


# Chapter 8

## Critical Thinking in Action: Empirical Insights from Socio–Critical EFL in HE

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores how critical thinking manifests in real-time classroom dynamics within socio-critical English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings in higher education. Drawing on empirical data from student reflections, classroom interactions, and instructor narratives, it investigates how learners engage with power, identity, and inequality through language. Rather than treating critical thinking as a static skill, the study frames it as a dynamic, socially situated practice—one that emerges in tension, dialogue, and discomfort. The findings reveal that when students are invited to interrogate social realities through language, their critical thinking expands beyond analysis into personal and collective transformation. This chapter underscores the urgent need to reposition EFL education as a space for ethical, critical engagement—not just linguistic competence. By documenting lived classroom experiences, it contributes to a growing body of work that calls for language education to serve as a site of social inquiry and active, mindful participation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational discourse, *critical thinking* is often lauded as a universal goal—a skillset that students are expected to develop and demonstrate across disciplines. Yet, beneath this apparent consensus lies a tangle of competing definitions, pedagogical assumptions, and cultural ideologies. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the pursuit of critical thinking becomes even more complex (Liang & Fung, 2021). Here, linguistic competence is traditionally foregrounded, often at the expense of deeper cognitive, ethical, or socio-political engagement. For many educators, critical thinking in the EFL classroom has been reduced to a list of analytical tasks—identifying main ideas, evaluating arguments, distinguishing fact from opinion—disconnected from the learners’ lived realities or their positionality in the broader social fabric.

This chapter seeks to disrupt that limited framing. It approaches critical thinking not as a universal cognitive skill, but as a socially situated, context-bound practice—one that unfolds within specific ideological, institutional, and linguistic terrains. Building on the principles of socio-critical pedagogy, it reframes the EFL classroom as a dialogic space where students do not merely consume language, but also *use* it to question, resist, negotiate, and transform their understanding of the world around them. This shift from skill to practice, from individual cognition to collective action, lies at the heart of the socio-critical orientation explored in this chapter.

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