Exploring Instructors' Beliefs and Practices in Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Writing Classes[1]

Explorando las creencias y prácticas de los instructores para promover las habilidades de pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura

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Abstract

The growing requirement for students' robust critical thinking (CT) skills in their academic writing, particularly at the tertiary level, has augmented the attention to equipping students with CT ability. The study, therefore, sought to investigate instructors' beliefs and practices in promoting students' critical thinking (CT) in writing classes. A multiple case study design was employed to address the study objective. Three purposively selected instructors from Wolkite University participated. The data collection method involved classroom observation, interview, and document analysis. The analysis was performed qualitatively using a grounded theory approach- open, axial, and selective coding. The findings indicated that the participants interpreted CT as students' abilities to use appropriate language and logically argue in their writing. They explained some strategies used to promote students' CT skills. These included providing an explicit introduction to CT, incorporating CT into the evaluation system, scaffolding, and giving meaningful topics and adequate opportunities for students to practice writing. Writing activities such as argumentative, summary and cause-effect types were considered to promote students' CT in writing classes. The study categorized and reported factors that interfered with instructors' beliefs and practices as student-related, instructor-related, and situation-specific factors. The findings contribute relevant insights into the English language teaching sphere.

Keywords: Critical thinking, instructors' beliefs, instructors' practices, students' critical thinking, writing skills

Resumen

La creciente necesidad de que los estudiantes tengan sólidas habilidades de pensamiento crítico (CT) en su escritura académica, particularmente en el nivel terciario, ha aumentado la atención para equipar a los estudiantes con habilidades CT. Por lo tanto, el estudio buscó investigar las creencias y prácticas de los profesores para promover el pensamiento crítico (CT) de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura. Se empleó un diseño de estudio de casos múltiples para abordar el objetivo del estudio. Participaron tres instructores intencionalmente seleccionados de la Universidad Wolkite. El método de recolección de datos implicó observación en el aula, entrevista y análisis de documentos. El análisis se realizó cualitativamente utilizando un enfoque de teoría fundamentada: codificación abierta, axial y selectiva. Los hallazgos indicaron que los participantes interpretaron la PC como la capacidad de los estudiantes para usar un lenguaje apropiado y argumentar lógicamente en sus escritos. Explicaron algunas estrategias utilizadas para promover las habilidades CT de los estudiantes. Estas incluyeron proporcionar una introducción explícita a la CT, incorporar la CT en el sistema de evaluación, crear andamios y brindar temas significativos y oportunidades adecuadas para que los estudiantes practiquen la escritura. Se consideraron actividades de escritura de tipo argumentativo, resumido y causa-efecto para promover la PC de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura. El estudio categorizó e informó los factores que interferían con las creencias y prácticas de los instructores como factores relacionados con los estudiantes, relacionados con los instructores y específicos de la situación. Los hallazgos aportan conocimientos relevantes sobre el ámbito de la enseñanza del idioma inglés.

Palabras claves: Pensamiento crítico, creencias de los profesores, prácticas de los profesores, pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes, habilidades de escritura.

Resumo

A crescente necessidade de habilidades robustas de pensamento crítico (PC) dos alunos em sua escrita acadêmica, especialmente no nível superior, tem aumentado a atenção para capacitar os alunos com habilidades de PC. O estudo buscou investigar, portanto, as crenças e práticas dos instrutores na promoção do pensamento crítico (PC) dos alunos em aulas de escrita. Foi empregado um design de estudo de caso múltiplo para abordar o objetivo do estudo. Três instrutores selecionados propositadamente da Universidade de Wolkite participaram. O método de coleta de dados envolveu observação de sala de aula, entrevista e análise de documentos. A análise foi realizada qualitativamente usando uma abordagem de teoria fundamentada - codificação aberta, axial e seletiva. Os resultados indicaram que os participantes interpretaram o PC como as habilidades dos alunos de usar linguagem apropriada e argumentar logicamente em sua escrita. Eles explicaram algumas estratégias usadas para promover as habilidades de PC dos alunos. Estas incluíram fornecer uma introdução explícita ao PC, incorporar o PC no sistema de avaliação, andamento gradual e oferecer **tópicos significativos e oportunidades** adequadas para os alunos praticarem a escrita. Atividades de escrita, como tipos argumentativos, sumário e causa-efeito, foram consideradas para promover o PC dos alunos em aulas de escrita. O estudo categorizou e relatou fatores que interferiram nas crenças e práticas dos instrutores como relacionados aos alunos, aos instrutores e a situações específicas. Os resultados contribuem com insights relevantes para a esfera do ensino da língua inglesa.

Palavras-chave: Pensamento crítico, crenças dos instrutores, práticas dos instrutores, pensamento crítico dos alunos, habilidades de escrita.

Introduction

Producing learners equipped with CT ability and who can function in this ever-changing and complex world evolved into an eminent concern of numerous scholars (e.g., Buskist & Irons, 2008; Paul & Elder, 2002; Schafersman, 1991; Vallis, 2010). Learners, who have the ability to question perspectives, recognize alternative points of view, make decisions/judgments, and solve problems, are demanded in today's workforce. The standards in the market require learners to handle the proliferation of information and to carefully weigh available evidence (Buskist & Irons, 2008; Halpern, 2003). Çavdar and Doe (2012) posited that critical thinkers have the ability to make better decisions by analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing existing information on a particular issue. The efficient application of CT ability has, therefore, become a foundation for competently undertaking responsibilities in the contemporary world.

