



Critical Thinking Dispositions of Preparatory EFL Students and Their Role in English Language Competence: A Mixed-Methods Study¹

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Abstract

Foreign/additional language (L2) development is a multifaceted process influenced by a range of cognitive, affective, and social factors. Among these, critical thinking (CT) has been widely discussed in the literature as a potential contributor to L2 competence and learning. Building on this assumption, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between CT dispositions and English language competence among preparatory Turkish EFL students. The study involved 87 students enrolled in a preparatory program at a state university, who would subsequently study in the English Language Teaching ($n = 40$) and English Language and Literature ($n = 47$) programs. Of the participants, 38 were male, and 49 were female. Data were collected using the Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory developed by Ricketts and Rudd (2005) and adapted into Turkish by Demircioğlu (2012). The instrument is a five-point Likert-type scale comprising three sub-dimensions: engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness. Participants' self-reported mid-term examination scores served as the indicators of their English language competence. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 21) and employing the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman correlation analysis. The quantitative results indicated that the participants demonstrated moderate levels of CT disposition. However, no significant relationship was found between CT dispositions and overall English language competence, or competence across individual language skills (use of English, writing, listening, and speaking). On the other hand, the qualitative findings revealed that participants perceive CT as a crucial construct that enhances their English language competence. In line with the contradictory findings, the implications of these inconsistencies are critically discussed.

Keywords

Critical Thinking

Disposition

English

Language Competence

İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil olarak Öğrenen Hazırlık Sınıfı Öğrencilerinin Eleştirel Düşünme Eğilimleri ve İngilizce Dil Yeterliğindeki Rolü: Karma Yöntemli Bir Çalışma

Özet

Yabancı dil (L2) gelişimi, bir dizi bilişsel, duyuşsal ve sosyal faktörün etkilediği çok yönlü bir süreçtir. Bunlar arasında eleştirel düşünme, yabancı dil öğrenme sonuçlarına potansiyel katkı sağlayan bir faktör olarak literatürde yaygın olarak tartışılmıştır. Bu varsayımdan yola çıkarak bu çalışma, hazırlık sınıfındaki İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerinin eleştirel düşünme eğilimleri ile İngilizce dil yeterliliği arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Çalışmaya, bir devlet üniversitesinin hazırlık programına kayıtlı olan ve daha sonra İngilizce Öğretmenliği ($n = 40$) ile İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ($n = 47$) programlarında öğrenim görecektir 87 öğrenci katılmıştır. Katılımcıların 38'i erkek, 49'u kadındır. Veriler, Ricketts ve Rudd (2005) tarafından geliştirilen ve Demircioğlu (2012) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan Eleştirel Düşünme Eğilimi Envanteri kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Bu araç, üç alt boyuttan oluşan beş puanlık likert tipi bir ölçektir ve katılım, bilişsel olgunluk ve yenilikçilik alt boyutlarına sahiptir. Katılımcıların ara sınav puanları, İngilizce dil yeterliliklerinin göstergesi olarak kullanılmıştır. İstatistiksel analizler, Mann-Whitney U testi ve Spearman korelasyon analizi kullanılarak SPSS (sürüm 21) ile yapılmıştır. Nicel sonuçlar, katılımcıların orta düzeyde eleştirel düşünme eğilimi gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu eğilimleri ile genel İngilizce dil yeterliliği veya bireysel dil becerileri (İngilizce dil kullanımı, yazma, dinleme, konuşma) arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmamıştır. Diğer yandan, nitel bulgular, katılımcıların eleştirel düşünmeyi İngilizce dil yeterliliklerini geliştiren önemli bir yapı olarak algıladıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Çelişkili bulgular doğrultusunda, bu tutarsızlıkların sonuçları eleştirel bir biçimde tartışılmaktadır.

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Introduction

Critical thinking (hereafter CT), one of the 21st-century skills, has gained special momentum among language educators and instructors, as it is regarded as one of the most significant intellectual outcomes of modern education (Petek & Bedir, 2018; Serin, 2013). Although it has become a trendy topic and has been investigated by scholars lately, its roots date back to Socrates, Dewey, Bacon, and others, who have been studied by both philosophers and scholars for years (Altıntaş, 2019).

Regarding the conceptualizations defining CT, it could be argued that there is no clear-cut definition, leading to variations depending on the attribution changes. However, CT has been generally approached from two main perspectives: skill and dispositional profile. From the skill perspective, CT can be defined by Facione (2007) as a “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference” (p. 14). This perspective regards CT as a skill that can be learned, mastered, or developed through special training or effort. On the other hand, from a dispositional perspective, CT is a characteristic trait or tendency that is innate or genetically determined. With a strong emphasis on the inquisitive personality, the dispositional perspective views CT as an inquisitive spirit or mindset that prefers challenging assumptions, is skeptical, and seeks alternatives (Brookfield, 1987). From both perspectives, it is evident that CT requires both intellectual standards and an inquisitive personality.

L2 development is influenced by several factors, including motivation, attitude, enjoyment, out-of-class engagement, learning styles, and social and cultural backgrounds (Kk, 2025). However, the role of CT in L2 learning has recently drawn attention. Scholarly discussion indicates that CT contributes significantly to L2 competence and development, given that thinking and language are intertwined constructs (Karadz, 2010). For this reason, it is argued whether L2 learners with higher CT dispositions and skills possess successful outcomes in L2 learning and competence.

CT has been integrated into language classrooms (Devine, 1962) through discussions, thought-provoking questions, and problem-solving-based instruction and tasks. Within this understanding, it is also questioned how to strategically develop and effectively benefit from CT, as it is a complex and multifaceted construct that necessitates not only cognitive abilities but also a characteristic tendency toward it. Though there are still arguments about the extent to which CT might have an influence on L2 development, there are several studies (e.g., Arslan & Yildız, 2012; Bardakçı, 2010; Davidson, 1994; Malmir & Shoorcheh, 2012; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Yang & Gamble, 2013; Zhang, 2018) that confirmed the positive and significant impact of CT on the development of EFL. Furthermore, several studies (e.g., Beşoluk & nder, 2010; ubukcu, 2006; Karakaş, 2021; Tufan, 2008) have examined prospective teachers' or teacher trainers' dispositions towards CT in the Turkish context.

