



When Word Becomes Thought: An Analysis of the Written Word Creating Critical Thinking in an ESL Setting

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Abstract

The ability to read and fully comprehend is a major step in an individual's education. The same text on the page speaks differently to each person. Historically, information was disseminated orally through storytellers and scribes, as Jean-Paul Sartre notes in his autobiography 'Les Mots' (1964), where he describes the difference between being told a story and being read one by his mother. The path of understanding whatever subject matter is being read subtly alters everything, moving the words from the page to the conscious grasp of meaning and the 'texture' of the words. What do we mean by 'texture' in this context? Texture, broadly, can be contextualized and broken down into superficial meaning, detailed in-depth meaning, subconscious meaning that may be attributed to it, and the reader's grasp of it. Mikhail Bakhtin speaks of heteroglossia, and Louise Rosenblatt speaks of the efferent-aesthetic scale while reading and assimilating the written word. We use the term 'language' even though the spoken word differs from what is on the page or in other media, such as a computer screen. Our understanding also brings about dimensions and grades of perception. In an ESL setting, especially, being able to layer multiple processes of literary theory and outlook helps to deepen and widen understanding and perspective significantly. Readers can tether their reading to these to enhance their reading experience rather than be confined to rote learning and explanatory frameworks. They build their own scaffolding, and this architecture is unique to each reader.

1. Introduction

In his book *Literature against Fundamentalism*, Tabish Khair argues that thought and language are indivisible in human beings, and that is sufficient without too much argument. In an ESL setting, the reader enters the learning curve with a preconceived thought process that includes more than one known language, environmental conditioning that may or may not align with the literature being read, and, more importantly, a fluid sense of grammar that may affect understanding. Especially when English is not the main language, there is wiggle room for understanding it in a slightly wrong or incomplete manner. When a word becomes the catalyst for a thought, analyzing the written word fosters critical thinking in an ESL setting. This scholarly and pedagogical proposal links language analysis with higher-order reasoning. To explain this in a deconstructed manner would be to show the pattern of thought that emerges as a reaction to the subject matter and the ensuing understanding, analysis, and outcome of this. The topic shows how explicit attention to textual features, argument structure, and discourse practices can cultivate interpretive and evaluative skills in learners of English as a second language, supporting both language proficiency and academic reasoning. Grounded in theoretical frameworks such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and genre-based pedagogy, the approach emphasizes how genre, lexicogrammar, and textual moves shape

meaning and stance in disciplinary texts. By teaching students to interrogate purpose, evidence, and authorial intent, educators aim to transform reading and writing into collaborative acts of inquiry that develop critical thinking alongside language development.

In practice, classrooms employ text-analysis strategies, metacognitive guidance, and explicit instruction in cohesion and discourse markers, paired with evidence-based reading approaches and, when appropriate, structured literacy. Proponents argue that such practices support higher-order reasoning, improve comprehension, and enable learners to articulate reasoned judgments in English, though researchers acknowledge mixed empirical results and the need for careful framing and fidelity to pedagogy.

Despite broad enthusiasm, the field recognizes challenges and debates regarding how to define and measure critical thinking in ESL, the potential risks of rhetorical manipulation if tasks are poorly scaffolded, and the variability of outcomes across contexts. Ongoing work seeks robust, reliable assessment methods and context-sensitive curricular designs, including models like SILVER for aligning purposes, content, and assessment in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs

When a thought arises, analyzing written text fosters critical thinking in an ESL setting. Critical thinking is a foundational skill in language learning that enables learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, thereby improving academic and communicative performance in English.

In ESL education, developing these skills helps students interpret texts, challenge assumptions, and articulate reasoned judgments in a second language

Defining critical thinking involves recognizing perspectives, evaluating evidence, and constructing well-reasoned analyses. Practical guidance emphasizes taking a critical stance toward texts, paying close attention to how arguments are constructed, and situating reading within broader contexts or sources

Classroom practices often include activities that require collaboration, creativity, and sustained reasoning, enabling students to challenge themselves and apply thinking strategies meaningfully. The ability to analyze written text in ESL is closely linked to broader linguistic comprehension, including semantics, pragmatics, syntax, and discourse. As such, a structured approach to literacy—often described as Structured Literacy—supports the development of linguistic comprehension, which in turn underpins effective critical thinking in reading and writing. Ongoing discourse on language and thought also clarifies how language use shapes interpretation, with research highlighting that language can influence perception and reasoning across contexts.

