analysis activities.**

| Lessons<br>(L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis                | Rating |     |     |    |
|----------------|---|--------|-----|-----|----|
|                |   | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4  |
| (L1)           | 3. The students can make connections from the film to their own life and context. | 15%    | 35% | 50% |    |
| (L2)           | 3. The students can make connections from the film to their own life and context  | 5%     | 50% | 45% |    |
| (L3)           | 3. The students can make connections from the film to their own life and context  | 15%    | 40% | 40% | 5% |
| (L4)           | 3. The students can make connections from the film to their own life and context  | 20%    | 70% | 10% |    |
| (L5)           | 3. The students can make connections from the film to their own life and context  |        | 40% | 55% | 5% |

As for criterion 3 of critical thinking skills set in the checklist, the percentage number of the students who were quite a bit able to make connections from the film to their own life and context was about 50% throughout the five lessons. This implied that half the number of students were able to apply what they saw in the film to their own context. The excerpt below showed how one of the students gave his opinion about Neil's act of defying his father rather acting according to his own will.

*S9: If I were Neil, I would do the same thing since there is nothing wrong with acting. As long as I'm not doing illegal staff, I would not accept that my father would oblige to give up what I want to do."*

*(Excerpt lesson 3, student 5, cultural analysis activity)*

**Table 5: Students 'development of criteria 4 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1 written responses for the Critical analysis activities.**

| Lessons<br>(L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis                              | Rating |     |     |    |
|----------------|---|--------|-----|-----|----|
|                |   | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4  |
| (L1)           | 4. The students can analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. | 30%    | 40% | 30% |    |
| (L2)           | 4. The students can analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. | 15%    | 60% | 25% |    |
| (L3)           | 4. The students can analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. | 35%    | 25% | 35% | 5% |
| (L4)           | 4. The students can analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. | 15%    | 40% | 40% | 5% |
| (L5)           | 4. The students can analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. | 5%     | 30% | 60% | 5% |

Table 5 shows that the percentage rating results of students to whom the researcher assigned the rating three on the scale, which increased from 30% in lesson one to 60% in lesson five. This entails that by the end of the intervention almost 60% of the students were quite a bit able to give implied meaning about the film. As represented in the table above, more than half the number of students were able to get the rating three which shows that there was an improvement in the development in their ability to analyze the cinematic aspect of the film and give implied meaning about it. One of the students described the meaning of the use of the camera angle and the meaning it conveyed in the last sequence of the film. She said:

*S20: "in the last scene of the film the students standing on their desk were shot on low level camera angle to prove that now the students were in a more powerful position than their headmaster Mr. Nolan, compared to the first sequence of the film when Mr. Nolan was filmed from a low level camera"*

*(Excerpt 4, lesson five, cinematic analysis activity)*

**Table 6: Students' development of criteria 5 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1 written responses for the Critical analysis activities.**

| Lessons<br>(L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis                 | Rating |     |     |   |
|----------------|--|--------|-----|-----|---|
|                |  | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4 |
| (L1)           | 5. The students can evaluate the value of the film by giving assumptions about it. | 55%    | 35% | 10% |   |
| (L2)           | 5. The students can evaluate the value of the film by giving assumptions about it. | 35%    | 65% |     |   |

|      |  |     |     |     |     |
|------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| (L3) | 5. The students can evaluate the value of the film by giving assumptions about it. | 20% | 65% | 15% |     |
| (L4) | 5. The students can evaluate the value of the film by giving assumptions about it. | 25% | 50% | 25% |     |
| (L5) | 5. The students can evaluate the value of the film by giving assumptions about it. | 15% | 30% | 40% | 15% |

As shown in Table 6 there was an improvement of criterion five of critical thinking skills throughout the five lessons. While in lesson one, the rating percentage of students who showed no evidence of being able to evaluate the value of the film by giving assumption about it represented half the number of the students, it decreased in lesson five to represent only 15% of the total number of students. However, the percentage ratings of students who scored three and could give assumption about the film increased from 10% in lesson one to 40% in lesson five. One of the students described the director's intention or message for not letting Neil surrenders his idea of acting and playing in the play as his father wished so. She explained:

*S6: the filmmaker did not let Neil give up his idea of becoming an actor in the film otherwise the film will lose its purpose of showing the main idea of the film which is change and challenge."*

