

**FOSTERING AWARENESS ON CRITICAL THINKING IN THE EFL
CLASSROOM THROUGHOUT A BEGINNER LEVEL COURSE.**

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at exploring insights regarding the implementation of critical thinking skills at a private institute in the city of Pereira, Risaralda. The theoretical background, methodological guidelines and results explored through the research process are going to be presented and described in detail in this document. The statement of the problem will contextualize the reader by justifying the reasons for this research conducted. Then the theoretical framework will provide the definition of concepts in the theoretical framework section, and the results of related studies in the literature review.

In order to describe what methods, instruments, participants and context were chosen to implement this research project and why they were selected, the section of the methodology, which is divided into different categories, will explain in detail how this study was carried out. Subsequently, the findings are presented and are divided into further sub-findings. In this section, evidence collected from the implementation period is presented, along with a discussion regarding the possible meaning of said evidence, as well as support from related authors in the field. Once this discussion has been presented, the limitations of the study are discussed in order to give a reader an idea of some of the challenges, which were found. In this line of ideas, the conclusions are presented whereby the researchers make final statements regarding what can be taken from the research project as a whole, and, more importantly, give direct answers to the research questions. Finally, a brief exploration of the possible pedagogical and research implications that can be taken from this study are presented.

2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Foreign and Second language teaching and learning have been constantly changing over the past decades to better the process students go through to gain knowledge, reforming their needs according to the social ways of living. The styles of teaching have changed – and will change - for several years to benefit students, but it does not mean, under any circumstance, that it has always been that way. Language teachers in the current 21st century are left to teach during a critical time when the world is constantly changing, moving, and making way to solve any problems left behind from previous eras.

One of the biggest factors started from the globalization and the postmodern era. Modernity began to take place and capitalist economies started to grow along with the industrial and urban age, which made a huge difference in societies spreading across Europe. Languages shortly after this evolved to become modern and this helped to codify and standardize them across different nations. Since then, the 21st century has had to include a framework to understand what is happening ever since and how to adapt so many changes to the current world, particularly in the classroom.

“As the developing world becomes more populous whilst developed countries meet the challenges of an ageing population, the world’s language system has been transformed.” (Graddol, 2006 p. 23) Nowadays, there is an enormous amount of English speakers in our world that have been a result of the globalization that took place during the past decades. English has become a factor, which has changed the way we see the world considering business, the urban and middle classes, the rise of new communication technologies, media, and specially the education system. The economic development and increasing global influence depend almost entirely on the process of globalization and enhancement of English language proficiency. This comes from what is now the 3rd era of globalization, but then, where did it begin?

“Some argue that globalisation started in the 15th century with the development of capitalist economies, nation states and national languages.” (Graddol, 2006 p.18). The beginning of globalization has been considered since the electric telegraph began to wire the world and there was a clear understanding of where this English-dominated technology would leave, it ended by the time WWI was over and started again after WWII until 1989. These significant transitional changes began to gather momentum in the 21st century, when English started to become much more available and at hand for people to learn it; it started

to accelerate globalization: hence, as English accelerates globalization, globalization accelerates the use of English. Consequently, the users of English are moving in a world where they need to use the language in the most efficient way as well as use their critical thinking skills to enhance and expand their knowledge of the world. On this basis, these 21st Century skills play one of the most important factors in classrooms as well as in students' lives so that they are able to acquire and advance in the world since globalization began.

“21st century skills enable workers to communicate and collaborate with others, organize and analyse information, make informed decisions, and then take decisive actions.” (Fitzpatrick & O’Dowd, 2012) According to Trilling & Fadel (2009:176), the skills that are needed for the 21st century are considered to be the 7 c’s as mentioned below:

1. Critical thinking & problem solving
2. Creativity & innovation
3. Collaboration, teamwork, & leadership
4. Cross-cultural understanding
5. Communication, information, & media literacy
6. Computing and ICT literacy
7. Career and learning self-reliance.

To be sure of where we are going we must expand our knowledge from the classrooms to our student’s minds by allowing them to use the 7c’s, particularly by focusing on the Critical thinking and problem solving skills. With this said, the huge impact Globalization has had on all societies and current educational systems is gradually translating into changes and improvements and due to this, the need for learners at all levels to foster critical thinking skills is at the highest peak in our current society.

Unfortunately, some have it easier than others do. For instance, Thailand is one of the many nations, which face various problems in the current educational system. Colleges in particular have a challenge when they accept students that later on show little to no abilities using a foreign language such as English, as well as the Critical Thinking skills necessary be successful throughout their college education. The aim of many colleges across the world is for their students to be able to have higher order thinking skills, yet they do not know how to apply them or work around them in an educational setting. “Critical thinking has little to do with what we are thinking, but everything to do with how we think”

(Mulnix 2010, p.3.) Although here Critical Thinking is defined rather easily, it is a term that in still does not show a clear definition overall. The inconsistent use of this term not only affects the development, but it also builds an unconscious seed of confusion among teachers, making it difficult for them to help students to develop these skills.

In Thailand, one of the major problems has been that students between the ages of 17 to 20 years of age do not get sufficient input to help them become critical thinkers by the time they are at a college level. Different laws had been passed on in the nation to impose and promote a new educational reform, which could possibly help to solve this problem. The reform set in motion by the national education act of 1999 inspires the current research on the integration of logic and critical thinking into the curriculum at the preparation center for languages and mathematics. "The reform is still on going in the Thai educational system, particularly at the high school level, however, many high schools have not yet implemented student centered learning, nor have they added critical thinking to the curriculum." (Wilkinson & Nanni, 2013). This idea of bringing in new reforms may be very beneficial for students to reach new levels of understanding of a new language but it needs to be implemented across all high school levels within the same country.

Throughout the world, another challenge comes across with the educational system due to customs and traditions. Critical thinking, as mentioned by Dr. Osman Barnawi, "is a socio-cognitive process in which interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions are vital when composing or writing" (Barnawi, 2011) The act of interacting with others becomes vital and it is a process which all students must go through to develop higher order thinking skills. Unfortunately, in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey interaction is not encouraged amongst teachers or students. One of the greatest things in a classroom is not only the interaction between teachers and students but also the fact that teachers can learn from students as much as students learn from teachers. Thus, in countries like the ones mentioned above, Critical Thinking may be considered disrespectful to the teachers. Students also tend to shy away from this practice because they have grown up with the idea that the teacher is the main source of information and because they are the authority figure in the class, students are not encouraged to challenge them or even ask questions relating to topics. The effects of this is annulling to a student's learning process because in the long term, the students will seem to "fit a didactic approach or concept-based instruction in the classic educational system where learning is centered on the retention of previously learned information and where no thinking is required" (Alagozlu, 2007, p. 131). Ideally, students

need to be involved in class in order to have some sort of development of their skills and a class where no thinking is required will not lead students anywhere.

Not only is this phenomenon of lack of Critical thinking seen through the world but also it is something Colombian teachers must face daily. Colombia is a country in which Critical Thinking is not promoted in or out of the classroom. Yet it is clear to many teachers that ultimately they consider a good student one who is able to stand out by his or her process of learning, understanding, defining, analysing and evaluating during a learning process. Unluckily, students are not all at the level to stand out in a classroom, let alone in a language classroom. One of the biggest problems in Colombia, however, starts with the fact that the education level is one of the lowest and most problematic considered by the Organización para la Cooperación y Desarrollo Económicos, also known as the OCDE. Amongst them, there are 33 other countries grouped together to promote the wellbeing of countries, and although Colombia is just starting to take part in it, the following data shows the low levels of academic achievements in the country. "In Colombia only 42% of the population between 25 and 64 years has as a minimum, the basic high school diploma, a much lower comparison to the average of about 75% according to the OCDE" (Albiser, 2014, p. 1). Additionally, in an article published by El Tiempo in 2014, the PISA tests of the same year show that young students in Colombia fail to solve simple problems due to their low ability to read and understand questions. In relation to this, the former education Dean of the Universidad Externado de Colombia Myriam Ochoa, explains that in order to reverse the results, it is necessary that teachers and students go back to the essence of learning, that is, the development of crucial skills such as reading comprehension and critical thinking so that they are actually able to adapt themselves to a more complex, globalized world.

Regarding this aspect, De Zubiría (2014) holds that the reason for Colombian students having a lack of ability to think, interpret, and solve problems critically lies on the whole education system, not only on educators. According to the author, these competences have not been developed; thus, the focus is still on transmitting fragmented information instead of teaching students to reason. Due to this, changing the situation will require teachers to foster the development of transversal competences necessary to think, communicate, interpret, and coexist.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that the main problem of education comes from the lack of interest of the citizens in Colombia wishing to obtain a high school diploma, or go further than this to obtain a Bachelor's degree. Since there is a low percentage of students

obtaining a high school degree, it becomes difficult for students to be guided carefully and well through their learning process. Consequently, there is a great gap between the classroom and all that can be taken away from their learning experience. The critical thinking skill is one of the many skills that are left behind in the classroom and in the EFL context in particular. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to bring these 21st century skills, but it is up to the teachers to bring ideas and classroom activities that will help students reach this level of understanding and analysing of a language.

The education systems throughout different countries varies greatly, but how do the 21st century skills help build strong students especially in a context such as the ones teachers face in Colombia? This becomes very difficult due to the language teaching problems faced in the field, which many times even come from the teachers. In Dosquebradas, Risaralda not only do the teachers have to deal with daily issues, but also often students have some greater issues that are completely out of their hands. Moreover, sometimes students are forced to see language classes through their learning experience while having language teachers that do not perceive, understand, or communicate the language the way they should be expected to do. "25.93% of teachers are classified under the B1 category according to CEFR, meaning that they have some sort of understanding of the language; 11.11% classify under A2, meaning they understand some of it and only 7.41% are found in the A1 category meaning they have an insufficient level of English." (Rendon, 2014 p. 1). The fact that only 25.93% of teachers are at a b1 level means that this is the audience in which studies should focus to help them surpass the level they are at and make sure their students build all skills for the 21st century along with their help if they have the right guidance.

With the help of bringing teachers to the right level of English in the department, plenty of other goals can be achieved as a department relating to bilingualism. Currently, the first thought a teacher gets from a student that is able to analyse questions relating to different topics is that he or she is at a level that is superior to others or has previous background knowledge or experience but, how is this measured? It is then when students must ask themselves what they know and teachers must be able to continue to evaluate their teaching and bring knowledge to students that will be meaningful and thought provoking, in this case, through Critical Thinking.

The intention of the present paper is to identify why teachers do not integrate critical thinking into the classroom activities they promote and create, causing possible effects on

English Proficiency through the beginning of the A1 level. This research project was conducted at the Centro Colombo Americano in Pereira, Risaralda, with a group of students ranging from 17 to 25 years old. It was proposed to be conducted at this language institute because of the amount of time students were exposed to English from the A1 to the B2 level. The study was focused only on the A1 level of understanding because it was crucial to recognize the situation and the fact that the critical thinking skills must be developed to some extent at beginning levels. The focus was on a specific audience to help their learning process and make sure their metacognitive skills began to develop early and help students become aware of the critical thinking skills possibly manifested in a language course.