In line with this understanding, this study is intended to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between their CT disposition levels and English language competence. In this sense, the research questions are addressed below:

Q.1. What are the critical thinking dispositions of preparatory Turkish EFL students?

Q.2. Is there any significant correlation between critical thinking dispositions and language proficiency of preparatory Turkish EFL students?

Q.3. What are the differences between participants with different levels of critical thinking dispositions in terms of language proficiency scores?

Q.4. How do Turkish EFL learners make sense of the relationship between their critical thinking dispositions and English language competence, including its perceived role, challenges, and implications for learning?

Literature Review

Critical Thinking

Critic is a word derived from the Greek language and is referred to as *criticus* in Latin (Şenşekerci & Bilgin, 2008). Greek philosophers are renowned for their profound questioning and challenges to assumptions, asserting that things can be different from what they appear to be (Bür, 2014). Hence, they emphasized that intellectual mindsets, equipped with inquisitive spirits, can only see reality. Therefore, it is seen as the art of judgment.

There is no consensus among scholars regarding what CT actually entails. Facione (2007), for instance, indicates that it is associated with “interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference” (p.14). Therefore, CT is primarily seen as drawing inferences, being aware of assumptions, interpreting conclusions, and assessing arguments (Külekcı & Kumlu, 2015). With an emphasis on skill perspective, Özmen (2008) attributes CT to cognitive habits of mind.

As mentioned earlier, CT is divided into two main conceptualizations: skill and dispositional perspective (Altıntaş, 2019; McBride et al., 2002). The skill profile remains associated with cognitive skills. For instance, Facione et al. (1995) regard it as encompassing “analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation” (p. 3). Furthermore, Halpern (2003) also stresses that CT encompasses the utilization of cognitive skills and strategies. In this respect, Innabi and Sheikh (2007) summarized the elements of CT as “purpose, question at issue, assumptions, inferences, implications, points of view, concepts, and evidence” (p. 47).

Paul (1999) suggests that CT helps learners improve their intellectual standards, which encompass what to believe, what to decide, and how to take action. These standards can also be attributed to certain criteria, such as clarity, accuracy, logic, depth, and breadth (Scriven & Paul, 1987). Therefore, a true critical thinker assesses and evaluates every piece of knowledge in terms of its clarity, accuracy, logic, and support (Facione, 1990).

The dispositional perspective, on the other hand, has been associated with critical spirit (Altıntaş, 2019; Bür, 2014). According to a 1990 Dephi study conducted by 47 experts from 7 fields, dispositional CT is defined as the inclination or tendency to be a critical thinker (Facione & Facione, 1992; Facione et al., 2000). It is rather seen as a characteristic inquiry. Elder and Paul (1994) point out that dispositional CT is related to the willingness to question one's own thinking, the thinking process, and the awareness of one's own prejudices and biases. Therefore, CT can be well-developed with the harmony of one's CT ability and tendency (Zin & Eng, 2014). In other words, CT requires integrating cognitive skills and affection. It should also be noted that having a characteristic proneness to CT is more essential than the use of cognitive skills (Beyer, 1987; Facione et al., 1995). Dispositional CT can thus be seen as an intellectual willingness that is more sustainable than a set of skills.

Facione (2007) claims that dispositional CT has seven characteristic traits: “truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, self-confidence, inquisitiveness, and maturity” (p.12). Truth-seeking is the pursuit of truth, whereas open-mindedness is openness to other alternatives as long as they are reasonable and reliable. Analyticity refers to the type of deep thinking that necessitates seeing beyond ideologies and the separation of thoughts. Systematicity is the consistency of evaluation regarding ‘believing or not’. Self-confidence also refers to trust in one's own abilities, and inquisitiveness can be seen as a lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Maturity refers to accepting one's mistakes and learning from them.

On the other hand, from a skills perspective, CT involves stages such as “interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation” (Facione, 2007, p. 9). Interpretation is the ability to clarify and logically express the phenomenon. Analysis refers to the inferential examination of the relationships among concepts, ideas, and events. Evaluation can be understood as

the assessment of the consistency and credibility of ideas, solutions, expressions, judgments, and related concepts (Br, 2014; Facione, 2007). Inference refers to the deduction from the evidence, ideas, or thoughts. Explanation is the expression of the results in a coherent way. The final stage is self-regulation, which requires an individual to monitor their process and decide whether to accept or reject changes in their attitude, behavior, and actions (Facione, 2007).

In sum, it can be asserted that CT is the utilization of a set of intellectual skills, accompanied by a characteristic disposition. It is fair to state that CT is an inquiry mindset that uses skills such as asking critical and logical questions for deep understanding, analyzing the arguments, checking the credibility of the evidence and assumptions, judging the quality of observations, sources, and reports, and making reasonable inferences (Innabi & Sheikh, 2007).

The contribution of CT to English language competence

CT can be viewed as a must in all areas of life (Paul & Elder, 2002). Since the 1990s, the importance of CT has been emphasized as a 21st-century skill and has thus become an educational goal (Br, 2014). Ghanizadeh and Mirzaee (2012) advocate integrating critical thinking into the core objectives of education. As a component of 21st-century skills, CT needs to be integrated into education because the quality-of-life standards for present and future generations highly depend on their CT skills (Enciso et al., 2017). Additionally, perceptions of literacy and illiteracy have evolved since the beginning of the 21st century. Illiteracy is not about not knowing how to read or write. Today, illiteracy is used to describe people who cannot relearn, those who are blind to their mistakes, and those who do not approach any sort of knowledge with a critical lens and reflective manner (Toffler, 1970). Therefore, those who do not question, reflect upon, and critically evaluate events, concepts, or ideas can be perceived as lacking in literacy. In other words, a lack of CT skills can be attributed to illiteracy.

