

## **Developing Critical Thinking Skills Through a Mandatory English Course in Korean Higher Education**

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The purpose of the study is to investigate whether critical thinking skills can be fostered through a college English course. Approximately eighty female Korean students taking a basic freshman mandatory reading course participated in the study. The researcher taught them critical reading skills along with other reading comprehension skills and provided them with Korean local context in the given topic. The students critically read two units of the required textbook and attended presentations of high school students with minority cultural backgrounds. The students submitted four online reports about multiculturalism, and they were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The results revealed that even students with relatively low English proficiency could enhance their critical thinking skills by practicing critical reading. Also, additional information about local contexts not only compensated for a culturally limited text but also facilitated the development of critical thinking. The findings indicate that teaching critical thinking is feasible in an English language course despite limited environments. Yet, more studies are required to generalize the findings.

**Key words:** critical thinking, critical reading, critical pedagogy, critical multicultural education, reading comprehension

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Critical thinking skills are one of the most important skills for college students to have (Barnett, 1997; Moore, 2013; Wilson, 2016). Unfortunately, most Korean students do not have much experience in critical thinking in secondary school. Their secondary education heavily focuses on rote memorization (Ahn, 2016), which in part makes it possible for them to be admitted into college. Another reason why critical thinking skills are not encouraged might come from Korean collectivistic culture, which values harmony and perceives critical perspectives as challenging authority. Whatever the reason is, the majority of Korean students have become effective rote learners who are eager to accept the contents of textbooks without a critical view by the time they begin college. If asked to use critical thinking skills in reading a textbook, most of them would not know how to do so since they have not had a chance to use critical thinking skills.

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Problems arise when students need to critically examine course materials. For example, the textbooks are already designated for many Korean college English language courses by the university curriculum. In such cases, an individual instructor has no choice but to use the selected textbook. The textbook, however, might not be suitable for students. It may contain, for instance, culturally insensitive contents if the author of a textbook has Eurocentric perspectives, making the textbook contents inappropriate for EFL students with different cultural background and perspectives. When managing such content is difficult for an EFL teacher, supplementing it with more culturally suitable contents will be beneficial. When it is not enough, teaching how to read critically could be helpful for students to have balanced perspectives since reading critically is often a great way to enhance critical thinking skills (Moore, 2013).

Suggestions of critical pedagogy being used to enhance critical thinking skills were introduced in the late 2000s (Lee & Park, 2007). Also, college instructors have realized that efforts to develop critical thinking skills should be included in language learning (Guo, 2013). However, some claim that critical thinking skills are a western concept and cannot be applied to foreign language education in non-western contexts (Atkinson, 1997). Although critical thinking skills in EFL has recently been studied and the studies show promising results (Alnofaie, 2013), research of critical thinking skills in EFL situations has still been scarce compared with critical thinking in western academic settings, including in ESL settings (Ko & Wang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Suh & Huh, 2014). Studies on critical thinking skills in Korean higher education have been even scarcer. Even though there has been research into teaching critical thinking or reading skills to Korean college students that are English majors, the development of critical thinking skills through an English language course has been hardly studied.

Thus, this study aims to investigate whether Korean students in higher education can enhance their critical thinking skills in a mandatory English course. The researcher explored whether students were able to critically examine a reading text. Furthermore, the researcher provided students with Korean contexts as a supplement to investigate whether having this context enhanced critical thinking skills. By doing so, the researcher tried to fill a gap in research on teaching critical thinking skills in English language courses in Korean higher education.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Understanding Critical Thinking**

First, it is essential to define what critical thinking is for the purpose of this research.

When the term “critical thinking” itself was not even invented, Dewey brought up the closest description of critical thinking using the term “reflective thought”.

Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought (Dewey, 1910, p. 6).

Dewey’s definition includes important elements of critical thinking. The elements are 1) the active role of a thinker and 2) the grounds or reasons for a belief. While thoughts without reflection are often unconscious and do not consider consequences, reflective thought is conscious inquiry, which requires the active role of a thinker. In this kind of thinking, a thinker is often forced to consider the reasons or grounds for beliefs because the consequences of a belief are important (Dewey, 1910). Dewey’s concept has been continued in the research of other educational philosophers and psychologists and became the steppingstone of a critical thinking movement (Davis, 2006; Ennis, 1992).