2. Background and Foundations

The development of critical thinking in ESL and EAP contexts has been pursued through a range of pedagogical approaches and theoretical frameworks that emphasize explicit reasoning, dialogue, and metacognitive awareness. Early work on thinking skills and reasoning standards has influenced classroom practices aimed at cultivating student inquiry and analytical discourse in language education.

In particular, scholars have explored how structured dialogue and explicit pedagogy can promote critical thinking among language learners, with studies highlighting methods to engage students in examining assumptions and evaluating evidence.

The field has also drawn on theories of universal elements and standards of reasoning to inform writing and composition in secondary and postsecondary settings. Research examining Richard Paul's framework for reasoning emphasizes elements such as purpose, question, information, interpretation, and implications, which have been applied to tasks such as argumentative writing and critical analysis in ESL contexts

Related work has investigated how targeted reasoning prompts and controversial dialogues can enhance critical thinking, with empirical attention to dialogue-based activities that challenge learners to articulate their reasoning and justify their conclusions. Several practical

instructional strategies have emerged to foster critical thinking in language classrooms. For example, structured activities that involve comparing outlines, integrating information from multiple sources, and constructing new representations of content have been used to promote higher-order thinking and collaborative problem-solving. Other classroom innovations include interactive formats such as Inside-Outside Circles, site visits, and themed “Game Nights” designed to provoke discussion of big ideas and motivate sustained engagement with content, thereby supporting critical inquiry in a real-world context. The use of visual and location-based activities, including classroom maps and geographic skill tasks, has been described as a means to develop spatial reasoning and communication competencies alongside critical thinking. In addition to discipline-specific planning, researchers have proposed broader course-design frameworks that link purposes, progress measures, disciplinary integration, varied formats, extended delivery time, and reinforcement of topics as core components of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course design. One such framework, known as SILVER, articulates specific considerations for aligning EAP content with disciplinary study while accommodating diverse formats and pacing to reinforce key topics.

Understanding how learners process texts and acquire reading comprehension skills also underpins the development of critical thinking in ESL contexts. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies play a central role in reading, with research noting that competent readers rely on explicit instruction in phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and metacognitive monitoring to support comprehension. Foundational work in metacognition identifies the roles of awareness, planning, monitoring, and regulation in second-language reading, informing instructional approaches that foster students' reflective and strategic engagement with texts. Meta-analyses and syntheses of reading strategies emphasize the distinction between cognitive strategies (direct interaction with text) and metacognitive strategies (management and evaluation of one's own reading processes) as essential components of effective reading instruction in ESL settings. The rationale for critical literacy instruction in language education, including the development of inference and argumentative reasoning, rests on the need for learners to actively engage with texts, draw evidence-based conclusions, and negotiate meaning in social and academic contexts. Emphasis on making inferences and connecting textual clues to prior knowledge and evidence supports deeper comprehension and critical interpretation rather than passive reception of information.

This body of work informs teaching practices that aim to cultivate students' ability to think critically while developing language proficiency. Across these strands, ongoing research addresses the challenges of cohesion and coherence in ESL/EFL writing, highlighting the importance of constructing well-organized paragraphs with clear topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding statements. Scholarly work on writing pedagogy points to cohesive devices and structured paragraph development as fundamental to effective communication, reinforcing the link between language accuracy, clarity, and critical reasoning in written discourse.

3. Theoretical Frameworks Linking Text Features to Critical Thinking

The integration of text features with critical thinking in ESL education rests on well-established theoretical frameworks that connect language structure, discourse, and meaning to higher-order cognitive skills. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a central framework for interpreting language in context, focusing on how lexicogrammar and genre shape meaning within specific situations. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a functional approach to grammar, originating with Michael Halliday, that emphasizes how clause structure and lexical choices realize social purposes within particular genres.