Language and thought can be seen as intertwined constructs (Piaget, 1971; Vygotsky, 1962); hence, it is believed that if thinking processes are developed, language skills can be better cultivated, and vice versa. At this point, Liaw (2007) notes that EFL teachers are most responsible for assisting in the acquisition of CT skills. Especially in EFL settings, critical voices are raised alongside linguistic activities, and meta-cognitive skills are highly employed, such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. This highlights the importance of language classrooms where CT integration can take place. Renner (1996) also advocates that the more learners benefit from higher-order thinking skills, the easier it is for them to reach higher language skills and competency. To be a proficient language user, Kabilan (2000) believes that one must be both creative and critical in the learning process.

From the aforementioned reasons, it is reasonable to suggest that there might be a close relationship between language and thought. For these reasons, it should be no surprise that, as an indispensable need of the 21st century, the importance of CT has also become a central issue among EFL classes just as in other disciplines.

Studies on CT

CT has been investigated with different variables in various contexts. In the Iranian context, Zare and Abdollahimzadeh (2013) investigated the relationship between CT and listening skills of 78 senior ELT and English translation students. Pearson correlation analyses revealed a significant association between CT levels and participants' listening performance. In this sense, the study advocates that the higher the CT, the better the listening performance.

In the Taiwanese context, Yang and Gamble (2013) conducted an empirical study with two freshman EFL classes to investigate the impact of CT-integrated EFL instruction on overall language proficiency and academic achievement. Findings indicated that CT integration, such as debates and peer critiques, as an intervention helped participants increase their language proficiency and academic achievement, demonstrating that CT is a valuable contribution to the development of language skills.

In a similar vein, Wale and Bishaw (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 40 Ethiopian EFL students that implemented inquiry-based essay-writing instruction. The results showed that an inquiry-based writing intervention significantly improved participants' CT skills, suggesting that activities based on discovery through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation can enhance EFL students' critical lens. Similarly, Arslan & Yıldız (2012) tested the impact of a seven-week literature-based CT program on 34 senior Turkish students in an English Language and Literature Department, using a one-group pre-test–post-test quasi-experimental design. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and the Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z. The findings revealed a statistically significant increase in participants' CT levels after the implementation. The study also demonstrated that integrating structured CT activities into literature courses promotes more student-centered, creative instruction, while highlighting the feasibility and importance of embedding CT in higher education. Contradictory findings also exist. For instance, Yükselir (2020) conducted a correlational study with 91 EFL students in the Turkish context and found no significant relationship between CT dispositions, language scores, and educational levels. Similarly, Genç (2017) conducted a study with 280 Turkish preparatory EFL students to investigate whether a relationship exists between CT dispositions, academic achievement, and reading habits. Results indicated that participants with higher reading habits seemed to possess higher CT dispositions, although no relationship was observed between academic achievement and CT dispositions, except for open-mindedness. This suggests that extensive reading habits may be beneficial for EFL learners. Additionally, the study revealed that participants' CT dispositions were low, indicating that explicit CT training in EFL classes is essential, as the one-size-fits-all approach prevalent in the traditional Turkish education system does not effectively foster students' CT dispositions.

Method

Research Design

This study is based on the master's thesis of the author, which was completed in the fall term of the 2019-2020 academic year at a state university. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), with quantitative data collected first to investigate the relationship between CT and English language competence, and qualitative data subsequently used to explain the quantitative results.

Participants

Participants in the quantitative phase were 87 preparatory students, studying English Language Teaching/Literature at a state university during the fall term of the 2019-2020 academic year. The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 31 ($M = 19.18$). 38 were male participants, whereas 49 were female participants. In the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants ($n=12$) who had voluntarily agreed to take part in the follow-up interviews.

Table 1 presents the participants' high school types. As shown, 69 participants were graduates of Anatolian High School, which had the highest frequency in the table. Science and religious high schools had the lowest frequencies.

Table 1. *Participants' high school type*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Science High School	1	1.1
Anatolian High School	69	79.3
Religious High School	1	1.1
Private High School	6	6.9
Vocational High School	3	3.4
Others	7	8.0
Total	87	100.0

Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three main sections. The first section collected demographic information, including participants' gender, age, department, and high school type. The second section comprised the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale, originally developed in English by Ricketts and Rudd (2005), adapted to Turkish by Demirciođlu in 2012. The scale consists of 26 items distributed across three factors: engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness. 5-point Likert-type scale includes 25 items ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The final section requested participants to self-report their mid-term examination scores for English language skills separately, including use of English, writing, listening, and speaking, to indicate their L2 competence.

In the second phase of the study, follow-up qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect in-depth insights from voluntary participants who provided informed consent. Participation in the interview phase was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The interview questions were created by the supervisor and supervisee, and were requested to be reviewed by experts in the field of ELT. Since the participants were preparatory EFL learners, the interviews were conducted in Turkish to help them feel more comfortable conveying their ideas, perceptions, and thoughts. The voluntary participants were contacted by the researcher, who was an ELT graduate at the time of data collection. The participants attended the interviews face-to-face. A mini-briefing session was conducted to inform participants about the study, and they were assured that they could withdraw at any time and that their names would be anonymized. The interviews ended within 15-20 minutes. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and no financial incentives or rewards were offered. The voluntary participants were contacted by the researcher, who was an ELT graduate at the time of data collection. The participants attended the interviews face-to-face.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, employing nonparametric tests, such as the Mann-Whitney U test and the Spearman correlation. Descriptive, correlational, and frequency analyses were conducted.