A recent study which clearly defines critical thinking is one by Paul and Elder (2014). In their miniature guidebook, the concept of the active role of a thinker is more developed. According to them, critical thinking is “the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improve it” (Paul & Elder, 2014, p. 2). They argue that although all people think, a large part of thinking tends to be biased and prejudiced. Thus, it should be our effort to improve such thinking. Their emphasis on a conscious effort to cultivate critical thinking summarizes critical thinking as “self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking” (Paul & Elder, 2014, p. 2). In other words, the effort by individuals to correct their thought to improve their own perspectives may be defined as critical thinking.

Paul and Elder (2014) developed a thinker’s role even further and moved a focus from individual to society. They maintain that critical thinking should entail a thinker’s effort to overcome his or her egocentrism and sociocentrism since we are all biased. They ask people to consider the rights and needs of others. The problem, they say, is that we might not be able to do so because we often decide what to believe and what to reject based on our self-centered mindset, which we are born with. We also have the capacity to be rational and fair, but the capacity has to be cultivated. Therefore, the only way to be able to think critically is by cultivating the capacity to live rationally and critically in a society where a multicultural world view, among others, is fostered.

Critical thinking toward a socially critical view is also found in Moore (2013). In his efforts to define the concept of critical thinking, Moore found seven traits; 1) the adopting of an ethical and activist stance; 2) self-reflexivity; 3) judgment; 4) a skeptical and provisional view of knowledge; 5) simple originality; 6) a careful and sensitive reading of texts; and 7) rationality. Critical thinking as the adopting of an ethical and activist stance

suggests inclusion of critical action beyond acts of cognition. It might mean being critical of political, social and academic establishments and also include social responsibility and transformation. Another interesting trait of critical thinking is self-reflexivity. It is being able to critique your own assumptions, so it is about “developing ‘awareness or a self-consciousness’ about how judgments are made” (p. 518). This concept can be traced to Paul and Elder’s definition, placing ‘the effort of the self’ as the center of critical thinking.

The definition of critical thinking is still under debate and numerous definitions exist; indeed, there is much research supporting a multidimensional view of critical thinking. Still, it is worthwhile to attempt to define here what critical thinking is for the purpose of this research. Previous research suggests that critical thinking is the conscious effort of an individual to be rational, and not to be biased, with reasons and grounds to support thoughts and beliefs, with the goal of making changes towards a better society

## 2.2. Understanding Critical Reading in Higher Education

If critical thinking should be cultivated, how would it be possible? As in one of Moore’s (2013) definitions, a careful and sensitive reading of texts might be one of the ways to develop it. Then what is critical reading? Critical reading, most of the time, falls into two different categories: reading for academic purposes and reading for social or civic engagement (Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, & Ryland, 2015). The first type of critical reading is for academic success focusing on skill-based reading. It is essential for mastering difficult content required in higher education. According to Manarin et al. (2015), the second type of critical reading is for democratic and socially relevant education. In this type of reading, teachers help students recognize power relations, engage with the world, and construct new possibilities. Thus, critical reading in this sense often encourages participatory action toward society.

Critical reading of a participatory nature is perhaps from the philosophical tradition of Freire. In Freire and Macedo (1921), they that “reading the world always precedes reading the word” (1987, p. 35). According to them, reading is not a passive act of understanding a text but a dynamic action of recreating a text. As an active agent, a reader comprehends a real situation hidden in the text because language and reality are not far from each other. Hence, instead of mere memorization of words, a teacher teaches the students to have “a critical perception of the meaning of culture by leading them to understand how human practice or work transforms the world” (1921, p. 36). This perception changes readers from passive beings in front of a given text to active agents to change the world because the act of knowing here encourages readers’ critical, democratic participation in society.

The importance of critical reading in higher education springs from this concept of participation. Critical reading not only helps students succeed in society but also

transforms who they are (Manarin et al., 2015). When reading is the mechanical understanding of a text, a student accepts it as a tool to succeed within the system. Yet, if students take an active role in reading, the reading becomes a tool to challenge the system. Knowledgeable readers gain agency and become confident to address problems and seek solutions. Maybe that is why most teachers want their students to read critically rather than just acquire textual details.

Whether critical reading means skill-based reading to succeed academically or reading to transform society, it is one of the most important skills required in higher education. It is less important to separate the two types of critical reading but more important to teach students critical reading skills because an individual student's subjective analysis of a text might not be possible without both types. Thus, quite a few studies have been done on enhancing critical reading skills in western higher education (Manarin et al., 2015). Critical reading often accompanies writing practices, for improvement in critical reading skills is often revealed in the form of writing. Western college students are expected to learn critical reading in freshman writing classes and to read critically when reading is assigned as part of course requirements (Vered, 2016). In Vered (2016), students read assigned materials with provided critical reading guides and produced written work to develop their critical thinking skills. In the study, critical reading is perceived as reading for university, and the study shows the possibility of enhancing critical thinking skills while maintaining an existing curriculum.