Genre-based pedagogy, developed from SFL, teaches students the typical lexicogrammatical patterns and textual structures of genres in context, thereby enabling learners to analyze texts for purpose, stance, and evidence within disciplinary settings.

This approach supports critical analysis by making explicit the textual moves writers use to persuade, inform, or argue, thereby foregrounding the evaluation and synthesis components of critical thinking. In parallel, text-analysis-centered strategies advocate moving beyond surface features to interrogate texts for arguments, evidence, and multiple perspectives. Research and practice under “TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH TEXT ANALYSIS” emphasize that critical thinking develops as students learn to evaluate information, interpret authorial intent, and assess the credibility and structure of arguments within texts. Foundational discussions of critical thinking describe it as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, aligning with the goals of deep textual analysis and interpretation in ESL contexts. Thamrin, Margana, and Widodo highlight higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, reflection, evaluation, and judgment as necessary for a deeper understanding of texts, noting the role of prior knowledge and emotional engagement in connecting readers to texts. In connecting these frameworks to classroom practice, researchers argue that disciplinary literacy and discourse analysis—rooted in SFL and genre-based pedagogy—enhance ELs' academic language and literacy while deepening comprehension of disciplinary texts. This theoretical stance is supported by the literature, which shows that SFL-based approaches facilitate content learning for English learners and help link textual features to the meaningful interpretation and evaluation of arguments. In John Dewey's educational theory, critical thinking examines the beliefs and preexisting knowledge that individuals use to assess situations and make decisions. If such beliefs and knowledge are faulty or unsupported, they will lead to faulty assessments and decision-making. In essence, Dewey advocated for a scientific mindset in approaching problem-solving.

In addition, studies on content-area pedagogy and reading comprehension emphasize that critical thinking in reading requires students to identify key textual elements, generate questions, and use graphic organizers to map relationships among ideas, claims, and evidence within texts. Taken together, these theoretical strands—SFL-driven genre analysis, discourse-aware instruction, and text-analysis approaches—provide a cohesive framework for linking text features to critical thinking. They suggest that teaching students to recognize genre expectations, analyze lexical choices and syntactic patterns, interrogate authorial claims, and connect textual cues to broader disciplinary knowledge fosters higher-order cognitive processing and more sophisticated, reflective reading in ESL settings.

4. Mechanisms: From Written Words to Thought

Words do more than convey information; they actively shape cognition and influence how learners think, perceive, and engage with language. The links between written language and thought span psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical dimensions. Linguistic relativity and cognitive shaping. The Sapir-Whorf framework posits that language influences thought processes and the organization of experience, suggesting that different languages can structure reality in distinct ways. This implies that the words students read and write can subtly steer categorization, judgment, and problem-solving, particularly when navigating multiple languages. Bilingual individuals often report feeling different versions of themselves when switching languages, reflecting how cultural and linguistic frameworks embedded in words shape emotions, decisions, and moral reasoning.

Understanding these differences highlights that language is not merely a neutral vehicle for information but a window into diverse ways of knowing. The neuroscience of words and intentional communication: Neuroscientific research indicates that positive and negative words exert measurable effects on neural pathways, influencing stress, reward processing, and emotional regulation. Thoughtful word choice can activate reward circuits and reduce tension, while habitual exposure to negative wording may reinforce anxiety and threat responses. These findings underscore that what we write and how we frame it can physically alter the brain's response patterns. Moreover, the way we frame sentences—such as replacing "You're wrong" with "I see it differently—here's why"—can shift tone, reception, and psychological distance,

thereby guiding cognitive processing during reading and discussion. Purpose, rhetoric, and metacognitive awareness in writing. Understanding the purpose behind a text helps students interpret and produce writing more effectively, fostering critical thinking about language use in real-world contexts. When learners analyze why an author wrote a piece and what action the author seeks from readers, they sharpen rhetorical awareness and the ability to evaluate arguments. This process links to ESL instruction that emphasizes designing moves, strategies, and audience considerations in writing.