Regardless of its relevance, the interpretation of CT is elusive. Scholars in different disciplines attempted to define it. For instance, in the discipline of philosophy, Facione (1990) described CT as a "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as an explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or conceptual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (p. 3). Facione links CT with the ability to make a judgment by operating the specific CT components. In the context of writing skill, Dong (2015) defined CT as "a mindful application of a structured mode of thinking which aims to improve the quality of thinking to achieve intellectual standards of excellence in L2 written communication" (p. 25). CT is depicted as the ability to exhibit refined thinking in writing.

Despite variations in defining CT, scholars agree on the intimate relationship between CT and writing. According to Paul and Elder (2002), "disciplined writing requires disciplined thinking; disciplined thinking is achieved through disciplined writing" (p. 376). This view echoes the demonstration of CT through writing and the relevance of CT to composing a substantiated text that meets the intended purpose. Advocating writing as a mechanism to stimulate CT, researchers (e.g., Bouanani, 2015; Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007) argued that learners reflect CT in applying knowledge of their course content. Writing reflects thinking. The recursive and reflective nature of writing assists learners' utilization of CT elements (Bouanani, 2015). Paul and Elder (2006), in this respect, expounded that "in writing, they [students] are able to clearly and accurately analyze and evaluate ideas in texts and in their own thinking" (p. 5).

The impact of CT in enhancing students' CT ability and thereby writing performance is explicated by various researchers (e.g., Dong, 2015; Lin, 2014; Moghaddam & Malekzadeh, 2011; Zhao et al., 2016). Academic writing is beyond a

collection of words, linguistic structures, and paragraphs. Nejmaoui (2019) asserted that effective communication of meaning in writing cannot be attained by haphazardly repeating language. CT is assumed to enable writers to compose texts systematically by retaining the purpose. Composing a text for the intended purpose requires writers to develop plausible reasoning, evidence, and conclusion that ultimately demands CT ability. For instance, generating and inspecting the relevance of the information, and coordinating ideas in a meaningful and reasonable way mainly involve the application of CT. In other words, CT guides writers to "think through a given idea." (Vallis, 2010, p. 5).

Because of the significant role of CT, intellectuals (e.g., Dong, 2015; Dwee et al., 2016; Lin, 2014) advocate the necessity of promoting students' CT in the educational sphere. Khatib et al. (2012) argued that "it is a moral right for learners to learn how to think critically" (p. 34). The promotion of students' CT is, however, influenced by instructors' classroom decisions and beliefs about CT. Instructors' classroom practices and beliefs about students' CT and writing abilities determine the learning condition. Several scholars (Borg, 2003; Breen et al., 2001; Pajares, 1992) indicated the influence of instructors' beliefs on their classroom practices. Instructors' beliefs, which are tacitly impacted by their prior learning experience, educational training, and teaching experience, dictate their actions in the actual context. As Gemechis (2020) explained, instructors' beliefs, which are mainly reflected through their classroom practices, "are a critical foundation for students to receive the knowledge and skills that they need to fulfill their potential" (p.59).

Instructors' classroom practices are assumed to accord with the principles in the educational curriculums in Ethiopia. Promoting students' CT has become one of the pertinent areas in GTP 2010/15 (MoE, 2011). The educational curriculums throughout primary up to university advocate the promotion of students' CT ability using a learner-centered approach (MoE, 2009, 2013, 2018). Correspondingly, instructors' attempt to promote students' CT is emphasized in the Higher Diploma Program (HDP) - in-service training provided to instructors in Ethiopian universities (MoE, 2011). They are supposed to facilitate learning, encourage independent learning, create conducive writing classrooms, and employ meaningful tasks (MoE, 2011, 2013). There exists an expectation that the teaching-learning process embraces both what to think (content knowledge) and how to think (thinking critically) aspects (Crawford et al., 2005; Schafersman, 1991).

Nonetheless, our knowledge about university instructors' beliefs and practices of promoting students' CT in writing classes is limited. For example, Meng (2016) studied the perspectives of primary school EFL teachers about the significance of incorporating CT into the curriculum. The study emphasized reading skills in connection with CT so that writing skill was not the concern. Petek and Bedir's (2015) study, on the other hand, aimed at assessing pre-service and in-service English teachers' perception of

CT and its integration into language education. Regardless of the significance of the study in the context of ELT, the participants' conceptualization of CT in the context of ELT was not precisely indicated. Besides, the strategies that the participants used to reinforce students' CT in the classrooms were neglected. Similarly, Tuzlukova et al.'s (2017) study explored English language teachers' beliefs about CT and the association between CT and language teaching methods. Like the studies above, the connection between CT and writing skills received no particular attention. In addition, the study neglected how the teachers' professed beliefs were exhibited in classroom practices.

The aforementioned gaps, therefore, instigated the authors to explore the beliefs and practices of instructors in promoting students' CT in the context of writing classes at the university level. The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are instructors' beliefs about promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

2. How are instructors' stated beliefs reflected in their practices in promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

3. What factors influence instructors' practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes?

Literature Review

Critical Thinking and its Elements

Critical thinking (CT) has become the principal issue in different disciplines (Dong, 2015). The philosophical dimension explains the peculiarities or qualities of a critical thinker (Lai, 2011). For instance, Paul and Elder (2006) interpreted CT as "the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it" (p. 4). For Paul and Elder, CT is about refining thinking by employing particular standards used to scrutinize reasoning. The cognitive psychologists (e.g., Sternberg, 1986), however, criticized the philosophical dimension for its focus on 'formal logical systems' that is incongruent with classroom requirements. Fahim and Mirzaii (2014) argued that the philosophical approach "merely focusing on hypothesized competence viewed in a vacuum, loses sight of real-life performance (p. 5)". Cognitive psychologists describe the actual thinking process. Sternberg (1986) explained CT as "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts" (p.3). The absence of a clear description of the 'mental strategies', however, makes the interpretation ambiguous and challenging to apply in an educational setting. Educationists adapt definitions either from the philosophy, or cognitive psychology disciplines. The interpretation of CT, thus, embraces both

competence and performance orientations (Sternberg, 1986). The use of different expressions to define CT might occur following scholars' attempts to subsume CT in their respective disciplines. This variation, however, cannot imply the existence of significant conceptual differences among intellectuals.