The language classroom in Colombia is now considered one of the most important topics under the curriculums across the country. Though there are many problems with bilingualism the countries department of education see plenty of positive effects that language learning in our context will bring to students. In the article of "Risaralda - Más idiomas, más oportunidades" by Cruz, the aim of language teaching in the EFL context by the year 2032 is explained. According to the author, the objective is to help the region become bilingual by that time. The main cultural canters in town, joined together to define the main objectives and because critical thinking has not yet been totally included in the language classroom, this project aims to identify ways to include critical thinking in the Colombian classroom and help students become aware about their own critical thinking skills at lower levels. Pineda (2004) mentions that "Becoming critical thinkers is a lifelong task which is only developed and sharpened through time and learning experiences." Considering this reason among others, some researcher have been able to capture the idea of helping students foster their critical thinking skills at lower levels and have had significant outcomes. Philip J. Wilkinson and Alexander C. Nanni are authors who decided to take critical thinking into account for beginner to intermediate levels at colleges in Thailand. Their goal was to help students think critically in a meaningful and productive way. One of the conclusions which they were able to show is that the meaning of critical thinking as a true definition needs to be unified because, once this is done, students and teachers will have a much better understanding of it, helping them use it correctly in the EFL classroom. Other studies in the field have also shown how critical thinking related studies, need to focus on tasks, which will bring students to think critically. Jimenez P. & Fuquen A. reassure this as they focused in bringing Critical Thinking into not only English, but applied different critical thinking tasks into different fields such as Social Science, Humanities, Psychology and

others. The importance of the English field is still surprisingly growing, but there are many efforts needed to help critical thinking become a force in the classroom.

In conclusion, the globalization that has been going on over the past decades has helped us to reach the moment we are at in the EFL classroom. Though language practices are changing for the better, there are problems at an international, national and local level, which have to be faced and solved at some point, and the need for students to reach higher order thinking skills and become aware of these skills through their A1 levels will help them to achieve excellence in the EFL classroom. This paper is particularly important to the region of Risaralda, where the benefits of the research will mostly impact the teachers of public and private section in the A1 levels, in order for them to guide their students. Considering the key aspects of Critical thinking, language education must develop and benefit the students around the region to better their future opportunities as Critical Thinkers in the EFL classroom.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in detail the several concepts, which will guide the development of this study. Critical thinking which explains the ability to improve the quality of thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing ones thoughts is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. Critical thinking awareness entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism. Higher order thinking skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking. These higher order-thinking skills are grounded in lower order skills such as discriminations, simple application and analysis, and cognitive strategies and are linked to prior knowledge of subject matter content; and finally, language instruction may include CBI and TBI which highlight learning towards a communicate way to interact in the target language. These concepts will provide the study with the necessary theoretical principles to organize the focus of inquiry. Masduqi (2011) will discuss the concept of critical thinking in education. Defining Critical Thinking will be argued through different viewpoints by Halpern (1998), Stenberg (1986), Lipman (2003), Pithers & Soden, (2000) Mulnix (2010) and Zhang (2003). Critical thinking awareness will be defined taking into account Harris (2012). Finally will be explained based on McDavitt (1993) and Halpern (1999).

3.2 CRITICAL THINKING IN EDUCATION

The education system has had many flaws, which unfortunately affect students directly; one of them has been to define critical thinking. Normally, the higher the education a student has, the more critical they could be considered. When students arrive at a higher education, such as the university level, they ought to have a higher level of critical thinking skills, which might have been guided throughout the lower levels of elementary school and high school. Unfortunately, this is not the case almost anywhere around the world. The critical thinking in the educational system can sum up to the following idea: "Students graduating in all levels of education nowadays seem uncritical in their performances."

(Masduqi, 2011). As mentioned by Masduqi, the education systems around the world face a critical problem. However, when the main implications of critical thinking are brought into the education students will be enabled to be much more autonomous when it comes to learning, and they will then be ready to face the globalization and modernization that is taking place in the current world. It must be noted that with the changes and their second language learning process, students should then be expected to use their critical thinking skills in understanding ideas both in printed materials and during spoken activities, in order for them to use their English as a source of communication. Hence, the idea of critical thinking in the Education system would be a very powerful element which EFL students must learn to use once students understand and aware of the importance of such skill.

3.3 DEFINING CRITICAL THINKING

As generations have progressed, the educational systems have changed and the 21st century has been the biggest factor yet to make new movements in regards to the educational needs. As explained by Halpern (1998), educators are now in the process of placing more importance on developing students' critical thinking abilities through inside their English classes. However, critical thinking is a term that, as mentioned before, has caused a lot of stir with changes in our current century, and debate over the last few years, one of the biggest difficulties in the education field remains to be how to define critical thinking. The term was first introduced by the Greek Philosophers from the Socrates era supported by Plato and then implemented by Descartes, and since then researchers have offered various definitions and ideas regarding the characteristics of critical thinking, the theories behind and the behaviors that humans show when developing and demonstrating higher order thinking skills. Lipman (2003) maintains that critical thinking relies on criteria, is self-correcting, sensitive to context, and provides intellectual empowerment. For his part, Stenberg (1986, p. 3), describes critical thinking as "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts." "Critical thinking in any area involves being able to pursue one's questions through self-directed search and interrogation of knowledge, a sense that knowledge is contestable, and being able to present evidence to support ones' arguments" (Pithers & Soden, 2000 p. 239).

This type of thinking can be directed in all types of education fields, though students must be guided carefully to help them question their surroundings and verify answers to any those

possible question through evidence and supported facts. Meanwhile a definition supporting the discipline that it is surrounded by and the process one must go through to reach the higher order thinking skills is provided by Mulnix (2010, 2): “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” The behaviors humans show are also vital to understand how this life long process undergoes through the education that one receives. According to Zhang (2003), “the ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgements, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances the inquiry permit.” (p. 1). In order to form these ideal thinkers, the basis must evolve from the classroom on, and supporting students to develop their thinking skills require changes in pedagogy.

3.4 CRITICAL THINKING AWARENESS

Critical Thinking is the ability to analyze the way you think and provide evidence for your ideas, rather than simply accepting your personal reasoning as sufficient proof. People can gain numerous benefits from mastering critical thinking skills, such as better control of personal learning and empathy for other points of view. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to understanding and accepting various possibilities to a single problem society faces. Students particularly face many problems on a daily basis in the education system. As previously mentioned, the PISA results prove that Colombia lacks these critical thinking skills, which can help students, analyze a situation better. Students are also misinformed about the importance of being critical. Critical thinking awareness needs to be raised in the language classroom for students to gain the benefits of mastering these skills. Since the lower levels are essential for students’ language learning, increasing the knowledge of understanding the benefits of these skills will help them express their ideas, and enhance their academic performance. It is important to understand that these critical thinking concepts are intuitive and to apply these skills in life

they must be practiced and mastered like everything else in life. Once a seed of critical thinking is planted on a mind, the lesson must become life long, and that is why critical thinking awareness must be enhanced from the beginning especially in a language learning process. In this sense, Harris (2012) highlights the fact that raising critical thinking awareness in students develops a different way of thinking, one that focuses on creating, inquiring and exploring new ideas. This aspect, then, is fundamental, for it presents a number of situations in which students are involved in tasks that require them to think critically.

3.5 HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

Amongst the many concepts, related to critical thinking is the understanding of the difference between HOTS and LOTS or higher order/lower order-thinking skills. Higher order thinking (HOT) is thinking on a level that is higher than what students are used to. HOT takes thinking to higher levels because it requires students to do something with the facts they are provided in any given course. HOTS belong to Benjamin Bloom's cognitive domain taxonomy theory developed in 1956, which seeks to promote higher forms of thinking in the field of education that should go beyond memorizing. In order to do this, what educators and students should know is arranged in a hierarchy from less to more complex levels of cognitive development, where previous levels need to be mastered, such as applying routine rules to familiar or novel problems. (McDavitt, 1994). Originally, Bloom et al. (1956) ordered these levels in this way: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. However, in the year 2001, Anderson and Krathwol revised Bloom's taxonomy to align it with the objectives of modern education; for this, the names of each level were changed to active verbs, like this: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, and Analyzing, where the first ones are the lowest levels of cognitive development.

This being so, HOTS in teaching require students to understand the facts or evidence, infer from them, connect them to other facts and concepts, categorize them, manipulate them, put them together and apply them as they seek for new solutions to new problems. Nonetheless, as Halpern (1999) highlights, this only achieved if courses are refined and aligned with the purpose of moving learners toward critical thinking.

3.6 LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

There are some errors found in the education system that are significant issues that lead students from point A to point B in a classroom, whether that is learning something, or simply understanding a topic in class. However, in many cases this may become more complex to students because language instruction in a class may be distorted. Different studies have been done with a focus on second language instruction to identify how it becomes effective in a classroom to promote students' second language acquisition. In language teaching in particular, there are different classifications of these language instruction approaches, which allow students to have a better understanding of the target language when they are guided with specific tools or tasks.

The first one is Content Based Instruction, which is seen around the world to a certain degree, but it is usually not something students are exposed to. Brinton et al. (1989:2) define CBI as "the integration of particular content with language teaching aims, or as the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills." During Content Based instruction, the second language becomes the way to convey information of different topics and interests to the learner's aside the subject of study, which is English. In CBI, however, there are gaps in relation to how to make students critical thinkers. It should usually be a skill that goes hand in hand but, instead, it is left behind. The moment content becomes partially integrated with a language classroom the results must also depend on the critical thinking skills that students have. This idea is supported by defining the short process that happens in the content classroom as mentioned by Eskey, (1997: 139-40, referenced in Oxford 2001: 2), "For every piece of content recognized, there is a discourse community which somehow provides us with the means to analyze, talk about, and write about that content. Hence, the task for EFL instructors in CBI is to acculturate students to the specific discourse communities." Therefore, the process that students must see in content based instruction must include tasks such as analyzing, discussing, conceptualize and assessing as the main focus, which are skills that are directly unified with the notion of critical thinking.

The other mainstream to take into account would be Task-Based Instruction. Nunan (1991a: 279) considers TBI to be "an approach which highlights learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, introducing authentic texts to learning situations, enhancing the learner's own personal experiences, and linking

classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.” The class itself must be guided towards a linguistic aspect but the teacher’s goal must then be to maintain a class in which the learners are able to use the language appropriately towards different social situations, and in particular with respect to the tasks assigned by the teacher. “Learners need a lot of comprehensible input, that is, exposure to the foreign language being used in a variety of contexts, both spoken and written, that is just slightly above their current level of comprehension.” (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1983, 1996; Ellis, 2003). The implementation of task-based instruction to language teaching, and integrating it with higher level thinking skills will engage students more and will make learning more meaningful to them.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Coming to a clear understanding of many of the language learning processes that happen all around is very important to better the current practices, which are taking place in the ELT classroom. The ability to think critically can be considered an essential facet in education and living as it is based on well-founded rational judgements where appropriate evaluative standards are used to determine the merit, true worth or value of something (Paul, Elder & Bartell, 1994).