Content analysis was manually conducted to analyze the qualitative data. Content analysis is a type of data analysis in which texts or interviews are systematically and analytically examined, taking into account both subjective and objective aspects (Berg & Lune, 2017). Classifications are made using codes, themes, headlines, or patterns. Taking this into account, the frequencies and repetitions of certain words were turned into codes. Namely, each code was prepared after determining its frequency. Also, for the inter-rater reliability, a peer researcher from the ELT department read a transcription of the interview codes and coded the data. The consistency of the codes between the two raters was 85%.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based on the author's master's thesis completed in 2020. Participants completed a consent form to participate in the study. The form informed them about the study's purpose and addressed issues, such as the right to withdraw at any time and the guarantee of anonymity. Additionally, institutional permission from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, School of Foreign Languages, where participants were enrolled in preparatory classes, was obtained with a protocol number (33813216-044-E.1900145076) prior to data collection.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative Results

The results of the critical thinking dispositions of preparatory students

According to the findings, the mean CT disposition score was 3.99 (SD = 0.46). This indicates that participants' CT disposition was slightly above the moderate level. This could indicate that participants moderately question, debate, and discuss topics, tend to look for reasons, and are open-minded in their lives. This finding aligns with Akdağ's (2018) findings. He conducted research with 10th-grade students at an Anatolian high school and found that their CT disposition was moderate. On the other hand, the present finding contrasts with the findings of several studies (e.g., Akdere, 2012; Sisay, 2019; Zayif, 2008). Akdere (2012) found that the disposition level of Turkish pre-service teacher candidates was low. Sisay (2019) found that 108 preparatory students in Ethiopia, across departments ranging from social sciences to natural sciences, had low and weak CT dispositions. Zayif (2008) also found that 502 teacher candidates at a Turkish state university across four departments had a low level of CT disposition. These studies showed that learners in different contexts may fail to improve their CT dispositions.

These contradictory results suggest that the study groups' contexts and participants' backgrounds, ages, genders, or locations may lead to different disposition levels, and therefore, CT could be influenced by various factors. This means that CT is not solely an individual trait or characteristic but a context-based concept (Aylin-Buran, 2016).

The study also sought to determine the extent to which participants reported being critical of the components of CT included in the scale.

Table 2. *Critical Thinking Dispositions of Preparatory Students*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cognitive Maturity	87	4.09	0.52
Innovativeness	87	3.99	0.53
Engagement	87	3.94	0.52

As can be seen in Table 2, participants reported being most critical in maturity ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .52$), followed by innovativeness ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .53$) and engagement ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .52$). Considering the sub-factors, it can be stated that these sub-factors were at a slightly moderate level as well. This indicates that participants exhibited a moderate level of CT disposition across the sub-factors.

CT has been investigated in other studies with different sub-factors (e.g., Aylin-Buran, 2016; Alper, 2010; Grosser & Nel, 2013). Cognitive maturity is a sub-factor that may be related to open-mindedness in these studies, since cognitively mature individuals may be open to other ideas, perspectives, or opinions on any topic, as well as being tolerant of others. To do so, individuals need mental and physical maturity. Considering that the participants in these studies were university students around 20 years old, they were likely to be cognitively mature and, hence, open-minded. For instance, several studies (e.g., Aylin-Buran, 2016; Çiçek-Sağlam & Büyükuysal, 2013) examined CT disposition among prospective teacher candidates from different departments, including Turkish, English, Primary, and Science, and found that the highest sub-factor was open-mindedness. Çubukçu (2006) also found that teacher candidates at a state university reported open-mindedness as the highest sub-factor. This similar finding may be due to participants' maturity.

Innovativeness is a sub-factor that could be related to curiosity or inquisitiveness. Curious individuals are generally defined as those who are willing to discover new ways or solutions when dealing with obstacles or problems. Similarly, innovative individuals are curious about new ideas or events that will lead to further unknown facts or ideas related to any topic (Demirciođlu, 2012). Aylin-Burhan (2016) found that innovativeness was the highest sub-factor in her study, whereas iek-Sađlam and Bykuysal (2013) found the opposite in theirs. These contradictory findings show the complexity of CT.

Engagement was also found to be moderate in this study. This factor appears to align with other studies' considerations of factors such as analyticity, reasoning, or problem-solving (e.g., Alper, 2010; Aylin-Buran, 2016; iek-Sađlam & Bykuysal, 2013). Contrarily, these studies found reasoning at a low level. Although the participants of these studies were tertiary-level students, they indicated contradictory findings regarding engagement. This suggests that engagement may not be directly related to educational level.

The correlation between critical thinking dispositions and language proficiency exam scores of preparatory students

To measure the correlations between CT dispositions and language proficiency exam scores of participants, Spearman's correlation test was carried out. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Correlation between Critical Thinking Dispositions and Language Proficiency Exam Scores (N = 87)*

V	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Listening & Speaking	1.00							
2 Reading	.554**	1.00						
3 Writing	.124	.310**	1.00					
4 Use of English	.447**	.436**	.629**	1.00				
5 Criticality Average	.068	.099	-.046	.029	1.000			
6 Engagement	.096	.133	-.022	.047	.879**	1.000		
7 Innovativeness	.106	.080	-.008	.117	.859**	.658**	1.000	
8 Maturity	-.084	-.040	-.026	-.076	.806**	.550**	.614**	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows that there was no statistically significant correlation between CT dispositions and language proficiency exam scores ($p > .05$). Also, the sub-factors, namely engagement, innovativeness, and maturity, were not related to language proficiency exam scores ($p > .05$).

This finding was contradictory to the previous studies, which showed correlations between CT and language skills (e.g., Grosser & Nel, 2013; Liaw, 2007; Yang & Gamble, 2014). They claimed that as the CT level increased, participants' proficiency and competency in their language skills, including communication, writing, and listening, improved. However, our findings did not support this claim. This might be attributed to the fact that language proficiency is a complex phenomenon, influenced by various factors. That is, there may be various factors that can promote language proficiency beyond CT.