CT embraces both cognitive skills and dispositions. According to Facione (1990), CT involves six cognitive skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (p.7). Paul and Elder's (2002) category incorporates elements of thought and intellectual standards. Elements of thought represent a related concept with what different scholars mention as 'CT skills'. Paul and Elder attempted to make CT more tangible and susceptible to measurement through the 'Intellectual Standards'. For this reason, most researchers (e.g., Dong, 2015; Wang, 2017) indicated the suitability of Paul and Elder's model to adapt in the EFL context. In the discipline of education, researchers (e.g., Baez, 2004; Dong, 2015) commonly mention Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. The higher-order levels in the taxonomy- analysis, synthesis, and evaluation- are claimed to represent the demonstration of CT in an educational setting (Wang, 2017). Despite variations in the proposed taxonomies, the skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation appear across the models.

Possessing CT skills fails to guarantee the disposition to apply them and vice versa (Facione, 2000; Jones et al., 1995). Learners are expected to have the disposition to implement the skills in appropriate circumstances (Qing, 2013). According to Paul and Elder (2002), CT dispositions incorporate intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual sense of justice, intellectual perseverance, intellectual fair-mindedness, intellectual confidence in reason, intellectual courage, intellectual empathy, and intellectual autonomy (p. 39). Regardless of its relevance, the disposition aspect has failed to obtain adequate recognition in educational settings, particularly in the EFL context. For instance, the disposition aspect gained little weight in studies (e.g., Daud, 2012; Dong, 2015; Lin, 2014) that focused on students' CT and English language learning. The lack of instructional strategies to reinforce students' CT dispositions and the inadequate awareness about the components might have caused the problem.

CT Promoting Strategies in Writing Classes

According to Wilson's (2019) explanation, a language class that is "interactive, vibrant, authentic, explicit and scaffolded" (p. 14) facilitates the promotion of students' CT. A wide array of teaching strategies exist to promote students' CT. These included teacher modeling, collaborative learning, questioning, reading, and writing assignments. The instructors' modeling of the demonstration of CT impacts students' implementation of CT, especially the disposition aspect of CT (Abrami et al., 2008; Buskist & Irons, 2008). Teachers model the demonstration of CT by recognizing biases as well as clarifying their viewpoints (Hofreiter, 2005). Students, thus, become flexible

in dealing with alternative ideas, detecting personal bias, and developing the habit of questioning views when conveying ideas in writing (Zhao et al., 2016).

Collaborative learning, which entails group discussion, dialogue, peer evaluation/ review, and group work, supports the promotion of students' CT in writing classes (Buranapatana, 2006; Dwee et al., 2016; Fahim & Mirzaii, 2014). Osborne et al. (2009) argued that learners execute CT by communicating ideas, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, and generating and scrutinizing varied perspectives in collaboration. They become conscious of the potential mental strategies by observing others demonstrate CT components (Buranapatana, 2006; Zhao et al., 2016). Likewise, Daud (2012) stated that learners become open-minded through the process of giving and receiving comments or suggestions of optional ideas from their peers. Collaboration, therefore, assists students in accomplishing complex tasks that demand advanced mental processing and reasoning skills.

In addition, questioning has become a prominent strategy to promote students' CT (Alfares, 2014; Buranapatana, 2006; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). As Fahim and Khatib (2013) explained, "it is the duty of the teacher to implicitly ask students to attend to strategies of CT and to evaluate each reasoning and argument on a multi-dimensional level before accepting it as correct" (p.82). Asking questions during lecturing compels students to analyze and apply the learned contents in different situations (Schafersman, 1991). In describing CT-triggering questions, Beyer (2001a, cited in Buranapatana, 2006) stated the relevance of questions that "call for sustained efforts to reason and to evaluate reasoning" (p.89). These questions demand students to "clarify statements, define terms, and judge the relevance, accuracy, and nature of statements" (p.89).

Furthermore, students' CT can be better reinforced by integrating reading and writing skills (Dong, 2015; Mehta & Al-mahrouqi, 2015). Paul and Elder (2008, cited in Mehta & Al-mahrouqi, 2015) stated that "writing which is not based on critical reading might well be merely personal and exist without either context or wider purpose" (p. 40). In this type of writing, prejudices, biases, myths, and stereotypes become dominant. Therefore, activities that demand analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing reasoning/ argument, explaining understanding and implied meaning in a text, and asking and responding to questions stimulate students' CT in writing (Case, 2004; Cottrell, 2005; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). Generally, researchers (e.g., Case, 2004; Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Mangena, 2003; Mulnix & Mulnix, 2010) suggested different types of writing tasks. These included argumentative, narrative, and opinion writing; note-taking, summary, and reflective writing as well as seminar papers.

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Promoting Students' CT in Language Learning Class

Examining teachers' beliefs is a daunting task due to different conceptualizations of the term. For example, Haney et al. (2003) interpreted beliefs as "one's convictions, philosophy, tents, or opinions about teaching and learning" (p. 367). In a more specific way, Pajares (1992) characterized beliefs as "teachers' attitudes about education-about schooling, teaching, learning, and students" (p. 316). Pajares asserted that every teacher holds beliefs about the profession, the students, the subject matter, and the teachers' roles and responsibilities. In the present study, beliefs refer to a complex set of theories, assumptions, and perspectives instructors hold about the teaching, learning, and curricula related to writing and the promotion of students' CT in writing instruction.