*(Excerpt 6, lesson 4, rhetorical analysis activity)*

**Table 7: Students' development of criteria 6 of critical thinking skills in lesson 1-5 based on students' written responses for the Critical analysis activities.**

| Lessons (L) | Criteria for developing critical thinking skills for film analysis        | Rating |     |     |   |
|-------------|---|--------|-----|-----|---|
|             |   | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4 |
| (L1)        | 6. The students can judge the film by giving consequences about the film. | 60%    | 30% | 10% |   |
| (L2)        | 6. The students can judge the film by giving consequences about the film. | 35%    | 65% |     |   |
| (L3)        | 6. The students can judge the film by giving consequences about the film. | 65%    | 20% | 15% |   |
| (L4)        | 6. The students can judge the film by giving consequences about the film. | 55%    | 35% | 10% |   |
| (L5)        | 6. The students can judge the film by giving consequences about the film. | 15%    | 30% | 55% |   |

Table 7 shows that the percentage rating of the students who showed no evidence of their ability to judge the film was 60 while that number decreased to 15% in lesson five. More than half the total number of students (55%) obtained the rating number three in lesson five, and showed quite a bit of improvement for criterion six of critical thinking skills set in the checklist. One of the students described the sequence where Charlie Dalton was punished for writing the article in the school annual asking the school to allow girls to be enrolled in Welton Academy and how he refused to give names. He said:

*S5: "Charlie Dalton although suffering for the punishment he received from Mr. Nolan (he was paddled), he refused to give names because he knows that he will be fired from Welton Academy like Mr. Keating. So he wanted to show that he is faithful to the principles of their secret Dead poet society club that they created"*

*(Excerpt 7, lesson 5; rhetorical analysis activity)*

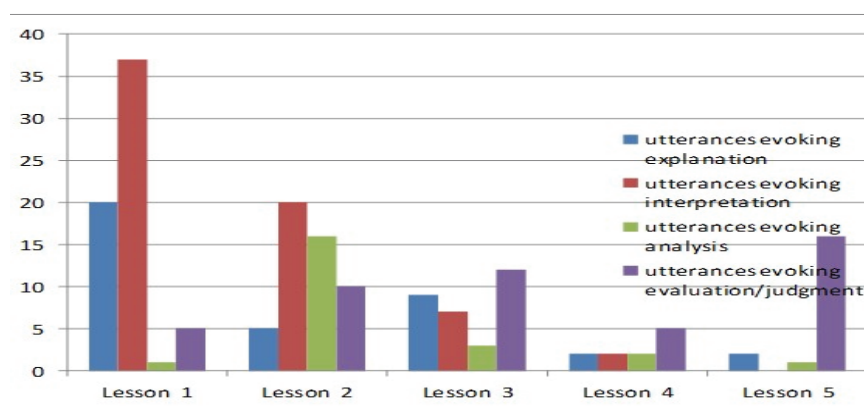
For instance, the above rating results of students' development of CTS throughout the five lessons corroborate with Scriven and Paul's claims (2003) that critical thinking is not a final stage a person can reach, and one cannot say that a person has completed and accomplished the task of becoming a critical thinker (Ibid). Instead, we speak of different degrees of criticality (Ibid). Thus, students cannot become critical thinkers overnight. It is a lifelong process fostered through time and learning experience and opportunities (Ibid). This is why our analysis provided evidence of an incipient development of students' critical thinking skills after doing the different critical analysis activities for film analysis.

The findings are also in line with Anderson (2008) who demonstrated that students could express their viewpoints about film from different perspectives (narrative, cultural, cinematic and rhetorical) and enhance their critical thinking skills if teachers design appropriate instructional activities centered on these four perspectives. Apart from the checklist and the interview, the classroom observation aimed to answer research question three and was geared towards examining students' talk in each lesson.

I then classified their talk according to Anderson's (2000) taxonomy (remember, understand, apply, create, analyze, evaluate) to identify any critical thinking aspects in their talk and interaction.

### ***Types and frequencies of students' utterances***

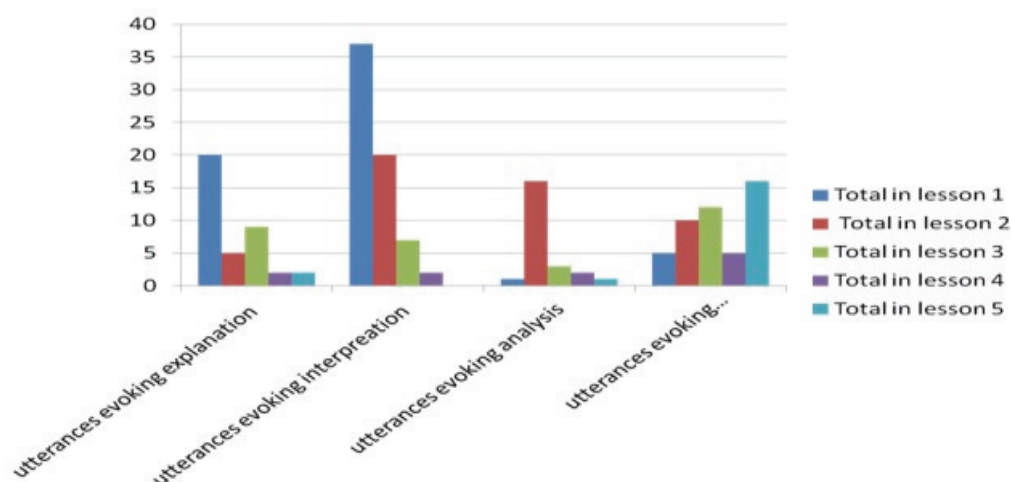
Students' utterances produced in each lesson were coded and classified in terms of utterances evoking explanation, interpretation, analysis and evaluation and judgment following Anderson's categorization of critical thinking skills and through the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 7. I intended to capture aspects of the students "verbalized thinking that might reveal their critical thinking dispositions" (Alnofaie, 2013, p. 73).