While critical reading skills are perceived as necessary academic skills in western higher education, they are perceived as much less important in ESL or EFL situations. Critical reading is regarded as something that English learners should go beyond the four basic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking to achieve. The focus on the four basic skills in ESL and EFL classrooms is perhaps the reason for the scarcity of research on the subject. Still, quite a few teachers attempt to push their students out of the comfort zone of learning only the basic language skills in English, and the results show the possibility of including critical reading in ESL and EFL situations successfully.

### 2.3. Critical Reading in ESL and EFL Situations

In one study on ESL situations, Wilson (2016) finds that developing critical reading skills is possible with a scaffolding approach. Although there were varying degrees with respect to criticism among different teachers, the study shows that developing critical reading skills can be realized in university preparation English for Academic Purposes (EAP). While the study opens up the possibility of teaching critical reading to students from diverse language backgrounds, the students were at least intermediate in their English levels and were highly motivated to learn academic skills to succeed in an English-speaking context at university.

In EFL situations, where students' motivation varies, not much research has been done. Among the previous research, though, researchers recently analyzed critical reading and critical thinking skills in Iranian EFL students. The research shows that higher critical thinking skills are greatly related to high lexical knowledge as well as learner autonomy (Faramarzi, Elekaei, & Tabrizi, 2016). Also, critical reading skills are found to enhance Iranian students' English literacy competence more than general English reading skills (Mozafari & Barjesteh, 2016). Moreover, a significant relationship has been found between reading comprehension and critical thinking skills in Iranian EFL learners (Fahim & Sa'eepour, 2011; Marzban & Barati, 2016). Marzban and Barati (2016) demonstrate that if critical thinking skills are improved, students' reading comprehension will be improved as well. Fahim and Sa'eppour (2011) also show that students' debate to improve critical thinking skills enhances their reading comprehension, but critical thinking skills have not been improved significantly despite the debate.

These studies reveal that critical thinking skills contribute to developing reading comprehension skills. It implies the importance of teaching critical thinking skills even in EFL situations where the four basic skills are more focalized. However, they regard critical thinking skills as a learning strategy for acquiring language skills such as reading or vocabulary rather than an essential academic skill in higher education. Furthermore, improvement of critical thinking skills through language learning has not been identified. Fostering critical thinking skills has been investigated, however, in graduate school students in Malaysia. By learning critical literacy, graduate students of multilingual backgrounds in Malaysia became aware of language choices that they made and meaning making (Koo, 2010). The study explores the possibilities of critical thinking skills through a critical literacy program. Still the study is about how multilingual students with high English proficiency levels represented their complex identities, so the results might not be able to be generalized to EFL learners with limited English reading proficiency.

The possibility of teaching critical literacy, although it was not critical reading skills, to EFL learners at lower English proficiency levels has been investigated in Taiwan, where a study demonstrates that EFL learners at different English proficiency levels are able to read news stories from a critical perspective (Ko & Wang, 2013). Although the feasibility and importance of teaching critical literacy is recognized by EFL teachers, the study does not show how critical literacy or reading critically fosters critical thinking skills. One attempt to explore the possibility of fostering critical thinking in an EFL reading course was conducted in China (Tang, 2016). While the research aims to improve critical thinking skills through a college reading course, the research is not based on empirical data, but appears to suggest how classroom activities can be used to improve critical thinking skills.

In Korea, there has been a little attempt to study the feasibility of teaching critical reading in the EFL classroom. The scarcity of research may be due to the perspectives of

English teachers toward reading. English instructors in Korean higher education regard English reading as analyzing structure, such as sentence-level reading and learning vocabulary (Yang, Oh, & Kim, 2009). Teaching reading as acquiring more than linguistic competence was first attempted in Korean elementary students in ESL classes in America and in EFL classrooms in Korea. The research reveals that students are able to identify the author's perspectives and challenge the perspectives through reading against the text (Huh, 2012; Huh & Suh, 2015). Teaching reading against the text in higher education has been explored as well. According to Suh and Huh (2014), students are not only able to read against the text but also comprehend it better when they are doing so. While the researchers build rapport with the students which enables them to discuss freely, many students still feel uncomfortable with resisting the ideas presented in the text. In addition, Park (2011) also finds that teaching to be critical readers using newspaper articles helps students voice their opinions. The studies are significant in showing the feasibility of critical reading in Korean higher education. Yet, the research has been conducted with only students who are English majors and who are fluent in English reading. Moreover, they do not investigate the enhancement of critical thinking.