In this respect, the findings of different studies explicated teacher respondents' beliefs about the interpretation of CT, the nature of CT-promoting activities, and teaching strategies. For example, in Meng's (2016) study, CT was depicted as the ability to produce novel ideas, develop a point of view, solve problems, and make plausible decisions through 'analyzing', 'reasoning', 'processing information' and 'questioning' (p. 178). The respondents' limited understanding of the concept of CT was mentioned as a recurring issue in the studies. In addition, respondents in several studies (e.g., Hasni et al., 2018; Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova, 2020; Tuzlukova et al., 2017) illustrated varied CT- promoting activities. These were argumentative writing, reflective writing, reporting, blog writing, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Studies (Gregory, 2011; Kanik, 2010; Meng, 2016) further indicated various CT-promoting teaching strategies. These included explicit teaching of CT elements, assessment of CT, inductive approach, inquiry, self-reflection, questioning, group and whole class discussion, and modeling.

The degree of consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices is, however, determined by contextual factors (Borg, 2003; Tsui, 2011). Contextual factors that impede the promotion of students' CT in writing classes are related to students, teachers, and situations. Students' achievement-oriented perception and lack of interest are among the student-related factors. Hofreiter (2005) argued that students who prioritize scoring good grades have less determination to think critically. These students instead prefer memorizing facts, responding to close-ended questions, and struggling to secure their marks (Alwine, 2007; Gregory, 2011; Reynolds, 2016). Besides, students avoid thinking critically about content that they perceived as irrelevant, and they become passive if their interests/needs are not addressed (Buskist & Irons, 2008; Gregory, 2011).

Additionally, teachers' insufficient understanding of CT, and CT- promoting strategies deter their efficacy in explicitly promoting students' CT (Dwee et al., 2016). In this regard, Alwine (2007) clarified doubts concerning instructors' potential to teach CT without a sufficient understanding of CT aspects. The absence of pre-service and

in-service methodological training concerning CT has contributed to the teachers' limited awareness of CT (Reynolds, 2016; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Likewise, Buskist and Irons (2008) associated teachers' abstinence from promoting CT with the teachers' uncertainty about the assessment mechanisms of CT in students' work. Furthermore, situational factors such as time constraints and large class sizes are explained to be hindering factors. Shortage of time obliges teachers to be indecisive about whether to focus on content coverage or encourage depth of understanding and CT (Saleh, 2019).

Method

Research Design

A multiple case study design was adopted. The design helps to extensively investigate the promotion of students' CT in writing classes from the perspective of multiple instructors to gain varied meanings (Yin, 2003). Examining the similarities as well as differences among the cases helped the authors to detect complex and unique insights regarding the issue in the study. Multiple case study aims at developing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on its natural setting (Yin, 2014, 2018). This nature of the case study supported the investigation of contextual factors that affect instructors' practices.

Participants

The study was carried out at Wolkite University- one of the third-generation public universities in Ethiopia. Yin (2018) asserted that participant selection in a multiple case study is primarily determined by the potential to generate a thorough understanding of a phenomenon instead of population representativeness. Three instructors were, therefore, purposively selected among the 30 instructors in the Department of English Language and Literature. They were selected in light of their background training, the course they offer, and their teaching experience. Instructors, who were trained in ELT (English Language Teaching), and teach the Communicative English Language Skills II course, participated in the study. These instructors were believed to provide better data due to their familiarity with the issue of the present study. In addition, the study involved instructors based on the length of their teaching experience categorized into three ranges (< 5 years, 5-10 years, and > 10 years). The target instructors' involvement in the study was, however, determined by their willingness and accessibility. The authors guaranteed the instructors the anonymity of the information they would provide.

Table 1. Description of the participants

Instructor Code	Gender	Qualification	Specialization	Teaching experience (in years)
IA	M	MA	ELT	5
IB	M	PhD candidate	ELT	10
IC	M	MA	ELT	14

As depicted in Table 1, the authors used instructor code to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Two instructors were MA graduates in ELT, while the other was a PhD candidate in ELT. Their teaching experience varies from 5 to 14 years.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included classroom observation, interviews, and document analysis. The classroom observation data aimed at addressing the second research question. A semi-structured observation protocol as well as continuous field notes served to carry out the observation. The observation checklist was designed based on insights generated from literature (e.g., Choy & Cheah, 2009; Meng, 2016; Paul & Elder, 2002; Mesfin, 2013; Meseret, 2012). The reliability of the observation data was maintained through data triangulation, frequent observation, and note-taking. The validity was ensured by receiving comments on the observation guide, operationalizing the CT indicators, and employing audio records. Adopting a non-participant observation approach, the first author carried out the observation with a support of a voice recorder. A total of nine writing sessions were observed from November 1, 2021, through December 17, 2021. Each of the participants was observed three times.

The interview was used to understand the instructors' unobservable meaning related to the research questions. Three different types of interviews were carried out: 'pre-observation interviews', 'stimulated recall', and the 'main interview'. The pre-observation and stimulated recall interviews accompanied the classroom observations. The pre-observation interview preceded each observation session to obtain an explanation of the instructors' plan as a benchmark to explain their actual practice. The stimulated recall interviews helped to detect the participants' rationalization of their practices. They elucidated their rationale for specific classroom decisions after they listened to the selected segments in the audio record. 'The main interview' was conducted after culminating all the observation sessions to explore the participants' general beliefs concerning CT and the promotion of CT in writing classes. For this interview, a semi-structured interview guide with 11 items related to CT and writing skills was prepared based on previous empirical studies (e.g., McIntyre, 2011; Paul et

al., 1997; Rademaekers, 2018; Stapleton, 2011). The main interview took an average of 1:10 hours. A digital voice recorder was employed throughout all the interview sessions. The reliability of the interview data was ensured by applying the same interview items across different participants (Cohen et al., 2000). Besides, comments were sought from the advisor, a panel of experts, and the respondents to maintain the validity.