**Figure 2: Types and frequencies of students' utterances in each lesson.**

The above figure indicates that the students were producing different types of utterances during the five lessons. When categorized according to the cognitive skills, they demonstrated the skills of explanation, interpretation, analysis and evaluation or judgment. The results as shown in Figure 2 demonstrates that the students' critical thinking skills have developed during the pedagogical intervention indicated by the great frequency count of the use of the cognitive skill

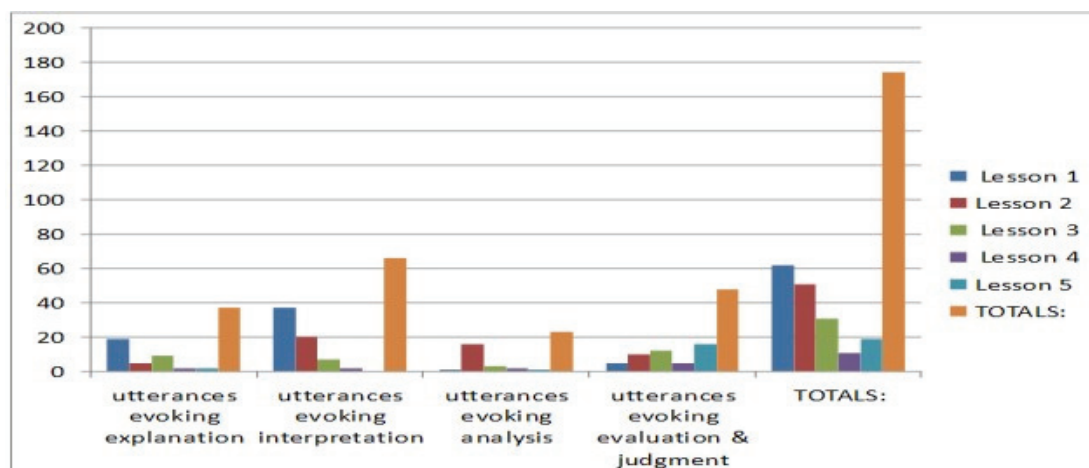
of explanation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation and judgment during class discussion. The figure above also shows that there is an obvious increase in the frequency of type of utterances evoking evaluation and judgment (an increase from 5 to 16), which represents evidence of the development of their critical thinking skills.



**Figure 3: Types and frequencies of students' utterances in the five lesson**

To further, assess the students' gains in critical thinking skills, the figure (3) above shows that the highest frequency of critical-thinking-reflected utterances falls under the cognitive level of interpretation and the cognitive level of "evaluation and judgment". 37% of the students' utterances demonstrated the skill of interpretation, while 27.5% of the utterances demonstrated the skill of evaluation and judgment. Utterances evoking evaluation and judgment increased significantly as the pedagogical intervention was progressing toward the end of lesson five from approximately 10% in lesson one to 33% in lesson 5. This result suggests that after a five-week involvement in study, the students were able to show nascent development of their thinking skills based on the frequency count of the skill of evaluation and judgment.

This nascent development of the students' critical thinking skills shown in Figure (2) and (3) seem to corroborate with Eken's (2003) view that film can be a valuable medium for the promotion of the learners' critical thinking skills. Similarly, to Chapple & Curtis (2000) who reported that film as a source of content in the language classroom is effective in helping students make gains in analytical and critical thinking skills. The student's incipient development of thinking skills as shown in figure (4) is also consistent with Baéz (2004) claims that it would be unfair and inappropriate to expect our students to become critical thinkers overnight, let alone during this five-week implementation process of the current study.