The ability to interrogate purpose, audience, and genre helps learners recognize how language choices aim to persuade, inform, or motivate action. Semantics, syntax, and coherence as cognitive scaffolds: Language structure—syntax, morphology, and word order—interacts with meaning (semantics) to shape comprehension and interpretation. Semantics covers word meanings, connotations, and figurative language, while syntax governs how words are organized to build sentences and coherence. For ESL learners, building vocabulary (including Tier 2 and higher-order words) and understanding semantic relationships enhances the capacity to analyze texts critically and to produce more cogent arguments.

Pragmatics, framing, and social interpretation: Pragmatics concerns language use in context—how speakers convey and interpret meaning beyond literal content. Texts and classroom discourse often involve framing, a process by which particular associations and interpretations accompany terms, subtly guiding readers toward specific responses. Recognizing framing enables students to interrogate how language constructs problems and potential reactions, strengthening critical literacy and rhetorical analysis.

Instructional moves that cultivate critical thinking about written language.

Effective ESL instruction integrates metacognitive strategies with explicit attention to how language is used in real-world writing. Practices such as using semantic webs to map relationships between vocabulary, synonyms, antonyms, and multiple meanings help students develop deeper semantic networks and improve recall. Additionally, teaching inter-sentential connectors and lexical cohesion—how repetition, synonyms, and collocations unify ideas—supports students in constructing and analyzing coherent arguments.

5. Evidence-Supported Classroom Practices

Evidence-based reading instruction refers to programs or practices with a documented record of success and reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence indicating that students can be expected to make adequate gains in reading achievement when the program or practice is used with a specified group of learners. In practice, educators rely on guidance from Evidence-Based Practice guides produced by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) at the Institute of Education Services (IES), which synthesize research findings, practitioner experiences, and expert opinion to formulate recommendations for classroom and school improvement. One notable WWC practice guide is *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*, which illustrates how foundational literacy skills can be taught to support comprehension. A central framework that underpins many contemporary classroom approaches is Structured Literacy, the application of the science of reading to instruction. This approach emphasizes explicit, systematic teaching of decoding and linguistic comprehension and pairs it with high-quality professional development to ensure teachers have a solid foundation of knowledge for effective instruction. Moving toward evidence-based literacy instruction, Structured Literacy guides educators to implement evidence-based practices rather than relying solely on awareness of the science of reading; professional learning is highlighted as essential for successful implementation. In classrooms with English Learners (ELLs) or multilingual students, guided instruction that foregrounds students' responses and scaffolded elaboration can foster more productive talk and learning. The Response Protocol emphasizes valuing students' response efforts and scaffolding elaboration within a classroom community that beckons, broadens, and builds students' language and content knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to solicit student input and then elaborate on ideas

to address instructional content and deepen language use. Beyond decoding and language structures, explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies remains a key area of evidence-based practice for reading comprehension. Although metacognition is valued for supporting comprehension, research indicates that teachers often under-implement explicit instruction in these strategies. Studies highlighting this gap underscore the need for direct instruction in comprehension strategies and deliberate practice in authentic reading tasks, rather than relying on passive references to strategy use.

Cohesion and cohesive devices also play a critical role in reading comprehension. Cohesive devices connect ideas within and across sentences, acting as the “glue” that helps readers follow meaning with reduced cognitive load. Clear instruction in lexical and grammatical cohesion—focusing on connectors, pronouns, transitions, and other devices—supports both reading comprehension and writing and aligns with standards that require students to link ideas across texts using appropriate connectors and varied transitions. Facilitating explicit instruction in cohesive devices has been linked to improvements in students' ability to infer meaning, follow text structure, and produce coherent writing.