Furthermore, the authors used document analysis to gain detailed information that strengthens data generated through observation and interviews. This method was particularly relevant to address the second research question thoroughly. The Communicative English Skills II course incorporated several writing activities. Students are required to write different types of paragraphs and an essay. Instructors who deliver the course give students activities mainly selected from the course material. The document analysis, therefore, focused on analyzing the quality of the writing activities the instructors assigned to students, especially during the observed sessions. For this purpose, a guiding framework that incorporated eleven items was used. The guide was designed based on ideas generated from the literature (e.g., Alfares, 2014; Wahab, 2013). The validity of the tool was ensured based on comments received from the advisor, and three experts.

Data Collection Process and Analysis

The data collection took two months starting from November 1, 2021, through December 24, 2021. The classroom observations were performed accompanied by the document analysis as well as the pre-observation and stimulated recall interviews. The main interview was conducted with each participant after completing the observation sessions on December 17, 2021. A memo that embraced informal discussions and personal reflections/perspectives complemented the overall data collection process.

The data analysis in a multiple-case study involves single-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009). The authors analyzed each case thoroughly and performed a cross-case analysis to address the research questions. The qualitative data analysis method was manipulated to treat the data. The data analysis involved three phases of coding: open, axial/analytical, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam, 2009). A constant comparative method that included a continuous comparison and contrast of categories, ideas, or concepts within and across the cases was performed during the data generation and coding process (Charmaz, 2006). The coding was processed using NVivo 10 software. The participants received the final version of the data analysis, and verbatim transcriptions of the observations and the interviews for their validation.

Results

What are instructors' beliefs about promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

The instructors' beliefs were accessed through interviews. They were asked about their interpretation of CT and its elements, CT-promoting strategies, activities, and feedback.

Interpretation of CT and the elements

There was a shared understanding between IA and IC concerning the interpretation of CT. They described CT as the ability to understand the way to convey information using the appropriate language in writing (see Table 2). IA highlighted:

CT might be related to the information students have in their minds and the way they express it using the grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics they know. It is the ability they use to just remember and brainstorm or jot down the information that they have in their mind at the first stage [Stimulated Recall Interview 1 (SRI1)].

Differently, IB viewed CT in terms of the ability to express ideas convincingly and logically in writing. IB emphasized the quality of the idea that is communicated to the reader. As shown in Table 2, IB and IC held different perspectives concerning the components of CT. For example, in IB's view, CT embraces Knowing, understanding, transferring, making a conclusion, inferring, and open-mindedness.

Table 2. Overview of Instructors' Beliefs about CT Promotion

Core Themes	Explanation	Cases		
		IA	IB	IC
CT Interpretation	The ability to evaluate, and have multiple understandings concerning how to use the language form in writing.	x		x
	The ability to express ideas logically and convincingly.		x	
CT elements	Knowing, understanding, transferring, concluding, inferring, and open-mindedness		x	
	Problem-solving, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, fairness, and reasoning			x
CT-promoting Instructional Mechanisms	Sufficient chance to write	x	x	x
	Meaningful topic	x		x
	Pair or group work	x	x	x
	CT-oriented evaluation system		x	
	Assessing meaning and structure		x	
	Explicit CT introduction		x	
	Scaffolding and follow up	x		x
CT-promoting writing activities	Argumentative writing	x		
	Cause-effect type of writing			x
	Summary writing	x		x
	Logical arrangement of sentences			x
CT-promoting feedback provision	Peer feedback	x	x	
	Instructor feedback			x

CT promoting Instructional Mechanisms

The participants elucidated various CT-promoting mechanisms in writing class (see Table 2). All the participants believed that students demonstrate CT when they obtain the chance to write more frequently instead of solely receiving input about writing skills. IA claimed that the authenticity of the topic transforms students' superficial understanding and description of the issue into higher-level thinking. Similarly, IC expounded on the possibility to promote CT in writing by assigning a variety of writing activities that are related to students' backgrounds, knowledge, and experience. Besides, IA elucidated the contribution of working in groups in minimizing students' anxiety and developing multiple perspectives. IC and IA denoted the possibility that lower achievers elevate their CT ability when working cooperatively with high achievers. IA stated that:

When students write a given essay, the way one keeps the unity of the text is quite different from that of the other. Then, while they share it, they critically think about how to improve, how to write, and how to forward their issue or information [Main interview (M int.)].

Unlike the others, IB elucidated the relevance of CT oriented evaluation system, explicit CT introduction, assessing meaning and structure, and imposing higher expectations on students. Apart from explicitly evaluating the manifestation of students' CT in writing, he indicated the possibility of implicitly promoting CT by seeking students to construct both 'grammatically' and 'functionally' correct sentences. IB illuminated the necessity of training students about the strategies to apply CT. He explained that:

The students can be taught or familiarized with the strategies and techniques that may help them to implement the elements of CT whenever they are writing. Once they know the strategies or the techniques, I think it could be easy for them to employ them whenever they are writing [M int.].

He also argued that students exercise to think critically when teachers consider students' CT ability as a requirement. He said that "We have to tell our students that as a university student, they are required to be critical or showing our expectation […] when the expectation of the teacher is high, the students may attempt to be that level" [M int.]. Additionally, IA and IC advocated instructors' role in scaffolding and follow-up. For example, IA asserted that instructors are responsible for designing and furnishing a path that students walk through. He highlighted that "the way they [students] walk is up to them, but my duty is only building the bridge […] so, I tell students how to reason out for a given issue or problem. I lead them, but the way they write what they have in their mind is up to them" [M int.].