The differences between students with different levels of criticality dispositions in terms of language proficiency scores

The language proficiency exam scores of participants with different levels of criticality were also compared. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Differences between participants with different language proficiency scores*

		N	Mean rank	Mean Difference	Sig
Listening & Speaking	Low	29	39.24	N/A	.21
	High	58	46.38		
	Total	87			
Reading	Low	29	42.81	N/A	.75
	High	58	44.59		
	Total	87			
Writing	Low	29	43.83	N/A	.92
	High	58	44.34		
	Total	87			
Exam Average	Low	29	41.60	N/A	.53
	High	58	45.20		
	Total	87			

As displayed in Table 4, there were no statistically significant differences between participants with different levels of criticality dispositions in terms of language proficiency scores ($p > .05$). However, although the difference was not statistically significant, students with higher proficiency scores in each language area reported being more critical. However, it may not be appropriate to state that CT improves language proficiency. On the other hand, studies (e.g., Davidson, 1994; Yang & Gamble, 2014) have confirmed that language learners who are taught CT and its dimensions improve their language skills. In particular, Yang and Gamble (2014) demonstrated that CT contributed to overall proficiency in reading and listening among Taiwanese non-English major students. Davidson (1994) concluded that writing development was achieved after implementing CT in language classes in Iran. Furthermore, some studies have revealed correlations between CT and language skills. Işık (2010) found a positive correlation between CT and reading skills. Moreover, Bardakçı (2010) found that after providing CT-related treatments to ELT students, participants' critical reading ability increased. Zhang (2019) concluded that Chinese EFL students developed their critical writing in academic English after the experimental treatment. These studies statistically proved that participants' reading and writing skills improved. These contradictory findings show that the relationship between CT and language proficiency may be questionable.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative part of the study aims to detect the opinions of preparatory EFL students about their criticality, CT disposition levels, and the perceived impact of CT on English language competence and learning.

The self-perceptions of the participants on being critical or noncritical

Participants were first asked whether they perceived themselves as critical learner. Most of them seemed to perceive themselves as critical thinkers, and they stated that they wanted to search for and verify information on the Internet before accepting it as true. They insisted that searching the Internet, verifying information, or questioning knowledge were highly related to CT. These showed that they perceived criticality as a search-based concept. These can be true based on the CT's skill profile. However, they did not mention the characteristic traits, inquiry spirit, or mind, which are more closely related to CT's dispositional profile.

"I don't believe in what I hear, and I think that I need to search it before accepting it". P1

"I do research even if I am sure of a topic and accept it". P7

They did not seem to take CT's dispositional profile into account. As is known, CT is not merely about doing research or verifying knowledge. It is also related to the inquisitive spirit or mind that is dispositional towards CT. As Brookfield (1987) indicates, a skeptical mind is inclined towards

inquisitiveness, and this leads to an analytic mind. Therefore, participants did not take CT's characteristic trait into account. Their understanding of CT is primarily based on research, verification, and questioning. Therefore, their perceptions of CT do not fully capture what CT really is. Only two participants also added that they are critical because their character is like this, and they have doubts all the time.

"The things I know as true may not be true, so before thinking deeply, it is not good to say this is true". P8

"In my daily life, I am a person who enjoys criticizing; therefore, CT stems from my character". P1

P1 and P8 were the only ones who attributed their being CT as something related to their characteristic traits. This showed that most participants perceived CT as a skill rather than a characteristic trait, except for P1 and P8. They were not aware that the dispositional profile of CT is also an important trait, just like a set of skills.

Moreover, when participants were asked about the reasons behind their CT, they stated that they wanted to deeply understand the realities and truths, to be sure, and to be objective about any topic before accepting it. Participants mostly stated that the true reason for being a critical thinker is to seek and attain the truth. It seemed that they perceived CT as a gateway before accepting any idea. Some of the relevant comments are as follows:

"The non-critical thinkers do not think about any topic, and when they hear something, they directly pass it on to others. They are not objective; they are rather superficial". P4

"I want to be sure. I can easily check on the phone and google it". P5

"I don't like accepting what society accepts and believe everything blindly". P2

On the other hand, a few participants noted that they were partly critical thinkers due to the test culture in education and the high reliance on teachers. Some participants discussed the barriers that prevent them from developing CT. CT requires individuals to have active and open minds, which are ready to analyze and question what is learned in a free and unbiased manner (Facione, 2007; Kabilan, 2000; Lipman, 2007; Renner, 1996). Therefore, the education system that fosters CT is an indispensable necessity for CT development. However, their education system encouraged them to choose one correct answer among four or five choices. Their educational background might be a big handicap for CT development because, for CT, questions are more important than answers, and individuals should create their own evaluations and thoughts rather than choosing a set of correct answers. Additionally, CT requires students to be active learners, rather than passive ones who rely on their teachers. Participants' exemplary utterances are as follows:

"Sometimes I am a critical thinker, but most of the time I am not because we have grown up in the multiple-choice culture, so whenever I see something, I directly look for the choices. Also, in our class, nobody questions the teacher. If s/he says something, that's totally true, to their opinion". P2

"I think critically, but I cannot put it into practice. In my high school, what the principal or teacher said was always true, and we could not resist them. So, I am hopeless in any way". P11

Participants' views about the needs of EFL learners for CT

Interviewees were asked whether EFL learners need CT, and all agreed they do. They perceived CT as a process of gaining abilities, such as self-research and self-learning, adopting different perspectives, and questioning the truth. Their conceptualizations of CT showed that they basically perceived it as researching something on the Internet, having different ideas about any topic, and questioning the truth.