The following studies that will be presented show a wide perspective in relation to applying critical thinking in the English as a Foreign Language classroom and the effects that it has had on students all over the world.

The first study is focused on an action-based study on the implementation and assessment of a structured method to develop critical thinking skills and enable students and teachers to use different tools when qualified in the space of seven months. This study took place in Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa. Before this study, there had been various changes that had occurred in the educational system in South Africa. Previous to 1994, the educational system was focused towards a curriculum that did not help students to become independent thinkers. The knowledge which was presented to the student was the only knowledge they truly were able to acquire and they had no thinking process to develop in the classroom. This drastically changed after the 1994 democratic elections that aimed the education towards a new flexible education system with meaningful outcomes from the students.

The biggest problem however, with this research started from the fact that students entering the higher education levels or undergraduates are students who are unable to think critically or logically. To begin the research, the students and teachers involved were asked to complete a descriptive questionnaire. From there on Action-Based research began to evolve as students and teachers were divided into four different classes and were asked to complete five different tasks that relied on various critical thinking methods. It must also be noted that during this study there was not one specific language mentioned due to the fact that this was focused on content-based instruction. The four classes were divided into different categories and each one of these focused on various subjects, some of which included Mathematics and Physical Science groups.

The author of this study was able to put a lot of time and effort into this particular study, even with such a big number of groups. The tasks that were carried out throughout the study lasted a period of three months, to reach some results according to the criteria stated. "The classes showed evidence of the student's critical thinking averages reflected improvement in all criteria's average. The student's critical thinking averages reflected improvement in 'Interpret Information' (0.75) 'Reason' (0.50), 'Apply' (0.75) 'Analyze' (0,50), 'Evaluate' (0.25) and 'Create' (0.50). The classes' averages increased by 3.25." (Jager, 2012). Though here we have some clear evidence of the percentage evaluated to increase critical thinking skills, the most important fact is that in total the class average shows a significant improvement of the use and understanding of higher level thinking skills. Due to this research, one of the main results is that by guiding students using their critical thinking skills, and especially when the teacher or educator is well prepared to bring new knowledge and guide students critical thinking process, it will have great outcomes for both teacher and students.

On the other hand, Long (2003), from the university of Sophia, brings a different issue at hand to research, bringing the idea of theoretical issues and Practical Applications of teaching Critical thinking in a more diverse and well-rounded culture such as the Asian one, relating particularly to the EFL context. The culture here is something that is very significant and plays a huge role in how this society in particular deals with skills that are applicable for today's world such as critical thinking. Since the idea of critical thinking emerged, it has mostly been around the Western society due to the social restrictions that Non-Western societies have. The students that are in the Non-Western societies such as those in Japanese schools, have a harder time expressing their opinions which may in fact affect them as critical thinkers, but it does not mean they simply accept everything that is taught to them throughout their education. This is, however, one of the effects of culture discussed in the research paper, which to a certain extent has an impact on students' cognitive skills. Hence, the aim of the paper is to design activities that encourage the expression of opinions, which is a strength that Non-Western students have. The author proposes some activities that draw some attention to critical thinking in the Japanese society and towards learners who have a hard time expressing their opinions. It is also noted that the critical thinking skills that are taught to students must be focused on a set of skills rather than on a single skill. This is important because it is a result that can benefit people elsewhere, by considering the connection of critical thinking to various sets of skills instead of focusing it mainly on one.

Finally, Mulnix (2010) proposes one of the most important research studies to the interest of this thesis. Her main goal, aside from wanting to teach students to think critically, was to help students of the beginning level to become aware of their critical thinking skills and determine whether these skills can be taught or even measured. This paper not only gives the reader plenty of insights on sources that truly help to identify critical thinking according to a vast number of perceptions, but it also helps to see the best ways to practice the teaching of critical thinking skills. She mentions the importance of teaching this correctly, as she considers that "skills are taught (or, maybe more accurately, coached) in a rather straightforward way. It involves modeling the skill, having the student practice the skill, providing feedback on his performance, and some amount of natural talent." (Mulnix, 2010). From this study, it is important to highlight that critical thinking is a process that is very different in comparison to other skills or mental processes. When educators want to encourage students to be more autonomous thinkers, then they must think carefully about how and what those skills are made of and, more importantly, how to bring that knowledge to students the best way possible.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The research conducted was focused on qualitative research, which is very common amongst the research projects placed in our current word. Qualitative research is easy to understand yet various authors have failed to compile a complete definition and one that researchers relate to. Due to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 3) have come up with a very complete idea of what qualitative research is and how it fits into current research projects such as this one. According to these authors, “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.” The same authors hold that, at this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world in its natural settings, which the researchers try to make sense of and to interpret in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. Additionally, Lincoln & Guba (1985) explain that qualitative studies also take into consideration the understanding of participants’ perspectives and the extent to which these are important for the researcher.

Qualitative research has become a method of inquiry in different fields while also working with their natural setting, and in this case, the research will be focused on the EFL context in particular. Through developing a qualitative study, the researchers are going to be able to understand the phenomena under investigation as fully as possible, which is related to a field where little research has been done and which is worth exploring.

It is very common for qualitative researchers to face choices related to data collection ranging from different theories, practices, focus groups, case studies, and participant

observations. The group guided during this research will be focused towards a case study, and various observations were done in order to gather the data needed. Hence, as mentioned by Bogdan & Bilken (2003), it is essential for the researcher to understand that the central method of qualitative research is the participant observation. Fostering awareness on Critical thinking skills through lower levels is oriented towards the qualitative methodology especially because the researcher is enrolled in the process, meaning that the results will be focused on the researchers' own perceptions and not on general views. Thus, it is not just about collection of data from others but in the end there is a perception that is subjective. The results impact the natural setting which has been observed but also extends to solve the problems faced within such natural setting as well, having to benefit the institution in the end.

5.2 TYPE OF STUDY

Qualitative research varies in the different structures and designs that go along with it since there is not one particular structure to follow. Many authors tend to focus more on the amount of topics to be covered or the type of plan or proposal for the written part that should be included in qualitative research. Fortunately, there are plenty of different approaches that become applicable to the use of qualitative research and which go along with the procedures that need to be followed to come up with an effective qualitative research. According to Creswell (1994, p. 22), "the way a researcher writes a qualitative study, for example, will differ depending on the approach the researcher chooses." There have been many types of approaches described throughout the years, and they have had their own benefits to add to the qualitative type of research, but it is important to note that some stand out more than others. These are some of the most popular types of classifications provided to discuss and identify the approaches. Tesch (1990), who organized 28 approaches into four branches of a flowchart, sorted out these approaches based on the central interest of the investigator. Wolcott (1992) classified approaches in a "tree" diagram with branches of the tree designating strategies for data collection. In the book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* by John W. Creswell, many approaches are mentioned, yet the most important ones are highlighted through a list of five of the most important approaches to conduct a qualitative research; the emergent design, participants' meanings, the theoretical lens, the interpretive inquiry, and the holistic account.

Qualitative research evolves when a problem or issue needs to be solved. The researcher must then take action in order to identify the type procedure he or she wants to use in order to complete the study. The aforementioned author states that, "when the approaches are displayed side by side throughout the phases of the design of a study; the reader not only gains perspective on their differences but also develops an applied perspective as to how the approaches inform each phase of the inquiry." (Creswell, 22). This is one of the ways in which researchers can become involved in understanding the differences that can develop in qualitative research and which one will benefit them the most. One of the most important approaches that has been applied and analyzed many times is the case study approach. "A case study and, normally, history focus on one case, but simultaneously take account of the context, and so encompass many variables and qualities.

I have labeled this strategy "explicative" as opposed to "experimental" (one unit of analysis and a few isolated variables) and "reductive" (many units of analysis and a few variables)" (Johansson, 2002). Case studies can be seen as a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry. There are a lot of resources that are essential when working with a case study, such as observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, or reports.

Case studies can change according to the size of the individuals involved in the study. There can be the single instrument case study, the collective or multiple case studies and the intrinsic case study. In this case, one can argue that it is oriented towards the multiple case study, which focuses on one issue and different interpretations of this issue according to different variables. The population then becomes very important because it will be focusing on a specific group of people that become the instrument to the study and focus on their particular behavior or reaction to certain materials implemented. Additionally, the study developed can also be considered qualitative – also called interpretive because, in order to characterize this specific population, the materials that will need to be implemented will have an effect to the context and mainly to the issue that needs to be solved.

The particular case study that was chosen is descriptive. According to Yin (1984), descriptive case studies describe the natural phenomena occurring within the process, and the researcher's goal is to describe the data as they occur. For their part, Glass & Hopkins (1984) state that descriptive research involves gathering data, which describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection. In the same sense, Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) explain that descriptive case studies document an event or

situation through a number of methods such as non-participant observations, interviews, in-depth questionnaires, and etcetera.

The type of case study was chosen for two main reasons. In the first place, one of the purposes of case studies is to reach an understanding of the phenomena in concern. Secondly, the main goal of this research project was to identify why teachers do not integrate critical thinking skills in the classroom activities and why students lack knowledge of English and, most importantly, of critical thinking skills in beginning levels. The results of this project can serve as a basis for teachers of the undergraduate program who want to have a broader perspective about what is happening in teaching and learning in the Colombian context regarding critical thinking skills.

5.3 CONTEXT AND SETTING:

This research project was conducted at the Centro Colombo-Americano, which is a bi-national English institute located in Pereira. This institute is well recognized in the coffee region and in the North part of the Department of Valle with three branches in Pereira and one in Cartago. The institute has been around for forty-five years and has as a mission to contribute with the cultural and educational growth of the region through the support of diverse cultural expressions and the developing of academic programs oriented towards English teaching /learning as a foreign language.

The curriculum at this institution is structured in three strands, receptiveness to language, competence and confidence in using the language (communicative approach), and developing cognitive abilities. Although no one strand is concerned exclusively with either principle, the first two are aimed primarily at language learning while the other aspect contributes to more general aspects of the students' development. The institution aims for promoting positive attitudes and appreciation of the value of language in the four different skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The aim of the research was to build awareness of these skills during of the A1 levels of this institution, where students from 18 to 25 years old of middle to upper socioeconomic statuses participated and used critical thinking skills in order to develop strategies that could help them to learn a language. In the institute, the courses were divided on a monthly basis and they were set up according to the CEFR which makes the A1 levels a standard five

courses for students to go through in order to achieve the language expected at the end of course 5. In terms of the syllabus of the classes observed and the standards of the institution, a student who finished the 5 courses was able to describe activities in the simple present, present continuous and the simple past, also what someone was doing at the moment using present continuous, discuss previous vacations and talk about their future plans. The main focus however became only on a course, level 3 that lasted for one month, on a daily schedule from 6:45 to 9:00 pm from Monday to Thursday. Furthermore, the students were aware of the daily objectives in class. The conditions at this institute were very flexible and most of the times provided the necessary environment not only for teacher but for students as well. Context and supplies were easily provided at any given point taking into account things like time and availability.