CT Promoting Writing Activities

The participants explained that CT underlies any writing process, though the nature of some writing activities determines the level of CT the writer has to instill. As depicted in Table 2, IA believed that an argumentative type of writing enables students to be reasonable, to engage in an 'evaluative kind of work', to identify the appropriate expression, and to solve a problem. IA and IC claimed that students demonstrate CT skills in cause-effect and summary writing. IC argued that "we also encourage students to make a summary. So they analyze a text and summarize a long text….We are not only teaching writing skills rather we are giving a chance for students to think critically about different subject areas or core courses" [M int.]. Moreover, IC signified the involvement of reasoning as students decide to sequence ideas in activities that demand logical arrangement of concepts.

CT Promoting feedback Provision

Peer feedback and instructor feedback have gained weight compared to self-reflection. According to the participants' view, the criteria that they introduce would implicitly dictate the students to do self-reflection. They believed that students exercise the skill of 'evaluation' when performing peer feedback and self-reflection. The participants, however, doubted the effectiveness of peer feedback compared to instructor feedback. IA argued that students' writing competence determines their ability to provide comments on others' texts. Likewise, IB contended that most of the students' feedback on their colleagues' written work is always positive. IB and IC considered instructor feedback as a mechanism for identifying the student's current status, motivating negligent students, and appreciating hardworking students.

The content of the feedback determines the students' opportunity to exercise CT in their writing. As the instructors stated, their criteria incorporated the structure of a paragraph (topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentence), unity, coherence, completeness, sentence clarity, reasoning, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. IB said that "most of the time whenever coherence is discussed, we often discuss the connectives or the linking words. But to write a coherent paragraph or essay, one needs to think critically" [SRI1]. He stated the possibility of sustaining the unity and coherence of a written text through thinking critically.

How are instructors' stated beliefs reflected in their practices in promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

The instructors' classroom practices were categorized under four themes: classroom interaction, instructional mechanism, the nature of writing activities, and the system of feedback provision. Each theme was elaborated with key indicators and a description of the indicators (see Table 3). The 'description' thoroughly portrays the feature of the key indicators based on the observation data. The implementation frequency designates the frequency at which the instructors implemented a particular strategy. It was counted in light of the number of classroom observations conducted with each participant.

Table 3. A Description of Instructors' Practices

Classroom Practices	Key Indicators	Description	Implementation Frequency		
			IA	IB	IC
Classroom Interaction	Student-student Interaction	Collaboration, confirmation, clarification, commenting, generating ideas	3×	3×	3×
	Instructor-student Interaction	Complementing, examining knowledge, monitoring attention, responding to questions, motivating, stimulating thinking, prompting elaboration	3×	3×	3×
Instructional Mechanism	Implementing process approach	Brainstorming, drafting, receiving feedback, writing the final draft	3×	3×	3×
	Providing input	Steps of the writing process, types of paragraphs, cohesive devices, the structure of a paragraph and an essay	3×	3×	3×
	reading text	Sample for the structure of a paragraph, cohesive devise implementation	-	once	once
	Assigning extra activity	Essay writing outside class	-	once	-
	Facilitating	Sharing responsibilities, explaining, providing examples, suggesting terms or expressions, guiding, encouraging	3×	3×	3×
The nature of writing activities	Narrative paragraph writing	Personal experience of problem-solving	once	-	once
	Reflective paragraph writing	Lessons learned from Dr. Aklilu	-	once	once
	Argumentative paragraph writing	Banning chat chewing, refuting or supporting the author's point of view, using traditional medicine	once	once	once
	problem solution paragraph writing	global warming problems and solutions	once	-	once
	Informative paragraph writing	Herbal medicine advantages and disadvantages	-	-	once
	Compare-contrast paragraph writing	Traditional versus modern medicine	-	once	-
	Informative essay writing	University life challenges	-	once	-

The nature of feedback provision	Instructor feedback	Content and language focus	3×	3×	3×
	Self-reflection	Content and language focus	3×	3×	2×
	Peer feedback	Content and language focus	2×	3×	-

Classroom interaction was the most prevalent occurrence in all the participants' classes (see Table 3). There was instructor-student interaction throughout the observed sessions. This interaction concentrated on complementing and questioning students to stimulate their thinking, examine their knowledge and monitor their attention. Most of the instructors' questions during the lecture sessions sought a predetermined answer that mainly required lower-order thinking instead of CT. The student-student interactions mainly occurred when writing collaboratively, peer commenting, and idea generation. For example, during the third observation session, IA instructed students to develop a paragraph individually and then produce a text collaboratively by combining selected ideas from their respective texts. This instance exposed students to analyze, evaluate and identify points through meaningfully interacting with peers. In IB's and IC's classes, students were allowed to share experiences and generate ideas at the prewriting stage.

The finding further revealed instructors' implementation of diverse instructional mechanisms such as process approach, input delivery, assigning a home-take writing activity, and facilitating. The instructors persistently followed up and encouraged students to do the activities using the process approach. Nonetheless, only a few students in the three sections continued writing after receiving feedback on their drafts. According to the observation, the participants provided inputs on different core issues about paragraph and essay writing (see Table 3). IB and IC accompanied the input delivery with sample reading texts. However, at the pre-writing stage, none of the instructors assigned time for students to read the passages that complemented the writing activities in the course material. Yet, few students in IB's and IC's classes were reading the passages before writing. The participants strived to compensate for this gap by reminding students of relevant information, giving examples and clues, and asking for elaboration. Among the others, IB extended students' writing practice by assigning a home take writing activity.