Thus, the present study aims to seek the possibility of improving critical thinking, in particular of students with relatively low English proficiency levels and with majors other than English. The study also explores whether providing students with more culturally relevant contents could enhance critical thinking skills since texts used to practice reading critically might not give enough information on local contexts. More specifically, the study investigates 1) whether students are able to learn critical reading skills, 2) whether students are able to apply critical thinking skills in real life situations, and 3) whether critical reading and cultural-specific contexts contribute to fostering critical thinking.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Data and the Participants**

To investigate the research questions, action research of a qualitative nature was designed. If possible, most action research is carried out with various data sources to increase validity (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Mills, 2003). However, a single type of data was used for the purpose of the study. While other action research attempted to find a solution for a problem using various data sources, the solutions for the study were already posed in this study and the study was designed to find out whether the solutions were appropriate. In addition, student reports were useful way to look into how the participants' critical thinking skills are developed. Thus, they were collected not to lose the precision of data.

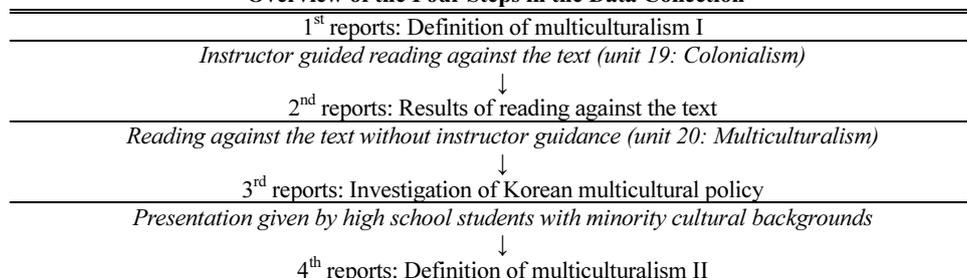
The data were collected from a mandatory English program of one women's university located in Seoul. The program has four different levels based on students' English proficiency: with one class for the 1<sup>st</sup> level, four classes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> level, six classes for the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, and twenty-five classes for the 4<sup>th</sup> level. Two random classes from the 4<sup>th</sup> level were selected by the researcher. Although students in the 4<sup>th</sup> level had the lowest English proficiency among four levels, the level had the largest number of the students. If their critical thinking skills were able to develop, it could mean the possibility of teaching critical thinking skills to all levels.

The researcher taught the classes as an instructor during the fall semester of 2014. Since the course was a mandatory college English course and designed for enhancing general reading comprehension skills, the instructor did not have much room to change the textbook or syllabus. The English classes met once a week for two hours, and the medium of the classes was Korean. Each class consisted of approximately forty students, so the total number of the participants was seventy-eight. Almost all of them belonged to the College of Humanities and the College of Social Sciences. Although there were seven students whose majors were different, the participants were grouped into four groups depending on their majors: International Trade (A), French Language & Literature (B), German Language & Literature (C), and Korean Language & Literature (D). The participants all signed a consent form for the study, and their real names were not used for the study to protect their identity.

### 3.2. Procedure

First of all, the textbook, *Reading the World Now 3*, included hardly any critical perspectives in the text or critical thinking skill exercises. There were six chapters in the textbook: science, medicine, music, sociology, and psychology. Each chapter had two units, dealing with two separate themes in the same field of the study. Yet, not all chapters were chosen to teach critical thinking skills. Out of six chapters, the sociology chapter was selected for applying a "reading against the text" strategy to enhance critical thinking skills because it dealt with rather controversial issues. The first unit in the sociology chapter discussed issues related to colonialism, and the second unit was about multiculturalism. The participants learned other general reading comprehension skills prior to the fourth chapter, which was the chapter on sociology. The reading comprehension skills included skimming, scanning, and note-taking skills, and the participants used the skills to find a main idea, a topic sentence, supporting details and examples.

Data collection began right before the fourth chapter, and Figure 1 describes the four separate steps of the data collection.