5.4 PARTICIPANTS:

This research was oriented towards a group of students that were in the third course. They ranged in various ages from 17 to 25 years and belonged to different socioeconomic status. They studied English as an extracurricular activity from Monday to Thursday from 6:45 to 9:00 p.m. due to the fact that during the day they had different schedules and obligations such as work or other priorities like the university or even high school. The students had different levels of education and some of them had families of their own, where some were parents; some others were rather highly dependent on their parents. In addition to this, the students came from different places in the region, so some probably were familiar with the context or the region while others weren't; the majority of them have lived in Pereira their entire lives; nonetheless, this was not an impediment for them to get along or share the same interests in things. It is worth mentioning that the participants took part in the entire process which lasted 4 weeks and in which the teacher was involved.

5.5 RESEARCHER'S ROLE:

As qualitative research is conducted, many different roles have a very big impact on the research, whether it is the participants, the whole population, or the researcher. In this case, we will focus for now on the researcher's roles, since the roles of the remaining participants who are students have already been studied. During this research, the main

role for the researchers was to be observe as participant or most commonly known as participant observation. The participant observation is a qualitative method that is used to assume different perspectives and understand how the perspectives play out in the research that is being conducted. One of the researchers conducted the implementation of the class as a participant observer while the other took part mostly during the process of analyzing the data and the written process of the thesis. Understanding this means that the researcher who was a participant observer had to become a person who was involved to a certain extent in the research and in whatever activities occurred during the research process, by presenting the class on a daily basis. "The method is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. The researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an "insider" while remaining, inevitably, an 'outsider' (Mack et al., 2005). There are many advantages to this as well as there are disadvantages, but it is a very important role and must be taken full advantage of while being part of a research study.

5.6 METHODS:

People have been collecting data on just about everything and in our current 21st century, it is very easy to collect and adapt data to different topics being studied. Data particularly comes in handy when talking about research that is conducted and we evidenced how it plays an important role on this thesis. As it has been mentioned before, it was very important to understand that this project was considered qualitative due to various reasons. This research wanted to seek answers to specific questions laid out, there were a set of procedures used in order answer the questions being asked, and there was a collection of evidence and findings that were beyond just the boundaries of the study that was conducted.

Qualitative research also places a very important role on the population regardless of what type of study is being done, and in this case, it focused on the population that was seen during a case study. Following Mack et al. (2005) qualitative research "seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations." (p.3).

During a qualitative research, data begins to play an important role. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research goes particularly in this part of the research. Quantitative researches use numbers, graphs, percentages, statistics; however, a lot of useful information for research cannot be recorded by just reducing it to numbers and that is why qualitative research uses people's judgments, feelings, emotions, ideas, and beliefs that can be described primarily in words rather than in numbers. For this and many other research studies, the researcher must then face the decision of choosing the appropriate method to apply in order to come up with the results of a qualitative research study.

In order to come up with clear results one must focus on the data that is collected. In this case, there was a collection of information coming from both students and the teacher in the class. The data was collected through several different resources such as questionnaires, interviews and a log. According to Popper (1959), questionnaires are a useful instrument for data collection because they are practical, allow large amounts of information to be gathered, and can be used with limited affect to validity and reliability.

The first methods to be implemented were the questionnaires, which were mainly focused on students in the classroom. In order for questionnaires to be developed, it was important to understand that these include a set of purposes that help turn the data into concrete information that can be used in the research. Questionnaires need to be clear on the topics that need to be included or covered in order to meet the purpose and elicit important data from the teacher or students.

Fortunately, there is also a semi-structured questionnaire, which can be very useful for the group of students I will be working with. According to Cohen, "The semi-structured questionnaire sets the agenda but does not presuppose the nature of the response" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This is the idea with this research in particular, considering that students will have to answer while basing their knowledge off the experience they have with the teacher during the time they are together. There will be four different questionnaires given to students, one during each week that the students are in course 3.

The second type of data that will be collected will also be oriented towards the students while using a tool that is very common now in qualitative research and very useful due to the lack of riding answers exposed to the researcher by the population being studied.

"The use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations" (Kvale

1996: 11). Using interviews is not only important because we see the population as a more reliable source but because the data is real and comes, from what or how they see things. Fortunately, it has many advantages, but that depends on who is using them, and there have been many different conceptions about interviews. According to the authors of *Research Methods in Education* conducting an interview "Has a specific purpose, it is often question-based, with the questions being asked by the interviewer; the interviewer alone may express ignorance (and not the interviewee), and the responses must be as explicit and often as detailed as possible." (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Since this project is focused on integrating critical thinking skills into a classroom and helping students become aware of these it is important to implement them on a daily basis. It will hopefully be something that is relatively new to them, and they will gain the knowledge that is necessary in order to implement it later on in their journey of learning a language. These interviews will be conducted only at the end of the course in order for students to have enough experience implementing critical thinking, this way the researcher will have enough information from the students according to their experience.

Finally, the teacher must have information that will be very useful in order to have a complete understanding of the events that occurred in a class and how they affected the critical thinking skills that were implemented. In this case, a log will be implemented by the teacher who will use it on a daily basis to keep track of events that occurred. This helps to measure to what degree activities work or do not work, how students behave and react, and how this will affect the outcomes of the research project. Using a log is helpful because it truly keeps track of important events from the point of view of the writer, who may be the researcher or a subject of the research. This may however be somewhat difficult and demanding to carry out because it tends to be very similar to interviews, and logs reflect the worldview of single individuals that varies a lot from another person. They also frequently require transcription meaning that the person in charge of keeping the log must be focused on writing one right after each class, which is how this research and logs will be use through the entire course.

5.7 DATA ANALYSIS:

This chapter is concerned with the methods for data analysis that were used for the project. As a first step, data of the study was coded by using colors (color-coding). In this respect, Shenton (2004) explains that this method helps the researcher to gather enough information from the participants in concern and to do it in an organized way. Additionally, Reiger, Kay, & Cook (2005) state that colors play an important role in helping us to recall information.

Since this research project was carried out through a qualitative focus, the theories guiding it had to do with data related to social and real life and aspects that are rarely explored by researchers. As such, this study was expected to certificate and to generate more theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) holding relation with the fostering of critical thinking skills in the Colombian context and the impact that teaching CTS had in students learning English, inside a group of related participants.

Urquhart (2013) states that grounded theory is “a wonderful method of analyzing data and building theory”. The same author explains that this method is a way to be close to data and to gain all sorts of insights that will eventually result in excellent research. The grounded theory of the project came from the commonalities that were identified during the data analysis stage. This measure allowed the researcher to set the participants’ characteristics and to minimize differences in the data being collected. Added to this, in order for the process to be strengthened and generate data, it was necessary that theoretical collection, coding and information analysis were together. As the aforementioned authors hold, it is impossible to engage in theoretical sampling without coding and analyzing at the same time. This can be achieved through the recognition of new categories within the data and their emergent properties, generating hypothesis and reflection. By doing so, obscure data is avoided, and the reliability of the project is not affected.

It is important to mention that the research data was collected with the help of three methods: interviews, reflective logs written by the researcher, and questionnaires, which is where the method of triangulation for qualitative research became relevant. In fact, according to Kulkarni (2013), triangulation is a method for data analysis that implies the use of more than one method to collect data on the same topic. Patton (1999) explains that this procedure ensures that the researcher is able to gather more reliable and unbiased information regardless of it being time consuming. For their part, Fielding & Fielding (1986:13) acknowledge that “triangulation involves different operational methods of the

same concept, which need to be treated as separable variables”. As it has been mentioned, the triangulation of this project was carried out by considering the pertinent data gathered through all the three methods for data collection with the aim of generating more reliable more trustworthy findings related to the focus of the project.

The first method to be used were interviews which were applied before the lessons started and then, at the end of the course, students were also interviewed about critical thinking, what they knew about the concept, how important they considered it was, and also which skills they believed were related to critical thinking as well as their use in daily life situations. The reflective logs were written by the teacher from the first lesson and were of three to 5 pages or more. In these documents, the teacher stated, in a descriptive way, what the class was about, the dimensions of thought that were explored, the whole lesson structure, and also opinions concerning how successful classes were turning out to be in relation with how learners were developing critical thinking skills. Finally, the questionnaires were carried out at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the course. These also contained questions related to how useful critical thinking strategies were in different life situations and to what extent making comparisons was meaningful for the participants. In general, the questions pertained to critical thinking skills.

After having collected the data for this project, the information was numbered in lines. Then, some codes – in this case, letters - were used to identify the participants and the methods that were to be analyzed. The information in the reflective logs was coded using the first letter of the participants’ names along with the number of the log and the line number of the data to be used, like this: RL1-L3. The same process was done with the remaining methods, the three questionnaires, the starting, and the final interview.

As a following step, a matrix was elaborated using a Microsoft Excel template. The matrix was divided into four cells that had each a different definition. The first cell contained the three research questions to be answered. Then, the second cell was concerned with the name of the methods, and the third cell was used to show the raw data from each of the methods, using the aforementioned codes. In addition, the fourth cell contained the general categories, which were created by selecting commonalities among the pieces of data from cell number three. A fifth cell was used to write the results that emerged from mixing the categories according to their similarities; the results were consolidated in one sentence or title that included, summarized or condensed all the elements from the categories, as proposed by Saldaña (2009, p.3), who mentions that “a code in qualitative inquiry is most

often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”. Then, these results were also assigned a particular color in order to distinguish each throughout the process (Mackey & Gass, 2011). This information became the findings of the current study. The template that was used during the data analysis process is available in Appendix C.

Subsequently, in order to illustrate what each was about, they were explained in a descriptive way by mentioning the meaning of each component of the title and by contrasting theory from authors with the perceptions of the researchers about what was found during this research project in terms of critical thinking in merged basic English courses.

Triangulation is a method for data analysis that implies the use of more than one method to collect data on the same topic. Patton (1999) explains that, by using this procedure, the researcher is able to gather more reliable and unbiased information. The same author holds that although it is useful, it is also time consuming and requires broad training on the part of the researcher. For their part, Fielding & Fielding (1986:13) acknowledge that “triangulation involves different operational methods of the same concept, which need to be treated as separable variables”. The triangulation of this project was carried out by considering all the data gathered through all the three methods for data collection already mentioned in order to generate more theory related to the focus of the project.

5.8 INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Throughout the five courses, there are different structures that need to be followed since they are standard rules established at the institution. The lesson plans are all meant to have a sequence to follow which include things such as the warm up, presentation, practice, and production stage, and finally the wrap up. Teachers have classes, which are oriented towards the Communicate Approach and must always have at least one listening activity with a specific strategy that goes along with the methodological agreements that are established between the administrative staff and the teachers in order to provide better quality service to students at the Colombo Americano. Appendix B presents one activity that was carried out during the current research project. During the project, various different activities like the one seen in Appendix B were implemented. There were a variety of writing,

reading, listening and speaking tasks that were communicative and were oriented according to the dimensions of thought the teacher intended to present throughout the class. Each activity was chosen in a specific sequence to be applied in class and were looked over carefully before the implementations. The activities were thought to be coherent according to the class, in order for the aim of the lesson to be reached.

The lessons were broken into the specific sections mentioned previously and were all from English webpages or books that guided the activity in the second language. The main objective was to communicate in English efficiently and due to this, students were asked to use their second language throughout the various tasks. At times, their first language was used because of the lack of knowledge but they were still able to acquire new knowledge and vocabulary during the activities implemented.