As shown in Table 3, students accomplished several writing activities that requires their CT ability. The activities demanded students to include examples and reasons and recognize the opposite view as well as incorporate ideas other than their mere

opinion. For instance, IC informed the students to use sufficient reasons and examples when writing a paragraph about their agreement and disagreement with the author's view. Similarly, harmonizing with his belief about CT elements, IB encouraged the students to consider opposing perspectives while writing an argumentative paragraph about traditional medicine. IA contrarily directed students to focus on their point of argument instead of recognizing the opposite side when writing a paragraph on prohibiting the practice of chewing chat. The students in IB's and IC's classes had more exposure to different writing activities since they did more than one writing activity in a two hours session. Moreover, students had to analyze, synthesize and evaluate concepts in passages when doing some of the paragraph writing activities. The instructors were, however, reluctant to encourage students to read the passages before doing the writing activities.

Moreover, students obtained comments on their drafts through instructor feedback, self-reflection, and peer feedback. IA's and IC's criteria focused on grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, coherence, and unity. IC emphasized students' reasoning, particularly in the second observation session. IB's criteria focused on the inclusion of opposite perspectives, and reasons. Students were not given a separate time for self-reflection. The instructors instead informed these criteria to the students and instructed them to evaluate their draft before peer feedback or instructor comment. Besides, the participants gave feedback to students individually and to the overall class at the end of each session. Peer feedback was the preferable strategy mainly employed by IA and IB. For example, during the third observation day, IA initiated discussions with the peers concerning the comments and learn from their mistakes.

What factors influence instructors' practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes?

According to the participants' explanation, the factors that impede the practice of promoting students' CT in writing classes are student-related, instructor-related, and situational factors. The student-related factors include inadequate understanding of the basic elements of writing and the absence of learners' self-autonomy. The participants contemplated good writing competence as a requisite to concentrate on students' CT. For example, IB said that "We have to teach and we have to remind our students to be critical whenever they are writing. My doubt is whether it is possible to teach or focus on CT on students who even lack the basic skills…how can I teach CT to students who start sentences with a small letter?" [M int.]. Similarly, IC explained the difficulty of promoting CT to students who cannot express ideas meaningfully. Moreover, the participants indicated students' negligence of their responsibility as an obstacle. IB clarified the students' apathy to practicing writing and bringing the necessary materials when they attend classes. He was, therefore, convinced about the unfeasibility of high expectations concerning promoting students' CT in writing classes.

In addition, the instructors mentioned aggressiveness and poor commitment as instructor-related factors that affect the promotion of students' CT. They indicated the prevalence of instructors who provide discouraging criticisms of students' errors, yet avoid compliments on the students' better attempts. IA disclosed that "most of the instructors in the university, including the instructors in my department, are aggressive on students […] the instructor has to appreciate them for their writing. He/she should give them constructive feedback on the error they have made while writing" [M int.]. In the participants' view, this factor presses students to focus on avoiding mistakes instead of making their ideas clear, and they get compelled to conform to what others believe. Moreover, the participants mentioned instructors' sporadic decrease in commitment to teaching. IB argued that instructors with low commitment are no longer interested in the teaching profession, so they are aloof to following up on how students critically express their points when writing. Instructors with such behavior instead prefer to deliver content that they are familiar with for years.

The instructors, furthermore, stated other situational factors related to classroom size, time constraints, and material preparation. They indicated the unfeasibility of asking students the 'how' and 'why' questions due to large class sizes, and time constraints. IA explained that "the number of students available within a classroom never pave the way to […] evaluate the mistake or to check whether they are applying CT or not [.…] how can I see all those 60 students' activity within an hour?..." [M int.]. The participants clarified their struggle to thoroughly check what students did and give students extra time for further practice to enable them to improve their mistakes due to time limitations.

Moreover, the participants reflected contradictory views regarding the teaching material [communicative English skills II course module]. IB criticized the module for a dearth of diverse situations in the writing activities and for the absence of an explicit introduction to CT. He said that "I do not know whether it is implicitly mentioned there or not. But if you ask me my understanding, it says nothing about CT. So, I cannot say it helps students to develop their CT" [M int.]. Conversely, IC argued that the module provided students with broader experiences and comprehensible themes that trigger students' CT ability. Opposing IC's view, IA complained about the module for including unfamiliar issues to students. He explained that "Even the issues the module comprised are just directly related to that of the Western country. How could I enforce students who came from villages to write about what they did not know?" (M int.). Despite this contradiction, the instructors agree that the material needs additional revision.

Discussion

The participants interpreted CT as the ability to express ideas convincingly or logically and as a strategy to manipulate the appropriate form of language when writing. These definitions imply the purpose the participants attached to CT, yet they confined them to limited expressions. Several studies (e.g., Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016; Stapleton, 2011) reported the unclear and insufficient definition of CT by respondents. Marijic and Romfelt (2016) associated this gap with the teachers' inadequate training concerning CT. The finding, to some extent, is consistent with some studies (e.g., Beyer, 1984; Chaffee, 2012; Ghaemi & Mirsaeed, 2017; Meng, 2016). These studies described CT as the mental ability to incorporate evidence and reason to convey ideas logically. Among the CT components that the participants illustrated, 'analysis', 'synthesis', and 'evaluation' skills accord Bloom's (1956) higher-order thinking skills, while the 'knowing' and 'understanding' skills are related to the lower-order thinking skills in the taxonomy. The element of 'fairness' is the aspect of Paul and Elder's (2002) intellectual standards. The finding conforms to similar studies (e.g., Assadi et al., 2013; Kanik, 2010; Marijic & Romfelt, 2016; Meng, 2016).