6. Operationalization and Assessment

Critical thinking in ESL education is operationalized as a set of observable English-language and reasoning outcomes, including the ability to analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and justify arguments drawn from texts and discourse. In this framework, teachers define concrete performance targets aligned with these higher-order cognitive skills, enabling systematic assessment across activities and over time. Critical thinking is presented as essential for navigating academic tasks, with an emphasis on skills such as questioning, assessing evidence, and constructing reasoned interpretations in English. Assessing these skills typically involves a combination of task-based performance and reflective practices. Common techniques for cultivating and measuring critical thinking in ESL contexts include big ideas and essential questions, think-pair-share, jigsaw, graphic organizers, and structured reflective forms such as logs and discussions. Depending on the curriculum, teachers may incorporate activities such as field visits, debates, media analysis, and technology-supported tasks to gauge students' analytical and evaluative abilities, as well as their ability to articulate reasoned conclusions in English. The specific mix of strategies is tailored to the teacher's design and curricular goals, with the aim of fostering transferable thinking skills alongside language proficiency. Operational measures and rubrics are designed to capture both linguistic development and the progression of critical thinking. Explicit assessment criteria for analysis, interpretation, and argumentation help ensure reliable evaluation across tasks such as text analysis, argumentative writing, and discourse-based assignments. Aligning assessment with explicit purposes and performance descriptors supports students' continued growth in both language and thinking abilities.

In practice, instructors may integrate progress measures—such as testlets or time-series evidence of learning—to monitor change over the course of an EAP program and to provide multi-source feedback on learners' evolving competencies. Such progress tracking can be particularly beneficial for students with lower initial self-efficacy, enabling them to visualize gains and adjust strategies to improve both language skills and confidence in disciplinary contexts. Moreover, assessment design often emphasizes alignment with the content and delivery of English for academic purposes (EAP) in higher education. Frameworks such as SILVER—Specification of purposes, Integration of progress measures, Link of EAP content with disciplinary study, Varied formats of content, Extended time of delivery, and Reinforcement of selected topics—offer structured guidance for designing and evaluating EAP provision in multilingual university settings. Integrating these components supports a coherent approach to measuring how well students can transfer critical thinking skills to disciplinary study and university-level communication.

In sum, operationalizing and assessing critical thinking in ESL contexts center on clearly defined cognitive outcomes, a diverse set of performance-based tasks and reflective activities, robust rubrics, and progress-oriented measurement. Combined, these elements provide a comprehensive view of both linguistic advancement and evolving reasoning abilities essential for academic success.

7. Teacher Roles and Classroom Dynamics

The Response Protocol emphasizes valuing students' response efforts and the teacher's role in scaffolding elaboration, with the goal of establishing a respectful classroom community where all members are accountable

Teachers are encouraged to beckon students' participation, broaden their ideas, and build deeper concept knowledge by rephrasing structures, exploring context, and highlighting key components of the content. This approach positions the teacher as a facilitator who helps transform knowledge through appropriation and supports students' development of new skills and language competencies. A central aspect of classroom dynamics is the teacher's responsibility for both affective and academic outcomes. Cazden (2001) stresses that teachers' direct discourse targets these dual goals, accepting, denying, recasting, expanding, or encouraging elaboration of student responses as needed to support learning. In culturally diverse classrooms, strategies that encourage all students to talk and work together are critical for success. Direct questioning can promote clarity and subsequent elaboration of responses, fostering academic language use.

What a text says – restatement. Talks about the same topic as the original text.

What a text does – description. Focuses on aspects of the discussion itself.

What a text means – interpretation. Analyzes the text and asserts a meaning for the text as a whole.

Teachers model feedback that extends student responses, with the expectation that students will mirror these patterns in peer discussions and small-group work.

Beyond eliciting initial contributions, teachers can cultivate higher-level discourse through structured activities such as debates and group discussions, which help students develop critical thinking by evaluating multiple perspectives and communicating their reasoning succinctly. In addition, teachers may integrate diverse media formats and problem-based tasks to stimulate critical thinking and motivate learners to examine information from multiple angles, thereby supporting language development and content mastery. The classroom teacher thus shapes opportunities for meaningful discussion, guiding students toward well-supported opinions and conclusions through sustained practice

Effective classroom dynamics also involve preparing learners for progressively challenging tasks through a gradual release of responsibility and by incorporating a variety of authentic materials to broaden viewpoints and language styles. These practices aim to raise language proficiency while empowering students to articulate arguments and participate confidently in discussions. Activities like think/write-pair-share illustrate how collaboration can engage multiple language skills—speaking, problem-solving, and critical thinking—within a supportive framework that models productive discourse for students. Challenges to these dynamics include ensuring equitable participation, managing logistics in collaborative settings, and maintaining discussion momentum and focus, particularly in virtual or varied schedules. Studies note that unequal contributions and off-topic drift can hinder engagement unless deliberate strategies are employed to balance participation and sustain momentum. Nevertheless, by embedding clear protocols, providing appropriate scaffolds, and monitoring discourse, teachers can normalize productive discussions about learning and support continuous improvement in both thinking and language use.