"We need it because students should analyze more than what's learnt, search for it and think about it by himself/herself more than what is given to them at school". P1

"For instance, we search in the lesson, and questions are asked and discussed, and then I can answer them and have opinions related to them. Later, when I come across the same question, I can already have my own opinion on it". P11

The quotes above refer to CT's skill profile. The skill profile confirms that CT is a way of understanding, clarifying, and expressing information logically (Facione, 2007). Moreover, regarding questioning the truth, CT is regarded as the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information to question and verify knowledge (Facione et al., 1995; Innabi & Sheikh, 2007). Therefore, participants in a way confirmed the skill profile of CT. In talking about the significance of developing CT, P3 stated that:

"We need to be critical thinkers in every aspect of life because being a bigot is for animals, not for us; therefore, our first duty as humans is to think and question". P3

However, none of the participants commented on CT's disposition profile when they described their conceptualizations of CT. It is also known that CT is a dispositional dynamic that one has or has brought from birth. Inquisitiveness, self-confidence, and maturity are among the characteristics of the dispositional profile of CT (Facione & Facione, 1992). In this sense, participants did not conceptualize CT as a dispositional concept. Therefore, they may not be aware that CT is also related to the characteristic trait, not just to the skill profile.

Participants' views about the role of CT in English language learning

When participants were asked to comment on the role of CT in English language learning, they frequently pointed out 'the development of self-research', and 'guessing the unknown words'. Most participants attributed their extensive research on language and their subsequent deductions. By saying 'research', they meant the research done on/ about the English language itself on the Internet. They again stressed that if they have CT, they will be able to develop their research skills and make deductions about their language skills. These were also confirmed in the literature. It is stressed that students can improve their language and linguistic knowledge by making inferences, expressing multiple opinions, and analyzing information (Kabala, 2000; Liaw, 2007; Renner, 1996). They are all gateways of CT. Participants, in a sense, emphasized the need to use CT's skill profile. Some participants justified this assumption as follows:

"What is taught at school cannot be enough. One may need to do research by himself/herself". P1

"There are Latin-rooted words in English. When we are aware of these words, and we think about them, we can then make different deductions". P3

Additionally, participants noted that, with CT's help, they became aware that there could be different perspectives on any issue. Therefore, they claimed that CT may affect understanding of culture and its aspects in the target language. For example, P2 emphasized this issue as follows:

"English is another culture's language. Therefore, we integrate a new culture and wonder how these people think. We see that there are different opinions in different cultures". P2

When participants were asked to explain which language skills are more related to CT, they mostly mentioned speaking, writing, reading, and vocabulary. They assumed that by reading in English, one can learn more vocabulary and information, and then s/he can put these into words through writing. It seems that participants conceptualized CT as a skill that is gained through reading and put into practice through writing. Some of the quotes are as follows:

"I can be very creative and write better". P12

"Particularly reading and writing because the more one does research, the more s/he will learn vocabulary, and as s/he reads, s/he will be able to write more and more". P1

"I can say reading and writing because we read passages a lot and I think about it". P4

P5 and P1, on the other hand, stressed vocabulary as follows:

“CT means the development of vocabulary, I think. To be a critical thinker, one needs to do research and read other sources, and in this way, s/he will find more words”. P5

“I see the advantages mostly in vocabulary”. P1

Speaking was also mentioned. For example, P8 emphasized speaking as follows:

“We can see in the class that the ones who have much knowledge can think more and speak better”. P8

As shown in the quotes above, most participants reported that CT affects the development of speaking, writing, reading, and vocabulary. These assertions are also supported by several researchers and studies, demonstrating the impact of CT on language learning. Several studies have concluded that CT affects reading (e.g., Bardakı, 2010; Iık, 2010; Yang & Gamble, 2014) and writing (e.g., Davidson, 1994; Zhang, 2019). It is noteworthy to declare that participants did not mention listening. They did not believe that CT leads to the development of listening skills. This is most probably due to the fact that they perceive listening as a passive skill that has nothing to do with CT.

The disadvantages of being non-critical while learning English

The participants believed that speaking skills and critical thinking are interconnected. They complained that they still need to improve their CT level because they felt that they were not as successful in speaking as they had hoped. It seemed that if they increased their CT levels, their speaking skills would be better. The participants mentioned this as follows:

“I think that my speaking is not good because we have not been fostered to think critically until university”. P2

“I see myself incompetent in speaking, so I cannot be critical”. P6

“I see myself incompetent in speaking”. P11

In fact, this attribution was confirmed by several researchers (Malmir & Shoorcheh, 2012; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014), indicating that CT makes EFL learners good English speakers and better at language skills. Therefore, since language and thought are intertwined, it is possible that when they acquire CT skills, they probably have better speaking skills.

The Suggestions of participants to overcome the lack of CT

Lastly, participants were asked how to overcome the lack of CT. Teaching criticality and searching on the internet were the most recurring quotes.

“I think it is possible through education if our teachers teach CT to us, because we then develop ourselves”. P3

“I succeed CT by searching, asking questions, and thinking about it”. P7

“I would research more and get more knowledge. I cannot say all things I know are true, so I would do research”. P10

Their suggestions aligned with Van Gelder's (2005) recommendations. He stressed that CT can be explicitly taught to students, and deliberate CT teaching was a must. This suggestion was also made for English language learners by several studies (e.g., Malmir & Shoorcheh, 2012; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014), confirming that language learners positively benefited from deliberate CT teaching. Additionally, participants claimed that students can develop self-research. This is actually good advice for those who copy every piece of information without questioning or even doing a little bit of research. The nature of CT, in fact, requires individuals to be inquisitive and to seek alternative opinions.

Conclusion

The present study showed that participants' CT disposition was slightly above the moderate level. The same was true for the sub-factors as well. Though this finding might be positive, it could call for improvement in their CT dispositions. The participants of this study were going to become teachers or philologists of English. Therefore, as a necessity for 21st-century skills, participants' dispositions need to be strengthened over the next four years, not only as teacher candidates but also as 21st-century individuals; they need to be offered courses on CT and taught CT skills as well. Explicitly teaching CT might help participants develop their CT skills.