**Figure 4: Total types and frequencies of students' utterances**

Thus, the effectiveness of using film for the development of critical thinking skills among EFL learners has the following benefits for learners. First, films offer learners with many opportunities to evoke and exchange their thoughts and ideas based on their personal experience and knowledge (Chapple and Curtis, 2000) trigger effective learning (King, 2002). Second, films also provide learners with thinking opportunities to analyze evaluate and judge (Anderson, 2008) what they see in the film. This is consistent with Stempleski and Tomalin (2001), Kaiser (2011) and Thaler (2014) who indicate that film can be an effective pedagogical tool when used appropriately in language classrooms along useful tasks and activities that will assist learning. Therefore, language instructors should be very careful in their selection process, a selection that should be consistent with the interests of the learners and the objectives of the course (King, 2002; Thaler, 2014)

### **Summary of the findings**

It was noticeable during the implementation of this pedagogical intervention that the students showed an incipient development of their thinking skills. In fact, doing film analysis using this framework of narrative, cultural, cinematic and rhetorical analysis activities for film studies as suggested by Anderson (2008) helped them actively analyze the film content from different perspectives. The study has also shown that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards the integration of film analysis in their EFL context. As far as language development is concerned, all the students reported that the study offered them ample speaking and thinking opportunities. They were able to practice English through classroom interactions and class discussions and felt actively involved.

Consequently, the different cultural analysis activities used for scaffolding during the activities assisted them in their analysis of the film and triggered them to express themselves. Hence, the class discussion was a platform for sharing their thoughts and ideas. The study has shown that with the use of the critical analysis activities for film analysis, the students were able to develop their thinking skills by giving their viewpoints, assumptions and their perceptions based on what they observed in the film.

In fact, the narrative analysis activities helped the students explain and give their point of view based on what they observed in the film, thus developing their lower order skills of remembering and understanding. The cultural analysis activities were useful in helping the students give their point of view based on what they saw in the film, indicating their ability to apply what they observed to their own cultural and personal context. The cinematic analysis activities triggered them to give implied meaning based on what they observed in the film and demonstrate the skill of analyzing the implied meaning of the technical aspects used by the filmmaker. The skill of evaluation has been developed by means of the rhetorical analysis activities which helped the students give assumptions and consequences about what they observed in the film.

It was also evidenced from the classroom observation of students' interaction, that they showed incipient development of critical thinking skills, as they were able to explain, interpret, analyze and evaluate and judge what they observed in the film. In consequence, the most prominent skill they developed while being engaged in classroom interaction was the skill of evaluation and judgment and this was evidenced by the high frequency count of the skill as reflected in their spoken utterances.

### **Implications and significance of the findings**

The positive findings of the current study represent a contribution to the highly acclaimed proposal of encouraging EFL teachers to infuse critical thinking in their English classes (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991; Brown, 2004), that there is evidence to indicate the feasibility of teaching this skill in a foreign language setting, thus refuting Atkinson (1997) skepticism about it. Moreover, the results have also certain contributions in regard to the EFL teaching in Tunisia at tertiary levels. In my view and as a teacher-researcher, the current study raised my awareness that critical thinking is greatly acclaimed by theorists and educators as an indispensable part of college education (Halpern, 1998).

Therefore, in light of the need to provide our learners with opportunities to become globally active as citizens in today's world of economic globalization and information technology, then English language teachers have to modify and refine their teaching practices to meet these global and educational needs.

Consequently, the implication of conducting this pedagogical intervention of film viewing and analysis to hone the students' critical thinking skills was conducted with the need to reflect upon our teaching context and reconsider our teaching practices to make it more meaningful to our learners. However, the current study showed that developing learners thinking skills is not possible without pre-planned activities that can help students build a critical view of the observed visual text. Therefore, the other implication drawn from the findings of the current study is that the implementation of critical analysis activities with film can be a promising strategy to enhance CTS.

### Limitations and suggestions for future research

Though the findings of the study were gratifying for me, I have to acknowledge that like any piece of research, it has some limitations, which need some reconsideration. To begin with, the study is based on a small sample of twenty participants with no comparison group, thus, it will not be possible to generalize the results to other educational contexts. The other limitation has to do with the period of the study. The study was conducted over a short period of five weeks and thinking skills as pointed out in the literature (Scriven & Paul, 2003) is a lifelong process that cannot be developed overnight but can be fostered through time, learning opportunities and experiences. Therefore, longitudinal studies are recommended, to reach results that are more conclusive.

It is worth mentioning that in the implementation of this pedagogical intervention, only one film was used. Therefore, the students' perception towards the integration of film in their EFL context might be affected by the choice of the film; 'Dead poet society'. Therefore, it is recommended that more than one film be used to see whether the same results can be obtained with different film genre and to explore whether, and to what extent, the prospect of teaching critical thinking skills can be sustained regardless of film features/type/genre. However, the limitations listed above, should not undermine the results obtained.

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