8. Challenges and Criticisms

Analyses of written language to foster critical thinking in ESL settings face multiple methodological and conceptual challenges. Critics note that translating theoretical frameworks,

such as critical discourse analysis, into classroom practice can be uneven and that outcomes depend heavily on framing, teacher expertise, and context. In particular, task design that prompts critical inquiry can inadvertently lead to rhetorical manipulation or perceived hopelessness if not carefully scaffolded, highlighting the need for balanced framing and explicit strategies: for example, reframing statements to introduce alternative interpretations can create space for critical thought, whereas inappropriate framing may dampen engagement. Defining and measuring critical thinking in ESL remains contested. Some work characterizes critical thinking as a definable set of inferential and interpretive skills linked to language use, while others emphasize the role of content knowledge and sustained study in second-language contexts, complicating cross-study comparisons and curriculum design.

This definitional ambiguity poses practical challenges for assessing and reporting learning gains in classroom experiments or pilot studies. Discourse markers and pragmatic features of spoken and written language can complicate attempts to teach and assess critical thinking. Discourse marker literature, including constellations of markers that signal coherence, stance, and discourse structure, shows that these elements influence interpretation and reader response in nuanced ways. This complexity can hinder straightforward instructional applications, as teachers must decide which markers to foreground and how to evaluate students' use or interpretation of them in written texts. Empirical evaluations of instructional interventions aimed at developing critical reading and thinking skills in ESL contexts have yielded mixed results. For instance, analyses of strategy-based instruction for Grade 9 English FAL learners showed non-significant improvements in critical reading from pre- to post-test in both the control and intervention groups under certain conditions, suggesting that without careful design and fidelity, even well-grounded pedagogical theories may fail to produce measurable gains. Such findings underscore the importance of robust experimental controls, larger sample sizes, and extended curricular timeframes to detect substantive effects. Additionally, translating theoretical analyses into classroom practice often requires careful fidelity checks and reliability assessments to ensure that scoring and interpretation of student work are consistent. Across related studies, high inter-rater reliability has been demonstrated for specific probes and scoring procedures, indicating that meticulous reliability practices are essential for credible conclusions about the impact of critical-thinking-focused instruction.

This emphasis on reliability highlights a broader challenge: the need to standardize instruments and procedures across diverse ESL contexts to support generalizable claims. In sum, while the aim of fostering critical thinking through written-language analysis in ESL is well-motivated by theoretical work in critical discourse and rhetorical analysis, practical implementation faces challenges related to framing, measurement, discourse-marker complexity, and inconsistent empirical results. Continued research with clearly defined constructs, rigorous methodology, and contextually appropriate scaffolding is needed to clarify how effectively such approaches can cultivate critical thinking in diverse ESL settings.

9. Best-Practice Recommendations for Practice and Curriculum

Effective literacy instruction for ESL learners' centers on the teacher as an active facilitator who supports the transformation of knowledge and the development of new skills. This includes modeling complete sentences, providing explicit feedback, and guiding students toward more standard English usage, including pronunciation and grammar, rather than simply slowing down or oversimplifying speech. In practice, this often involves accepting partial answers, modeling more complete academic language, and engaging in targeted one-on-one or small-group interactions to build higher-level discourse skills.

Small-group interventions are a key strategy for at-risk English learners in the elementary grades. Programs should provide focused, intensive small-group instruction covering the core reading elements—phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—using explicit, direct instruction as the primary delivery method. The level of intensity and duration should reflect the degree of risk indicated by assessments and other

indicators. Training for teachers delivering these interventions should include familiarization with the specific program materials and the ability to apply techniques across programs and subject areas, including pacing, feedback, wait time, modeling, and error correction; coaching from experienced master teachers is often critical to effectiveness. Guidance for improving the virtual or integrated classroom experience emphasizes clear guidelines, communication and collaboration skills, multimedia integration, structured discussions, diverse group composition, and flexible group dynamics to support struggling students. This reflects a student-centered approach to EFL contexts and highlights the importance of ongoing adaptation to learners' needs. Instructional design for language development should emphasize systematic, cumulative teaching, with a planned scope and sequence that progresses from simpler to more complex concepts. New language elements should be integrated so that each builds on prior learning, with the ultimate goal of developing automaticity and reading for meaning. Concepts should be taught directly and under continuous guidance, with immediate feedback and correction as necessary; students should not be expected to deduce new concepts through exposure alone.