The study also revealed no statistically significant correlation between CT dispositions and language proficiency scores. The relationship between CT and L2 competence was found to be questionable in this study. Therefore, an experimental study is also needed to determine whether CT affects language proficiency. Also, there may be other factors affecting CT that need to be investigated.

The results further showed that there were no statistically significant differences in language proficiency scores among participants with different levels of criticality dispositions. However, students with higher exam scores in each language area reported being more critical. CT may not directly lead to the development of language competence. There may be other factors more closely associated with improved language competence.

The qualitative data yielded contradictory findings, revealing that participants thought they were critical thinkers and believed that learners with more CT might be exposed to English more often. This might help them improve their English competence. However, they seemed to complain about their CT levels because they still had difficulty speaking. Also, some participants complained about the testing system in the education system and the high reliance on teachers. They suggested CT teaching and Internet searches to address CT's deficits.

The study offers pedagogical implications. The first one is associated with the courses that the participants will take in the faculty. The courses are needed to integrate more reading, writing, and vocabulary-based activities and tasks. In this way, students will have the opportunity to develop their CT through these activities. The second point was that it is time to move away from an excessive dependence on the teacher and traditional teacher authority in the classroom; instead, more student-centered practices are required to foster their CT. Also, as the participants mentioned, the multiple-choice test and the educational testing system were other important handicaps to CT development. This suggests that the testing system needs to be changed, especially at the K12 level, as participants complained it leads to rote learning. The third is that CT training is essential, as participants mentioned they could improve their CT with explicit teaching. It is believed that CT-based courses could help them improve their CT level. Additionally, it might be effective to assign tasks, homework, and assignments that require them to search the internet, as this extracurricular activity might develop their curiosity and inquiry skills.

The study also presents methodological implications for future research. First, as the study was conducted with a relatively small sample of preparatory EFL students from a single state university, future studies are suggested to replicate the study with larger and more diverse samples across different institutional contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, while the Turkish version of the Critical Thinking Disposition scale and midterm examination scores were used as data sources, future research should benefit from employing alternative CT disposition measures and more comprehensive indicators of English language competence, such as final or standardized proficiency exam scores (TOEFL or IELTS), to further validate the findings. Finally, considering the correlational nature of the research design, future studies are advised to examine the potential causal effects of CT disposition on English language competence more directly, adopting experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Eleştirel düşünme, 21. yüzyıl becerilerinin temel bileşenlerinden biri olarak modern ve çağdaş eğitim anlayışında kritik bir konuma sahiptir ve özellikle dil eğitimi alanında önemli bir entelektüel çıktı olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Günümüzde popüler bir araştırma konusu hâline gelmiş olsa da eleştirel düşünmenin kökenleri Sokrates, Dewey ve Bacon gibi felsefi düşünürlerle kadar uzanmaktadır. Ancak alan yazında eleştirel düşünmeye ilişkin herkes tarafından kabul gören kesin ve tek bir tanım bulunmamaktadır, bu durum, kavramın farklı bakış açılarıyla ele alınmasına yol açmaktadır. Genel olarak eleştirel düşünme, beceri (skill) temelli ve eğilimsel (dispositional) olmak üzere iki ana perspektiften ele alınmaktadır.

Beceri temelli yaklaşıma göre eleştirel düşünme; yorumlama, analiz, değerlendirme, çıkarım ve öz-düzenleme gibi bilişsel süreçleri içeren, öğrenilebilir ve geliştirilebilir bir beceriler bütünüdür. Eğilimsel perspektif ise eleştirel düşünmeyi, bireyin sorgulayıcı, şüpheli ve alternatiflere açık olma eğilimiyle ilişkili bir zihinsel yatkınlık olarak tanımlar. Bu bakış açısına göre eleştirel düşünme, yalnızca bilişsel becerilerin kullanımıyla değil, aynı zamanda bu becerileri kullanmaya yönelik isteklilik, tutum ve karakteristik özelliklerle de yakından ilişkilidir. Dolayısıyla eleştirel düşünmenin etkili biçimde ortaya çıkabilmesi, bilişsel beceriler ile bu becerileri destekleyen eğilimlerin bütünleşmesini gerektirmektedir.

Yabancı dil (L2) gelişimi, motivasyon, tutum, öğrenme ortamı, sınıf dışı etkileşim ve sosyo-kültürel faktörler gibi pek çok değişkenden etkilenmektedir. Son yıllarda eleştirel düşünmenin yabancı dil öğrenme sürecindeki rolü de giderek daha fazla ilgi görmeye başlamıştır. Dil ve düşüncenin birbiriyle iç içe geçmiş yapılar olduğu kabul edildiğinde, eleştirel düşünme beceri ve eğilimlerinin dil yeterliliğini de yakından etkilediği öne sürülmektedir. Alan yazında yer alan çok sayıda çalışma, eleştirel düşünmenin İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenenlerin dil yeterliği üzerinde olumlu ve anlamlı etkileri olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın hem İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin eleştirel düşünme eğilimleri ile İngilizce dil yeterlikleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi hem de eleştirel düşünmenin dil öğrenme sürecindeki algılanan rolünü, karşılaşılan güçlükleri ve pedagojik çıkarımları bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla ele almayı hedeflemektedir.

Metot

Bu çalışma, yazarın 2019–2020 akademik yılı güz döneminde bir devlet üniversitesinde tamamladığı yüksek lisans tezinden ortaya çıkartılmıştır. Araştırmada, eleştirel düşünme ile İngilizce dil yeterliği arasındaki ilişkiyi nicel olarak incelemek ve elde edilen bulguları derinlemesine açıklamak amacıyla açıklayıcı sıralı karma yöntem deseni kullanılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, ilk aşamada nicel veriler toplanmış, ikinci aşamada ise nicel bulguları açıklayıcı nitel verilerden yararlanılmıştır.