5.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the following paragraphs, some important aspects related to the ethical considerations of our research project will be addressed and explained according to the specifications of qualitative studies. In addition to this, the correspondent consent letter used to get the permission will be annexed.

Qualitative research is not merely concerned with the process of gathering and analysing real-life data. Through such process, the reliability and the validity of a project must be ensured, and the privacy of the participants' is an aspect of utmost importance. According to Merriam (2009), the following ethical considerations can help the researcher to carry out the study process in a rigorous way. These elements have been considered according to the requirements and specifications of this specific research project, and are presented as follows:

- I. Trustworthiness: How trustful is, a project depends on four main aspects:
 - a. Credibility: that is, how congruent are the findings with reality.
 - b. Transferability: To what extent can the findings be applied to a different population?
 - c. Dependability: Do the methods fit the situations under investigation?

- d. Confirmability: the research findings are the result of the ideas and experiences of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher, (information is not biased).
- II. Inform consent: this element refers to the format where the agreements of the project are established, participants agree or disagree with the terms of the project to take place in such a way that they confirm that their participation is voluntary. This measure is also taken into account in the way of a consent letter, which is annexed in Appendix A.
- III. Protection of subjects: Due to the fact that some or all the information taken from the subjects might be very personal, the researcher needs to decide whether to make it public or not; however, this decision depends on the policies of the institution where the study takes place. In the present research project, the data collected will not be used or known by people not related to the Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa program.
- IV. Avoiding deceptions: Deception means lying to any person related to the research project. Merriam (2009) states that deception can range from relatively minor omissions, such as not telling all of the information related to it, to something more serious such as lying about the nature of the project and one's identity. To achieve this, the researcher will be truthful and honest to the subjects in concern and other people related to the institution.
- V. Minimizing intrusion: This means that the purpose and the contribution of the study should be mentioned right from the beginning of the research. In this case, both aspects will be a matter of discussion between the researcher and all the participants involved in the study. The contribution, then, is to foster critical thinking in lower levels to help students to learn a different language.
- VI. The project is carefully designed: In order to set how well the project is designed, it is important to first define how it is going to contribute to society. The researchers

should not - and will not - take answers out of context, and the study itself will be objective, that is, there will be no place for biased information.

- VII. Reciprocity: Expectation on students' behaviour will depend on how the researcher treats them. Participants will respond to this in exactly the same way they are addressed by the researcher. In order to avoid a bad relationship or a negative environment during the development of the project, the researcher will create a somewhat friendly atmosphere by being a good listener, offering tutorials, and taking interesting materials to classes.

During the first day of class, the students were given – and signed - a letter explaining what was to happen throughout the month so that they knew what to expect and how it might affect their learning process. This was done with the aim of allowing the students to have a sense of confidence and confidentiality on what was going to be done; the letter contained the most relevant information regarding the research, and the teacher explained this verbally for students to pose their questions, if any.

6 FINDINGS

In this section, five findings aim at developing and answering the research questions. Each finding will be described and supported with evidence and data, which provided the researchers with insights to explore Critical Thinking and its implementation in the English as a Foreign Language classroom.

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES ARE IMPORTANT TO BUILD CRITICAL THINKING AWARENESS IN AN ENGLISH CLASS THROUGH THE ABCD MODEL

In the implementation of a merged course, the dimensions of thought are monitored by the design of objectives. For this specific project, a model for designing objectives adapted from Mager (1962) has been implemented, called the ABCD model, which aims at providing a clear idea of the performance expected by teachers as the result of a lesson by designing specific and measurable objectives that guide both the teachers and the learners in the learning process.

The dimensions of thought belong to the theory of critical thinking developed by Richards (1993) and Bloom (1956). According to Richards (*ibid*), there are a number of aspects or instructional strategies related to the concept of critical thinking. Some of these are: drawing and clarifying conclusions, analysing the meaning of words or phrases, questioning deeply, comparing and contrasting ideas, noting significant similarities and differences, giving reasons, and exploring implications and consequences. These were the concepts that guided the design and implementation of the lesson.

Through the instructional design process, it has been scheduled the promotion of the dimensions of thought, for which it was necessary to define objectives. This was manifested in the reflective log of the second session, as is presented in the following data sample:

RL2-L14:

“The key to making these classes just like any other class is the learning objective.”

It is evident in the above sample of data that the implementation of specific model for objectives design has been crucial in the promotion of dimensions of thought for the students to develop critical thinking skills. In this particular merged course, it was of utmost importance to relate the content to in-class activities. Critical thinking needs to be emphasized in the language classroom from basic levels where students gain the benefits of mastering the skills while learning a new language. As explained by Harris (2012), raising critical thinking in students develops a different way of thinking, one that focuses on creating, inquiring and exploring new ideas. In the same fashion, Hooks (2009) states that critical thinking is an interactive process that requires both the teacher and the student and it encourages the initiative of every participant to think in a passionate way and to openly share their ideas in the classroom. However, the author holds that there is a need to create first a learning community together as to make learning useful and significant.

Thus, this aspect is fundamental and it presents a number of situations in which students are involved in tasks that require them to think critically. The evidence of the dimension of thought is also seen in the lesson plans in a specifically designed section, which allows for the teacher to focus different tasks to that dimension of thought.

Mager (1962) states the importance of designing clear lesson objectives that portray what is expected for learners to achieve. As reflected in this finding, the concept of the author is important in lesson planning in order to implement critical thinking in these kind of courses. By applying the model mentioned before, the teacher has been able to ease the process of designing the classes and relate the content, the topic and the dimensions of thought that were to be taken into consideration.

Not only is this process important to the teacher, but it is also very important for the student because it allows for them to understand the type of process they are going through in a classroom where critical thinking is merged with the language as mentioned in the following sample:

I2PM-L215

"El pensamiento crítico va más allá de lo que me imagine, así que con ciertas palabras que vemos en el tablero nos vamos guiando como a la estrategia que estamos implementando. "

I2PM-L215

["Critical Thinking goes much further than what I imagined, so with certain words that we saw on the board we are guided towards the strategy that we are implementing.]

During the implementation process, students were opened to having a good attitude about what critical thinking was and how they would expand this knowledge throughout the course. In the example above, the participant gives insight on what the ideal thoughts were of critical thinking and how specific words helped learners carry out activities that were related to critical thinking in a further level than expected. The student mentioned that critical thinking means more than they imagined. This is something that is essential because we can infer that the student had a completely different perception of the definition of critical thinking. The statement also shows that the participant probably knew less about the concept and through time, they gained more knowledge about it. It is evidenced that the students were presented with specific words on the board; this means that they had a word such as compare or interpret in order to see which dimension of thought was being used on that day of class. Needless to say, it is important to remember that students were in fact aware of the words because the teacher constantly reminded them of it and that each day a new word was presented relating to the class. Students had a limited idea of critical thinking which is why the use of specific activities in class helped them understand this concept better once they were able to see a relationship with the word on the board and critical thinking skills. In the example the clear evidence of how the use of a specific strategy is shown to the students on the board allows for them understand the activities in class and it allows for the process to continue. Students are given the chance to see the connection of the word to lesson plan objective that they also have access to on the board. Through this small action provoked by the teacher in the class, students got a perception of the methodology being implemented, which is a crucial factor for the students to know. The exposure to the methodology is very important because without a learning objective it is

difficult for students to know what they are supposed to be learning. It can be difficult for students to know where to direct their attention to. If the learning objective is not present, they could be spending time focused on things that are not necessary which takes away from the learning process as a whole.

6.2 BY USING THE I+1 LEVEL IN A BEGINNER COURSE, STUDENTS ANALYZE THROUGH SPECIFIC TASKS.

This project aimed at developing better foreign language education by helping students to be aware of how to use critical thinking skills. In this sense, the use of critical thinking skills must be implemented in the classroom through various tools. Considering the fact that this is a beginner level, course three, students have very little language to use, which is why many times teachers do not use critical thinking skills. It is observed in higher courses, though elementary courses hold back and lack the use of these skills. The implementation of these skills is best observed through specific tasks, which help students in their learning process. The evidence of specific tasks, however, creates a key connection between what is taught and how it is interpreted by the students making their learning meaningful through these tasks and helping them to achieve a higher level of understanding. As seen in the following sample, the teacher is able to evidence how these specific tasks help them understand the skills as well as the importance of critical thinking.

RL1-L56

"I saw them using some good thinking skills, which made it meaningful to continue. However I do have to say that they are all aware of what is going on, and I think right away they realized that I was making them analyze more than what they are usually asked to do."

As seen in the above sample, the teacher gives insight towards the implementation by stating how students were able to do more than they are usually asked to do, through a task, which made them analyze a situation. When the teacher says students were seen

using good thinking skills, it refers to an in-class activity in which learners were asked to identify morning or evening people in terms of their routines, and used the skills of comparing and contrasting. Moreover, it is mentioned that they are all aware of what is going on because, in this particular lesson, she noticed that students do realize that they are facing activities that require them to analyze more than usual.

It is also important to see how students evidenced their own progress through the task, which was meaningful. Students were using the thinking skills that helped them to reach a better level of understanding of the task by developing exercises about routines of people in different parts of a country, finding problems in a short statement, and then comparing their answers with their peers' ones as to see if they would have the same conclusion as well. However, the fact those students had to analyze more than what they usually do is closely related to the input hypothesis developed by Stephen Krashen. As explained by Krashen (1985), speaking is a result of acquisition and not only the cause of it; the speech we use which cannot be taught directly but instead emerges as a result of creating competence in students through comprehensible input. The idea of comprehensible input usually contains a structure that goes a little beyond the current understanding of the language learner. This occurs through exposure to comprehensible input, which is why here, the input is important to help students' progress through the tasks, and it was essential to provide the learner with the comprehensible input, which is beyond the competence they have. This is also evidenced through the following sample that the teacher provides from a different task:

RL4-L32

"This was good because they were able to infer whom they would be good for by analyzing the peers' information and information about three new people. Overall, the class was good and this activity worked great because in my point of view students are going beyond the language they know and are exploring more and are asking questions to make them think."

In the sample above it is very important to identify the strategy, which the teacher focused on for the class, which was the use of inferring information. Students were able to analyze more than one specific object at hand, by working on the analysis of three different things. From the teachers' perspective, this activity was good due to the fact that students have a language level, but are yet again evidencing the input hypothesis by going a little beyond what they know. They are able to ask questions, explore, and discuss more,

which is the +1 component in Stephen Krashen's theory. The following sample shows how the students' point of view comes into perspective, which evidences further the importance of Krashen's 1985 theory in a low course.

I2JM-L172

"Al usar las estrategias es importante porque pone nuestra mente a trabajar con diferentes actividades que vemos en clase y así es como se adquiere el conocimiento."

I2JM-L172

["It is important when using the strategies because it makes our mind work through different activities that we are exposed to in class, and this is how knowledge is acquired."]