Within the broader framework, four recommendations guide K–3 foundational reading instruction: (1) teach academic language skills, including inferential and narrative language and broad vocabulary knowledge; (2) engage students in conversations that support inferential language and narrative development; (3) explicitly teach academic vocabulary in the context of reading activities; and (4) model reasoning and prompt students to expand their responses, encouraging detailed explanations and justification for answers

Practical exemplars include prompts that require students to articulate their reasoning and elaborate beyond initial responses, such as “Why do you think that?” or “Can you add more. Critical literacy, as an approach to ESL instruction, encourages students to examine texts from multiple perspectives, question authorial intent, consider sociocultural and political contexts, and take action to address inequities. This framework asks students to reflect on power relations, seek marginalized voices, and resist solely standardized or decontextualized instruction. It sits in conversation with broader shifts away from test-centric pedagogy and toward reflective, citizenship-oriented learning. Finally, emerging frameworks for EAP course design, such as the SILVER model, propose components for specifying purposes in program design and delivery, underscoring the need for purposeful alignment among objectives, instruction, and assessment in ESL contexts.

In addition, contemporary discussions of word choice and sentence simplicity emphasize the value of clear, concise language, with guidance to favor shorter, well-structured sentences and to balance clarity with appropriate complexity in both written and spoken forms

10. Related Concepts

Critical literacy is a foundational concept in the study of how readers interrogate texts beyond their surface meaning by examining who creates texts, for what purposes, and how language operates within power dynamics and persuasive dynamics. Related pedagogical approaches emphasize that language use is not neutral and that learners should identify authors' purposes while developing their own expressive capabilities. This orientation intersects with broader discussions of critical thinking and how to cultivate it in language learning, including ESL writing contexts, where conventional grammar-focused instruction is increasingly complemented by opportunities for reflective, deliberate meaning-making.

Metacognitive strategies play a central role in supporting reading comprehension and independent learning, enabling students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their understanding of texts.

In ESL and EAP settings, teaching metacognitive planning, monitoring, and evaluation has been shown to improve reading comprehension and overall learning outcomes.

These strategies often align with explicit instruction in cohesive devices—such as transitions, lexical cohesion, and substitution and ellipsis—which help learners connect ideas, structure arguments, and process information more effectively.

Revised Bloom's taxonomy is frequently invoked as a framework to structure ESL writing and critical thinking activities. By guiding students through levels from Remember and Understand to Create, educators aim to foster independent, rational thinking and higher-order analysis in writing tasks, with practical applications in contexts such as IELTS preparation and other interactive writing courses.

This taxonomy supports a shift from purely product-oriented writing to processes that encourage argumentation, evaluation, and creative production, consistent with critical-thinking-centered approaches to ESL pedagogy.

Cohesive devices and discourse markers—often referred to as “glue words”—are considered essential for helping students articulate and organize ideas within and across texts. Explicit instruction in cohesive devices has been linked to improved comprehension and writing quality, as students learn to signal relationships such as cause/effect, sequence, addition, and contrast more effectively.

This emphasis on text cohesion complements critical literacy aims by enabling clearer expression of persuasive or informational purposes. Collaborative learning and interactive pedagogies feature prominently in theories of critical literacy and ESL writing. While collaborative approaches can enhance engagement and exploration of multiple perspectives, researchers acknowledge challenges related to language proficiency, cultural diversity, and the need for clear objectives and structured guidance in EFL settings. Nonetheless, collaborative reading and discussion can foster deeper meaning-making, peer feedback, and collectively constructed interpretations, thereby supporting the development of critical reading and writing skills.

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