The results further revealed that the participants appreciated classroom interactions in the form of student-student and instructor-student interactions. They implemented the process approach to writing, prepared inputs on different issues, encouraged collaboration, and facilitated students' learning. Practitioners (e.g., Buranapatana, 2006; Dwee et al., 2016; Fahim & Mirzaii, 2014) argued for the relevance of collaboration since it allows students to share skills and resources. Likewise, classroom interaction that involves questioning and praising students' responses is regarded as helpful. Masek and Yamin (2011) asserted that "probing questions may engage students in a systematic cognitive process that promotes the development of the student's reasoning ability" (p. 117). Students extend their exploration ability when they are appreciated for their responses and when their thought is valued (Masadeh, 2021). Moreover, Matthews and Lally (2010) signified that the process approach to writing assists to "focus thinking and sharpen thinking and reasoning within the subject" (p.137).

Contrary to their classroom practice, the participants advocated the explicit introduction of CT and the provision of an adequate chance to students. The discrepancies might be partly attributed to the participants' limited understanding of CT and lack of experience in explicitly incorporating CT in writing lessons. As different authors (e.g., Buehl & Beck, 2015; Fives & Gill, 2015; Zheng, 2015) stated, teachers' dependence on the belief that is perceived to be suitable for the immediate complex context creates the disparity. Lan and Lam (2020), conversely, argued that teachers are likely to take actions that accord with their beliefs if they hold strong beliefs in that respect. The finding is in contrast to Hasni et al.'s (2018) study that implies consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices in promoting students' CT. This might be due to the weakness of the contextual constraints in influencing the

teachers' beliefs. On the contrary, the finding agrees with Bataineh and Alazzi's (2009) study that reported the disparity between the participants' beliefs and their practices in using strategies that they claimed were useful to promote students' CT.

Moreover, the participants believed that giving students meaningful topics and assigning different writing activities help to promote students' CT. The activities demand students to be reflective, compare and contrast ideas, argue with the support of examples and reasons, and include multiple points of view. The instructors, nonetheless, failed to encourage students to read the passages that accompanied the writing activities. This implies that although the activities stimulate students' CT ability, students would not benefit much unless they understand how to handle the activities. Researchers (e.g., Kanik, 2010; Pei et al., 2017; Slavin, 2012) underscored the influence of topic meaningfulness or familiarity on students' motivation and ability to formulate sound reasoning. Moreover, the results of several studies (Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Dong, 2015; Mulnix & Mulnix, 2010; Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova, 2020; Tuzlukova et al., 2017) indicated the relevance of argumentative, reflective, summary, report, and blog writing to promote students' CT.

Additionally, the participants considered the inclusion of CT into the evaluation system and the assessment of meaning and structure in students' text as strategies to promote students' CT. They believed that self-reflection, peer feedback, and instructor feedback give chances to students to exercise CT in writing classes. They were, however, doubtful about students' ability to provide feedback on their peers' texts. Despite mentioning the relevance of including CT in the evaluation system, the participants were rather uncertain about specific indicators of students' CT in their texts. Regardless of this, they attempted to focus on the clarity, organization, and reasoning in students' texts. Walker et al. (2003) argued that "vigorously grading on grammar instead of commenting might discourage students, inhibiting their willingness to think critically" (p. 65). Students are assumed to enhance their analytical ability, develop the ability to solve problems and recognize their mistakes and make improvements when they engage in the process of self-evaluation and peer-evaluation (Daud, 2012; Liu, 2018).

The findings, furthermore, revealed problems that affect the participants' classroom practice. The student-related factors include a limited understanding of the core elements of writing and the absence of learners' self-autonomy. The instructor-related problems were aggressiveness and reduced teaching commitment. Moreover, large classroom sizes, time constraints, and poor material preparation were considered situational factors. The finding is consistent with several studies. As indicated in some studies (e.g., Bataineh & Alazzi, 2009; Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016), teachers isolate CT from subject matter content and believe that students learn to think critically only after they acquired content knowledge. Likewise, other studies (e.g., Petek & Bedir, 2015; Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016) revealed teachers' beliefs that students' insufficient prior

knowledge and inadequate language competence affect their CT ability. Similarly, teachers' lack of interest, students' irresponsibility for their learning, time shortage, and large class size were clarified in some studies (e.g., Bataineh & Alazzi, 2009; Ganapathy et al. 2017; Kanik, 2010; Slavin, 2012).

Conclusion and Implication of the Study

The study investigated instructors' beliefs and practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes. The findings revealed that the writing classes were not devoid of the promotion of students' CT. The participants nurtured students' CT by fortifying classroom interaction, assigning different CT-promoting writing activities, scaffolding, and providing feedback. Nonetheless, participants' beliefs about the inclusion of CT in the evaluation system, the explicit introduction of CT, and the assessment of meaning and structure in students' texts were inconsistent with their practices. They mentioned hindering factors related to students' poor competence, inadequate instructors' commitment, time constraint, large class size, and poor quality of the course material.

The findings benefit several concerned bodies in the English language teaching sphere. University instructors obtain insights to examine their classroom decisions and then build their capacity to promote students' CT in writing classes. The study informs teacher educators about the theoretical and practical gaps concerning students' CT promotion in writing classes. Consequently, they strive to equip prospective instructors with the required knowledge about CT and the various CT-promoting pedagogical approaches. Besides, based on the detailed accounts of hindering factors related to the promotion of students' CT in writing classes, they inform prospective instructors on how to cope with the factors. Similarly, material designers may refine the quality of the writing activities by incorporating activities that stimulate students' CT. Along with the activities, they may include diverse CT-promoting strategies that direct instructors' and students' roles in writing classes. Regardless of these relevancies, the present study has limitations that can serve as a starting point for other researchers to do a higher-level investigation. Hence, further studies should be conducted on a similar issue by increasing the number of participants, assessing the participants' sources of beliefs, and making frequent observations of classroom practices.

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