In the sample provided, the students' point of view is evidenced, and it is important to help us understand why these tasks and strategies are key in a beginner English course. As mentioned by the students, the use of these strategies in a lower course does make their mind work. Using these different type of strategies and the combination with the activities that are in class, it allows students to develop a new, level of knowledge. The students are given a specific context and input hypothesis is important because of the way they use the information provided and helps them to build on the language they already had, by pushing them into new aspects of knowledge.

6.3 LEARNERS UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND SHARE REASONABLE CONCLUSIONS FROM COMPARISONS OF STATEMENTS THAT THEY INTERPRET AND TALK ABOUT WITH CLARITY, WHICH CREATES MEANINGFUL DICUSSIONS DURING THE CLASSES

During the lessons that took place for the collection of data of this project, the teacher has implemented in-class activities that require learners to understand, analyse, go beyond basic information and share reasonable conclusions of statements provided which they

could interpret and talk about. In turn, students have been able to create meaningful discussions during the classes. This type of activities included giving readings about daily routines of people in different parts of a country that could promote the students' ability to analyse and draw conclusions from them, as well as analysing pieces of information from which learners would have to infer and go beyond basic information. Additionally, pictures were used for students to interpret information, express what they were seeing, and give the reason to why they had such conclusion. As it has been seen during the lessons, class discussion provides an opportunity for students to think critically. According to Brookfield & Preskill (1999), in-class discussions have different advantages in the sense that they are a tool for learners to explore a diversity of perspectives, face students with the need to recognize and investigate their assumptions, encourage attentive and respectful listening, highlight differences, increase intellectual agility, prompt learners to be co-creators of knowledge, and develop their synthesis skills.

Richards (1993) proposes different dimensions of thought that develop critical thinking. In this case, analyzing requires learners to develop their own perspective and justify their opinions based on their skills to analyze the information provided by the teacher. Comparing and contrasting ideas require learners to carry out critical evaluation between facts and inferring provide conclusions, which give meaning to the information being analyzed.

Throughout the lessons, the implementation of activities that involve the concepts just mentioned is manifested in the following piece of data, taken from the second reflective log from the second class:

RL1-L38

“Regardless of it being such a short activity, this is where their comparisons came from considering that they had the same information. This happened because even though they had similar statements, they were able to identify things in a completely different way.”

As it can be seen in the above piece of data, the activities proposed by the teacher has shed results in the sense that learners have actually been able to analyse and identify things in a different way, by giving more reasonable conclusions of a problem provided by

the teacher during the lesson in concern, which proves that students are actually able to go beyond basic information by analysing them and getting to logical conclusions. In activities in which learners needed to identify a problem from a short statement, students make use of their skill to contrast own information to the one from different peers; therefore, conclusions were more reasonable and gave an actual solution to the problem. From this particular sample of data, it describes that comparing and contrasting ideas implies that learners have the ability to come up with new ideas and solutions to a problem, which is evident in the information taken from the second log. Similarly, the piece of evidence shows what Stenberg (1986) describes about critical thinking, who outlines that it is the mental process, strategies, and representations that people use to solve problems, in this case, the one presented by the facilitator during the lessons.

As mentioned before, in-class discussions ease students' learning process and increase their intellectual agility. Similarly, Ozer (2005) considers that critical thinking is an important goal in most fields and, in teaching, discussion is an excellent tool for developing students' reasoning skills because it gives teachers access to their thought processes and an opportunity to guide students to a higher level of thinking which is faster. In addition to this, the same authors hold the view that discussions develop the capacity for clear communication of ideas and meaning. With the implementation of in-class activities that required the learners to analyze information given by the teacher, students have found ways to interact, create conversations and meaningful discussion within the class with a lot of clarity, especially tasks that depend on something to compare on. For instance, in certain lessons students have been asked to go beyond information that is given and infer possible underlying reasons for that, as is the example of explaining why a person would sleep more hours during the weekends in comparison to her week routine.

The following piece of data attests to the information above. In the implementation of class activities, it has been evidenced that some of them do promote discussion in the classroom on the part of some of the learners who have been of help to the development of the classes. The sample is found in the second reflective log of the second class, in line number nine, as shown below:

RL2-L9

“The focus group seems to be what I expected; the three best students have been very useful because they participate the most in class. They always seem to find a way to interact, analyze and create more conversation and good, meaningful discussion within the class.”

This data show that the activities proposed by the teacher have facilitated conversation and discussion in the classroom. These activities require learners to be use critical thinking skills such as analysing and getting conclusions of problems, and to share with the group orally. In this merged course it has been necessary generate activities that not only provided students the chance to share their answers, but also to use different critical thinking skills to do so. The skills that have been developed by the participants were analysing and moving beyond basic information, making conclusions and interpreting statements. Through the application of in-class exercises that advocate for the growth of the preceding skills, the merged course in concern has been able to promote critical thinking awareness. Moreover, when the teacher states that there are three best students, it is important to clarify that five students formed the focus group. The three of them that are mentioned in the data excerpt showed a more participative attitude towards different in-class activities that promoted critical thinking and discussion, whereas the remaining two usually seemed shy and had more difficulties trying to develop what the teacher proposed.

Developing critical thinking is crucial for learners to become analytical in their performances. According to the author, the second language learning process has changed in the sense that students are now expected to use their critical thinking skills in understanding ideas both in printed materials and during spoken activities, in order for them to use their English as a source of communication. Similarly, Harris (2012) highlights the fact that raising critical thinking awareness in students develops a different way of thinking, one that focuses on creating, inquiring and exploring new ideas. This aspect, then, is fundamental for it presents a number of situations in which students are involved in tasks that require them to think critically. Thus, the activities that have been carried out with the focus group have responded to the need of developing students' ability to communicate, create discussions and to explore ideas that reach beyond what is being asked with the aim of solving problems, most especially in some of the learners who seemed more willing to speak and participate in the lessons.

6.4 OBSERVING, INFERRING AND LOOKING FOR SIMILARITIES IN THINGS THAT ARE SUPERFICIALLY DIFFERENT AND DIFFERENCES IN THINGS THAT ARE SUPERFICIALLY THE SAME ARE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING AND ANALYZING A PROBLEM.

In the same way, this merged course has explored some other critical thinking skills. As it has been mentioned, critical thinking skills belong to the theory developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. According to the author, these abilities promote higher forms of thinking in education such as analyzing and evaluating, rather than just remembering facts. By analyzing, facts and inferences are made and materials and concepts are separated in order to understand their organizational structure. The skills that have also been developed are observing, inferring, and looking for similarities in things that are superficially different and in things that are superficially the same. In the third questionnaire that was implemented, the participants of the study agree that, in order to find answers to a problem, it is necessary to search for similarities and differences. Similarly, the students believe that observing and inferring are effective strategies that can be used in order to draw conclusions from a problem as well as to have a broader view of it. In the words of Richard (1993), critical thinking strives to treat similar things similarly and different things differently; thus, things that are superficially similar are seldom significantly and essentially different, and vice versa. According to the author, for learners practice is the key to be able to see significant similarities and differences, which is achieved by reasoning in a different way that allows us to “become more careful and to discriminate in our use of words and phrases”. Concerning observation and inferring, Richard (1993) describes that these are two strategies that help learners to reach sound conclusions, that is, they are useful in seeing beyond the facts, in actually being able to decipher what such facts might imply.

These opinions have been expressed by the participants themselves when answering the seventh question from questionnaire number three, which was implemented in the middle of the course. An example of this is the following excerpt from the aforementioned questionnaire regarding students’ opinions about the critical thinking skills that have been explained:

Q3AG-L42

["Observación e inferencia, porque es más eficaz a la hora de sacar conclusiones de un posible problema."]

Q3AG-L42

["Observing and inferring because it is more effective for drawing conclusions from a possible problem."]

This participant in particular expressed the importance of observing and inferring when aiming at drawing conclusions from a possible problem. This was the general perception evidenced in the participants involved with regards to these two skills of critical thinking; moreover, there is a common sense among the students that observations and inferences are useful strategies for having a more ample view of a problem and for solving it faster. In addition to this, there were participants who gave similar opinions with reference to the skills of looking for similarities in things that are superficially different and differences in things that are superficially the same, as follows in the ensuing sample of data:

Q3PM-L23

"Andrentrarse en temas que no tienen nada parecido, es razonar con algo que al principio no tienen sentido a simple vista pero al enfocar el estudio se pueden encontrar conclusiones diferentes."

Q3PM-L23

["It means to go deep into a topic that has nothing in common, it means reasoning about something that does not make sense at a glance, but when we focus the study there may be found different conclusions"]

With the participants of this specific merged course, there were carried out a number of questionnaires that aimed at finding students' understanding of some critical thinking abilities such as observing, inferring, and looking for similarities and differences in order to

analyze and solve a problem. The answer given by this participant is similar to the previous one for they agree that looking for similarities in something that is superficially different and differences in something that is superficially the same means to explore topics that have nothing in common to the naked eye and in the end conclude that there are similarities or differences amongst them. This answer was found in questionnaire number 2.

As established in this finding, there is a conception that looking for similarities in things that are superficially different, and differences in things that are superficially the same, is important to the development of critical thinking skills that help learners to reach the solution of a problem by having a broader view of it and reaching conclusions from it. As explained by Richards, (1993), this skill requires that learners hesitate before accepting analogies or comparisons. In the words of Eggen & Kauchak (2001), critical thinking is the process of generating conclusions based on evidence; it implies that students are able to identify underlying assumptions in things that do not seem to give rise to them. Stenberg (1984) defends that critical thinking is a set of mental processes, strategies and representations used to make decisions, solve problems, and learn new things.

6.5 THROUGH THE LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS STUDENTS BECOME CONCIOUS OF UNDERSTANDING THEIR OWN CUSTOMS AND BEHAVIORS WHEN ANALYZING THEIR SURROUNDINGS.

Critical thinking allows people to gather relevant information, interpret the significance of different material, clarify meaning and examine a situation from various perspectives. A critical thinker must evaluate what has been learned and consider various options before arriving at a conclusion. It is a process that has many unexpected results and variables and can be open to change in order for successful outcomes to be reached. Success which many times can overcome the needs of students in a classroom and help them in real life situations. The way students and teachers approach critical thinking can be perceived through different strategies and activities as mentioned in previous findings. The main focus in this finding is to show the importance of applying these skills and strategies in the class, which will help students in the long term. If being implemented through a long period of time, students will be able to interpret them in various cases on their own, without

guidance from others. In the following sample, the student makes a clear statement about how the long-term effects of using critical thinking may be helpful in their life.

I2JM-L182

"Me ayudaría a largo plazo porque tendría mis propios pensamiento de las cosas teniendo en cuenta mis propias ideas podría ayudarme a mí y la sociedad que me rodea para ayudarles a resolver casos difíciles y les ayudaría a aceptar la situación de las cosas".

I2JM-L182

["It would help me in a long term because I would have my own conceptions about things by taking into consideration my ideas, which could help me and the society in order for them to be able to solve and understand difficult life situations."]