Araştırmanın nicel örneklemini, 2019–2020 akademik yılı güz döneminde bir devlet üniversitesinde İngilizce Öğretmenliği ve İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümlerinde öğrenim gören 87 hazırlık sınıfı öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Katılımcıların yaşları 17 ile 31 arasında değişmekte olup yaş ortalaması 19,18'dir. Örneklemin 38'i erkek, 49'u kadın öğrencilerden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu Anadolu Lisesi mezunudur. Araştırmanın nitel aşamasında ise, gönüllülük esasına göre belirlenen 12 öğrenci ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Veri toplama sürecinde üç bölümden oluşan bir anket kullanılmıştır. İlk bölümde katılımcıların demografik bilgileri toplanmıştır. İkinci bölümde, Ricketts ve Rudd (2005) tarafından geliştirilen ve Demircioğlu (2012) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan Eleştirel Düşünme Eğilimi Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Ölçek; katılım, bilişsel olgunluk ve yenilikçilik olmak üzere üç alt boyuttan ve 5'li Likert tipinde 25 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Üçüncü bölümde ise katılımcılardan İngilizce dil yeterliklerini yansıtan ara

sınav puanlarını (İngilizce kullanımı, yazma, dinleme ve konuşma) z bildirim yoluyla paylařmaları istenmiřtir.

Nitel veriler, yarı yapılandırılmıř grřme formu aracılıęıyla toplanmıřtır. Grřmeler, katılımcıların kendilerini daha rahat ifade edebilmeleri amacıyla Trke olarak, yz yze ve yaklařık 15–20 dakika sreyle gerekleřtirilmiřtir. Tm katılımcılardan bilgilendirilmiř onam alınmıř ve gizlilik esasları gzetilmiřtir.

Nicel veriler SPSS 21 programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiřtir. Verilerin normal daęılım gstermemesi nedeniyle non-parametrik analizler tercih edilmiř; Mann-Whitney U ve Spearman korelasyon analizleri uygulanmıřtır. Nitel veriler ise ierik analizi yoluyla zmlenmiř, kodlayıcılar arası gvenirlik oranı %85 olarak hesaplanmıřtır. Arařtırma sreci boyunca etik ilkelere uyulmuř ve gerekli kurumsal izinler alınmıřtır.

Bulgu ve Tartıřma

Arařtırmanın nicel bulguları, eleřtirel dřnme eęilimleri ile İngilizce dil yeterlięi puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir iliřki bulunmadıęını ortaya koymuřtur. Bu sonu, sz konusu rneklem kapsamında eleřtirel dřnme ile ikinci dil yeterlięi arasındaki iliřkinin doęrudan ve gl bir biimde ortaya konmadıęını gstermektedir. Bu baęlamda, eleřtirel dřnmenin dil yeterlięi zerindeki olası etkisinin daha net biimde belirlenebilmesi iin deneysel ya da yarı deneysel arařtırmalara ihtiya duyulduęu sylenebilir. Ayrıca, eleřtirel dřnme eęilimlerini etkileyebilecek farklı biliřsel, duyuřsal ya da baęlamsal deęiřkenlerin de ilerleyen alıřmalarda ele alınması gerektięi dřnlmektedir.

Bulgular, farklı dzeylerde eleřtirel dřnme eęilimine sahip katılımcılar arasında dil yeterlięi puanları aısından anlamlı bir fark olmadıęını da gstermiřtir. Bununla birlikte, her bir dil becerisi alanında daha yksek sınav puanına sahip ęrencilerin kendilerini daha eleřtirel bireyler olarak algıladıkları belirlenmiřtir. Bu durum, eleřtirel dřnmenin dil yeterlięinin doęrudan bir belirleyicisi olmayabileceęini; dil geliřiminde motivasyon, maruz kalma sresi, ęretim yntemi ve sınav odaklılık gibi bařka deęiřkenlerin daha baskın bir rol oynayabileceęini dřndrmektedir.

Nitel bulgular ise nicel sonularla eliřen bir tablo ortaya koymuřtur. Yz yze yapılan yarı yapılandırılmıř grřmelere katılan ęrenciler, kendilerini eleřtirel dřnen bireyler olarak tanımlamıř ve eleřtirel dřnme dzeyi yksek olan ęrencilerin İngilizceye daha fazla maruz kaldıklarını, bunun da dil yeterlięini olumlu ynde etkileyebileceęini ifade etmiřlerdir. Ancak katılımcılar, zellikle konuşma becerisinde yařadıkları glkler nedeniyle eleřtirel dřnme dzeylerini yetersiz bulduklarını da dile getirmiřtir. Bunun yanı sıra, mevcut eęitim sistemindeki sınav odaklı yaklařım, oktan semeli testlere dayalı lme anlayıřı ve ęretmene ařırı baęımlılık, eleřtirel dřnmenin geliřimini engelleyen temel faktrler olarak belirtilmiřtir. Katılımcılar, bu eksikliklerin giderilmesi iin eleřtirel dřnme ęretiminin aık ve sistematik biimde yapılması ile internet temelli arařtırma ve sorgulamaya dayalı ęrenme etkinliklerinin artırılmasını nermiřtir.

Arařtırma, eřitli pedagojik ve yntemsel ıkarımlar sunmaktadır. ęretim programlarında okuma, yazma ve szck bilgisine dayalı etkinliklerin artırılması, ęrenci merkezli ęretim yaklařımlarının benimsenmesi ve lme-deęerlendirme sisteminin zellikle K–12 dzeyinde yeniden yapılandırılması, eleřtirel dřnmenin geliřimi aısından nemli grlmektedir. Yntemsel aıdan ise daha byk ve eřitli rneklerle, farklı lme araları kullanılarak ve deneysel desenlerle yrtlecek alıřmaların alan yazına daha gl katkılar saęlayacaęı dřnlmektedir.