This excerpt is taken from an interview with a student, who states that using critical thinking will help in the long term. There is a clear acceptance of the important of implementing this in class because it will help students build their own thoughts of things that surround students and their society. The students mentions specific types of strategies, which have been implemented, and help with the applicability in real life not only for students but also other people. In addition, different implications are expressed by stating that people may use these same strategies by adapting them in different ways according to the situation presented. It will help students in the long term not only to become better people but also to make them conscious of the situations around them and how to face them. According to Paul & Elder (1998), the referred by the participant is called "intellectual empathy" and it is one of the authors' proposed Valuable Intellectual Traits theory. It means that we have a consciousness of the need to understand others by putting ourselves in their place which can be achieved by disregarding our egocentric tendencies in order to "reconstruct accurately the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own." Additionally, Paul & Elder (1998) state that this trait is also concerned with remembering and accepting occasions in the past in which we have been wrong and struggle against our need to believe that we were right.

In the following sample, from a different method implemented, there is a discussion about the importance of critical thinking in the society as well by stating the following:

I1CS-L114

"Porque el pensamiento crítico, tanto como crear una mejor sociedad y tanto como un mejor desarrollo de lo que se esté analizando, crea personas más auténticas. Forma personas capaces de enfrentar situaciones difíciles y manejarlas de acuerdo a su lógica, y razonamiento más adecuado. "

I1CS-L114

["Because critical thinking creates more authentic people, both for creating a better society and a better development of what is being analyzed. It creates people who are able to face and manage difficult situations in accordance with their logical abilities as well as a more adequate thinking process."]

Porque el pensamiento crítico, tanto como crear una mejor sociedad y tanto como un mejor desarrollo de lo que se esté analizando, crea personas más auténticas. Forma personas capaces de enfrentar situaciones difíciles y manejarlas de acuerdo a su lógica, y razonamiento más adecuado. "

In the sample provided above, the student is able to describe how critical thinking helps not only society but people in particular. It can be inferred that critical thinking helps to develop a better idea of what is being analyzed and that by doing this there are then more authentic people. Moreover, people who face hard situations will have the capacity to reason better and use their logic as a way to achieve it. In this sense, Chandler (1990) creates an argument that critical thinking-promoting curriculum enhances the development of responsible citizens with a higher moral and intellectual commitment, which would influence society in a positive way.

7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although this study has shed important findings in the field of critical thinking skills and teaching in the local context, it is necessary to note a number of limitations that the researchers found during the development of the project.

The main constraints are expressed as follows: the first limitation concerns lesson planning. To put it in another way, the teacher faced some difficulties when designing the classes due to a lack of knowledge of the dimensions of thought, which became worse considering that students had never been taught any lessons related to critical thinking; as it was mentioned before, in Colombian education this is an aspect which is often relegated to a second place. As authors highlight, improving thinking requires a conscious commitment to learn in order to be able to follow the gradual process that leads to bettering the way we reason, but in a context where little attention is put to this side of teaching, this becomes more difficult to achieve.

The second and final limitation regards teaching activities. The researchers found that the tasks for basic English courses are rather limited; there is not enough information about this aspect on the internet; therefore, planning became more time-consuming than expected, and that is without mentioning the need to select in-class activities that were completely coherent with the dimensions of thought to be explored. Additionally to this constraint, the time for carrying out the lessons was too short. As a result of this, in some cases the teacher had to end the class in the middle of an important activity and do it the following day or week. In this sense, it can be said that the continuity of the process was also affected to some extent.

8 RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Parting from the present research experience, a number of opportunities for future research on critical thinking awareness in beginner level courses of English raised. The following are some of the research implications that emerged from this study.

As stated by Harris (2012), it is beneficial to raise critical thinking awareness in students from basic language courses in order to help them to develop a new way of thinking. However, Hooks (2009) believes that this is only achieved when there is an interactive process that prompts learners to think in a passionate way and share their thoughts with the whole class. In this sense, it was evident in the process that the group of students was divided into two teams that had both different English levels; some of these students were more willing to participate and to give answers to in-class activities in a faster way when the teacher posed different questions. In the opinion of the researchers, it is necessary to consider learners' personality when carrying out research that has to do with critical thinking in the classroom. It was noted during the analysis of data that the three more participative students were more extrovert while the remaining two took longer to answer and seemed doubtful to share their answers. Considering this, in order to make the process more effective and to help all the students to take the greatest advantage of lessons related to critical thinking skills, future studies should focus on learners' personality traits, how these affect language classes, how to deal with them, and how to make the process as interactive as possible, as Hooks (2012) suggests. In addition to this, the researchers also recommend making some methodological changes in terms of the target population. Worded differently, it would be beneficial to implement the project in more advanced English courses with learners. In this way, it would be possible to ensure that students all feel comfortable and more confident to participate of the process using the language appropriately.

The second research implication has to do with the data collection methods to be used. During the process of analysing the data, the researchers found that reflective logs do represent an important method for collecting relevant information about the lessons. Nonetheless, from the experience it is important to highlight that this type of information should be recorded in a very explicit way with the purpose of expanding the view of what occurs in the classroom, why it occurs, what activities take place, what they are about, what are students' perceptions, and some other aspects pertaining to the current research project.

In point of fact, Moon (2004) holds the view that reflection should be descriptive and should provide opportunities for the researcher to be thoughtful and critical when gathering relevant data. Similarly, Symon (2004) points out that, in qualitative inquiry, reflective writing is relevant for it allows the researcher to thoughtfully report and question their experiences, feelings, thoughts and interpretations of these in order to make data as clear as possible. Thus, for future research the implication is to carry out reflections in a more clear way, with the aim of improving the quality of the data and strengthening the process of triangulation.

With reference to pedagogical implications, the first suggestion to take into account in order to foster critical thinking in the language classroom is the use of the ABCD Model for designing lesson objectives, which was implemented in the current research project. In accordance with Gagné (1974), teachers should first set what learners need to be able to do after the instruction that they could not do before in order to start writing the objectives. Mager (1962) states that these need to be descriptive and to provide a clear idea of what one expects as a result of the lesson. To achieve this, the same author presents some important elements to be taken into consideration, which are: the audience, that is, the language level of the students; the behaviour, which should be described using an observable verb; the condition, and finally, the degree, which refers to how well students must perform using a scale that should be determined by teachers themselves. From the experience of the researchers, learners should also be informed of the importance of knowing the aim to be achieved at the end of the lesson for it gives them a clear idea of what they are expected to achieve.

In addition to the above, it is equally advisable that for this type of projects, teachers design tasks that are in accordance with learners' current language level and the intended dimensions of thought. Krashen (1985) defends that comprehensible input should be considered in relation with students' competences in the language. In the same way, Smith (1998) assures that the development of a second language is equally related to students' belief that they are able to speak the language so that their motivation and their attitude help them to achieve the goals of the lesson. Krashen's theory (ibid) entails that we acquire language and literacy when we are able to understand messages whether in a written or in an oral way. However, such messages should have a level of comprehensible input. Therefore, in-class activities need to be aligned with students' capacities without going too far beyond their current level so that learning takes place. Similarly, to achieve this it is necessary for the teacher to be thoughtful as to find not only how certain dimension of

thought can be related to an activity, but also to what extent such activity is related to the topic of the class and to the skill to be explored during this time.

9 CONCLUSIONS

The current study aimed at exploring the challenges, perceptions and implications of Critical Thinking and its implementation in the English as a Foreign Language classroom through a merged course in a private language institute in Pereira. The complete research process allowed the researchers to categorize the results into different sections that were found. Taking into account the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that through the long-term implementation of critical thinking skills, students became conscious of understanding their own customs and behaviors when analyzing the things that surround them. Furthermore, it was found that there are many important aspects that need to be taken into account in order to implement this into a beginning level, merged class.

Firstly, we must understand the impact that this project had in the life of the participants. Students expressed their own understanding of the process that they went through, which helped them to become aware of the critical thinking skills that were presented to them during the time of the study. It was perceived by the students that the implementation and understanding of the critical thinking skills would help them in the long term in their personal life. There was clear acceptance of understanding the relevance of what was presented in the class, to what they might need in their own life, considering that specific strategies were implemented. This is a topic that is explored by Paul & Elder (1998) called "intellectual empathy" which helps us to understand the different viewpoints and reasoning's of others, different from our own ideas and beliefs. Initially, students lacked a clear understanding of the definition of critical thinking, and were surprised to see the differences in their own beliefs to what was being implemented. They were able to increase their own intellectual empathy by identifying further viewpoints of various topics. Furthermore, it is also possible to refer to Chandler (1990) who argues how critical thinking-promoting curriculum helps to create citizens that are more responsible. This finding was unexpected to the researchers, as it was believed that critical thinking in the merged course would create a sense of knowledge of the different skills, but it was not expected to have a personal impact on the life of the learners. The researchers have agreed that students went from having very little knowledge and understanding of critical thinking skills, to being guided correctly in order to reach a level of comprehension of the skills that were used and that they would personally consider useful throughout their lives later on. Therefore, it is

concluded that teachers and students need to know the importance of developing critical thinking skills in their lives, through a long term process so that students are more conscious of their own surroundings, their own differences to others that will help them to appreciate the society they live in, and add to the community in a positive way.

The second important aspect is the use of a clear learning objective developed through the ABCD Model proposed by Mager (1962). The study presented through various different components that made it possible to implement critical thinking skills in a merged course. Considering that the course was a beginner level course, many important elements needed to be taken into account in order for the success of students in the class to be achieved. One of these key elements was the learning objective in the class. It is particularly important to know and to understand that the learning objective is presented through the ABCD Model, showing the different dimensions of thought. This was evidenced by the teacher in the class and it is evidenced by Mager (1962) who states the importance of the clear lesson objectives in order to know what to expect the learners to achieve. It was essential for the participant of the study, in this case the teacher to sit and analyze the best possible way to integrate the class with the learning objective, but the use of the mentioned model in particular made it easier to design a successful learning objective for the class. Those who will implement critical thinking skills in future classes will also have to go through a similar process. For the teacher, who was a key participant in the project, it was not easy to get used to the way to implement this model since it is a process that takes practice and time due to the dimensions of thought and to other key elements that must be considered. Nonetheless, with time the person in charge of developing the model for the class will understand the dimensions of thought and will see further advantages of having a clear objective in order to guide the activities that will then take place in the class.

The dimensions of thought relate directly to the concept of critical thinking and the particular strategies used. It is important to note that, unfortunately, the learning objective is not usually taken into account by the students as an important element of the class, but during this study, the objective was presented to them, and therefore given the attention needed for the students to know what to expect as an outcome towards the end of the class. Due to this, it was concluded that through the dimensions of thought a clear learning objective must be defined, through the specific implementation of a model that will promote the critical thinking skills.

The third key conclusion is the importance of the comprehensible input implemented in a beginner course. There were various different tasks implemented to demonstrate how to use the different skills correctly in the merged course, although it was necessary to guide the students in the implementation because it was a beginning level. The amount of information given to students and the way it was implemented made a difference when using the critical thinking skills, which was what the researchers originally intended. As expressed by both, the students and the teachers throughout the implementation, specific tasks helped students in their learning process. Using the specific tasks allows students to make a connection to the lesson and interpret the information in a meaningful way. This concept relates to Krashen's theory of language acquisition (1985) with relevance to how students' competences need to be obtained, and why they need good comprehensible input. During classes, teachers find ways to integrate the topics to the class in a cohesive form, but in many cases, it may be difficult to truly see how meaningful an activity can be. A lot of thought was given to each activity from the teacher, who was one of the main participants in the research. It is not simply a matter of finding one activity and implementing but also analyzing how it can be extended and adapted to the class. It is also important to see how the task will be affected when compared with the skill or dimension of thought taken into account for the specific lesson. It is then concluded, through the analysis of the data, that in beginner courses the tasks that are implemented are specific to help students to advance in their language learning process, but it is important to keep in mind the use of comprehensible input in order for learners to go beyond the level of understanding that they have.

Amongst the inquiries found in the project, another important piece of evidence is the specific types of strategies and how to implement them in class. According to the data collected, many meaningful conversations in class were created through reading, writing, listening and speaking activities in which students had to infer information. Brookfield & Preskill (1999) argue the importance of these in-class discussions considering the many advantages for students. Through the tasks implemented, both teacher and students were able to see different results in terms of how to analyze each task. In some cases, students had to infer specific details to come up with a conclusion to a problem that they were hypothetically faced with. There were also scenarios in which students had to compare life styles and discuss the differences between cultures other than their own. This type of activities was very helpful because they were meaningful, and helped the teacher to identify how the students reacted to the information presented. This was expressed in the reflective

logs with the teacher's point of view. Through the questionnaires, students expressed the knowledge learned about critical thinking and were able to argue how they were able to use the skills provided in order to contrast the information provided, reach reasonable conclusions and clearer solutions to problems presented. Richards (1993) discusses the different dimensions of thought, which help in the development of critical thinking skills, such as understanding and analyzing. This is essential for a teacher to understand given the fact that it helps key point the specific type of dimensions of thought that work in a critical thinking language, merged class. With that said, it is concluded that learners are able to create meaningful discussion in class by comparing and interpreting statements through understanding, analyzing of specific tasks proposed by the teacher in order to reach a reasonable conclusion on their own.

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11 APPENDIX A

FOSTERING AWARENESS OF CRITICAL THINKING THROUGHOUT THE A1 LEVELS.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por la Docente Andrea Milena Quintero Ortiz. Este estudio de investigación contribuirá a la tesis de la docente como uno de los requisitos de graduación. El estudio será dirigido durante el periodo de un mes por la docente, quien participara como investigadora y observadora de las clases de Inglés en el Centro Colombo Americano.

PROPÓSITO DEL ESTUDIO:

Identificar las percepciones, creencias, y características del pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes del programa y qué estrategias se pueden aplicar en escenarios de inglés como lengua extranjera. El proyecto tiene la intención de responder a la pregunta de investigación:

1. Al enseñar las habilidades del pensamiento crítico a principiantes de inglés en un instituto, como se promueven las habilidades de pensamiento de orden inferior en el nivel A1?

2. Hasta qué punto impacta la enseñanza de habilidades de pensamiento crítico a los estudiantes del nivel A1 en el instituto.

PROCEDIMIENTOS Y ACTIVIDADES

Se harán algunas preguntas acerca de las actividades que se realizan en clase y cómo va el desarrollo de las habilidades que va adquiriendo durante el curso.

1. La docente empezara las observaciones el 14 de Agosto del 2015 en el instituto centro Colombo Americano al nivel 3.

2. Algunas observaciones se registrarán para obtener información completa de que el estudio de investigación requiere.

3. Las clases de idiomas se observarán todos los días de una forma muy habitual por la docente sin cambiar la dinámica de las clases.

4. Los estudiantes recibirán un cuestionario de inglés Online cada jueves al finalizar la clase.

5. Los estudiantes serán entrevistados dos veces durante el ciclo, al principio de las clases y al finalizar las clases.

6. Las entrevistas de los estudiantes se registrarán sólo para propósitos de recopilación de datos.

7. No hay ningún incentivo pago a participar en este estudio.

Beneficios potenciales para los participantes y / o la sociedad

Los centros culturales de la ciudad incluyendo el Colombo Americano se unieron para definir el objetivo del bilingüismo en la región. Para mayor beneficio de los estudiantes el pensamiento crítico debe estar incluido en el currículo pero aún no ha sido incluido en las clases de lengua inglesa, de tal forma que este proyecto tendrá como objetivo desarrollar las habilidades del pensamiento crítico en el aula desde los niveles más bajos a través de diferentes estrategias que ayudaran a desarrollar y fomentar en los estudiantes no sólo conocimientos y estrategias aplicadas pero también habilidades que requieren procesos complejos del pensamiento y valores relacionados al contenido.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Cualquier información obtenida en relación con este estudio se mantendrá confidencial y será revelada solamente con su permiso.

1. Los seudónimos serán utilizados en toda la documentación relacionada con este proyecto de investigación. Todos los datos y la información recogida serán utilizados exclusivamente para este proyecto de investigación y para ningún otro propósito. Los datos

y la información (con seudónimos) sólo se proporcionan a la Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira como él (la investigación) componente tesis requerido para la graduación.

2. Si se deben registrar las actividades, sólo el investigador mencionado tendrán acceso a ellos. La información recabada sólo será utilizada o muestra para cumplir el requisito de la investigación y para ningún otro propósito. Una vez, la investigación es completa, se borrarán todas las grabaciones.

PARTICIPACIÓN Y RETIRO

Usted puede optar por participar en este estudio puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin penalización o pérdida. También puede negarse a responder a cualquier pregunta que no quiera contestar y aún así permanecer en el estudio.

IDENTIFICACIÓN DE INVESTIGADORES Y JUNTA DE REVISIÓN

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud acerca de la investigación, no dude en ponerse en contacto con: Andrea Milena Quintero (aq.ortiz1104@hotmail.com)_Andrés Mejía (andres.mejia@colombopereira.com) Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira (lenguainglesa@utp.edu.co)

FIRMA DE PARTICIPANTE

Entiendo los procedimientos descritos anteriormente. Mis preguntas han sido contestadas a mi satisfacción, y estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio. Se me ha proporcionado copia de este formulario.

Nombre del Participante

Firma del Participante

Fecha

INVESTIGADOR:

A mi juicio, el participante es voluntario y da su consentimiento a consciencia para participar en este estudio de investigación.

Firma de Investigador designado

12 APPENDIX B

OBSERVATIONS AND INFERENCES

- A. In the space provided give a short paragraph of what is happening to the person in the picture. Tell me what you are seeing, what are the people doing and why they may possibly be doing that.



They have a date. He is wearing a blue jeans and a shirt red, she is wearing a sweater purple and a necklace brown. They are not talking because he is checking his new cell phone that he buy in flamingo. She is very mad and she is thinking that he has girlfriend and children and he only wants play with her. He is downloading whatsapp to he can chat with she. She is crazy, obsessive and in this moment she think in broken his cellphone. They are discussed in Latin Chat.

13 APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS	METHOD	CODE	CATEGORY	FINDINGS
<p>How is CT awareness manifested throughout a Course that merged CTS in a basic English Level?</p>	<p>INTERVIEW II QUESTIONNA IRE I</p>	<p>I2AG-L20 I2JM-L172 Q1AL-L65 Q1CS-L97</p>	<p>Using specific tasks and material, helps students develop knowledge on each skill to identify situations, which need further analysis in the class.</p>	<p>The ABCD model is essential for teachers to develop a learning objective that is aligned with the content of each topic and with the specific tasks and materials in class in order for there to be clear evidence of which dimensions of thought are being used, while</p>
<p>How could CTS Be implemented in a basic English Lg Course?</p>	<p>INTERVIEW II QUESTIONNA IRE I QUESTIONNA IRE III</p>	<p>I2AL-L82 I2PM-L215 I2AG-L13 I2AL-71 Q1CS-L88 I2PM-L233</p>	<p>Seeing a clear methodology, guides students towards understanding strategies that are directly related to critical thinking.</p> <p>By regularly practicing the way to evaluate situations students can make changes in their personal customs and behaviors.</p> <p>The constant use of evaluating a given situation and analyzing problems can be implemented as a way</p>	<p>allowing the students to identify the type of methodology applied.</p> <p>Understanding strategies that are directly related to critical thinking emerge from the use of specific tasks and materials that makes students analyze further what they are used to doing, especially in a low course, pushing them to the i+1 ideology.</p>

			<p>to deliberately practice critical thinking skills.</p> <p>Guiding the use of strategies that evaluate a given situation allow a deliberate analysis through logic and reasoning.</p> <p>ABCD model prompts students to analyze more than they are used to do.</p> <p>The learning objective of the lessons should be aligned with the topic and the content, and related to the dimensions of thought.</p> <p>Activities that require learners to analyze and explore information make learners infer and go beyond the language they know.</p> <p>Lesson plans that include noting significant and differences are hard to design because the</p>	<p>By regularly making students practice hypothetical situations where they analyze their surroundings, they become more capable of understanding their own customs and behaviors helping them be conscious of how critical thinkers can help the society around them by forming well-structured perceptions.</p> <p>Learners understand, analyse, and share reasonable conclusions from comparisons of statements that they interpret and talk about with clarity, which creates meaningful discussions during the classes in finding.</p> <p>Observing, inferring and looking for similarities in things that are superficially different and differences in things</p>
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			<p>teacher needs to help learners to go deeper into things that are apparently the same.</p> <p>Looking for differences and similarities in life situations helps learners to solve problems and to make decisions.</p>	<p>that are superficially the same are effective strategies for solving and analysing a problem.</p>
<p>How do the merged course lessons promote so CT awareness?</p>	<p>INTERVIEW I</p> <p>INTERVIEW II</p> <p>QUESTIONNAIRE I</p>	<p>I2JM-L186</p> <p>I2CS-L130</p> <p>I2CS-L138</p> <p>I1AG-L20</p> <p>I1CS-L114</p> <p>Q1CS-L93</p> <p>I2CS-L135</p> <p>I2JM-L182</p> <p>I2PM-L209</p> <p>Q1AG-L18</p> <p>Q1AG-L29</p> <p>Q1AL-L69</p> <p>Q1CS-L102</p> <p>Q1PM-L163</p> <p>Q3PM-L148</p> <p>Q3JM-L134</p> <p>Q3AL-L74</p> <p>Q3AG-L11</p>	<p>Including merged lessons create a possibility of having more than one solution to a problem, while allowing students to be more analytical through promoted strategies like comparing, exploring and looking for differences and similarities.</p> <p>While being put in hypothetical situations students are more capable of understanding that the practice involved in becoming critical makes them conscious of how critical thinkers can help not only</p>	

		<p>Q3JM-L117</p> <p>Q1PM-L153</p>	<p>themselves but the society around them.</p> <p>Merged lessons promote knowledge of critical thinking to students by helping them use their capacities to observe their own surroundings and later on build their own well-structured perceptions.</p> <p>Comparing can be implemented as a critical thinking skill that takes more time in terms of the process it is given in a class but helps students judge the outcome of two or more distinct behaviors.</p> <p>Observing and inferring are effective strategies for solving and drawing conclusions from a possible problem (as well as for having a broader view of it).</p>	
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