**FIGURE 1****Overview of the Four Steps in the Data Collection**

The first step was writing 1<sup>st</sup> online reports on the definition of multiculturalism using their own ideas. This step was created to find out their original perspectives on multiculturalism before they learned critical reading skills. The second step included learning the reading against the text with the instructor. “Reading against the text” was introduced as another reading comprehension skill when the participants studied the first unit of the sociology chapter, *Colonialism*. Comprehension of the first paragraph using the strategy was modeled by the instructor first, and the rest of the unit was studied by the participants themselves with instructor guidance. The participants analyzed the text using this set of the questions; 1) Who is the target audience?; 2) Who is the marginalized group?; 3) If you want to make the text more democratic, what else does the author have to consider?; 4) If you want to resist the text, how would you do it? Then the participants were asked to report the results of the applying the strategy on the first unit, *Colonialism*, for the second reports.

For the third step, the participants applied the strategy by themselves on the second unit of the chapter, *Multiculturalism*. The participants analyzed the unit without instructor guidance and were asked to write the third reports. To investigate whether the participants were able to apply the learned strategy to Korean contexts, they were asked to write about Korean multicultural policies. The open-ended questions were as follows: “Find out about the multicultural policies of Korea.; What do you think about the policies?; How could you make the policies more democratic?”

The last step was created to investigate whether students were able to apply critical thinking skills to real life situations. The participants attended presentations given by the high school students with minority cultural backgrounds. The presentations were arranged to provide the research participants with the authentic voices of people in Korea from diverse backgrounds. While the textbook offered the participants an opportunity to learn various perspectives toward multiculturalism, the text had limitations if it were to be applied to Korean contexts. The presenters were high school students from an international multicultural school located in Dongducheon City. They belonged to three groups: 1)

Amerasian students; 2) children of marriage migrants; and 3) children of migrant workers. The contents of their presentations were composed of three parts. The first part was the introduction of the reasons of their existence in Korea. The Amerasian students found the reason of their being in Korea as due to the presence of US military bases. The children of marriage migrants defined their being in Korean as due to having Korean father with 3D jobs, and the children of migrant workers believed their living in Korea was due to the growth of the Korean economy. The second part of their presentations was their struggle to integrate into mainstream Korean culture. Limited job opportunities, their insecurity of having legitimate identity, and people's biased perceptions toward them were illustrated. The last part was the presenters' own perceptions toward their identity. The research participants handed in the last report (4<sup>th</sup> reports) after attending the presentations on multiculturalism. To find out if the participants had become able to critically examine the issues around multiculturalism, they were asked to define multiculturalism again. The open-ended questions included the following: "Define what multiculturalism is after watching the multiculturalism presentations; Have your perceptions changed?; If yes, in what ways have they changed?; What caused the changes?; If not, what is the reason?; Why do your perceptions remain the same?"

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Although there were seventy-eight participants, only the reports of fifty-two participants were analyzed for the purpose of the study since the other participants failed to submit all four reports. In addition, the second reports contained similar, if not the same, themes since they were the results of critical reading with instructor guidance. Thus, a total of two hundred and eight reports were analyzed. In addition, the participants had a choice of language when they wrote the reports. Therefore, the reports were written in either English or Korean, and sometimes there were code-switches to both languages. Excerpts used in the result and discussion section were either translated or edited for the purpose of better comprehension.

Since the reports were answers to the open-ended questions, thematic analysis was used to analyze the rich raw data (Patton, 2015). The aim of the analysis was to find prominent themes among the participants' reports, following the protocol for thematic analysis. The inductive analysis generated general themes as well as subthemes. The first step was becoming familiar with the data, so the reports were read at least three times. Second, after the researcher became familiar with the data, reports were categorized into the first, second, third, and fourth reports. Then, the reports were once again categorized under similar themes. Initial codes were produced in this stage. Fourth, contents under the themes were expanded to interpret data at a deeper level so as not to lose information in the coding process. Subthemes

were generated in this stage. Fifth, further refinement or creation of new themes was tested. Last, the themes were rearranged from the most frequent to the least frequent.

After reviewing these themes and subthemes again, the researcher's colleague, who was not familiar with the research questions, reviewed the generated themes and subthemes. When there was disagreement, careful discussion followed, and the results were newly applied. In addition, the researcher's translation of the participants' reports in Korean was checked for accuracy by another colleague.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of the participants' reports. First, the results of applying reading against the text, which are from the second and the third reports, are presented. Then the results of the first and the fourth reports analyses are presented to compare the participants' perspectives before and after they were exposed to reading against the text and the presentations from high school students with minority cultural backgrounds.

### 4.1. Reading Against the Text

#### 4.1.1. Reading against the text with an instructor guidance

The participants were taught to critically analyze the text about colonialism. They had guiding questions to critical reading, and the answers were submitted as the second reports. Since the second reports were submitted after instructor-guided teaching, the answers from the participants were almost identical. Below are the questions and answers.

- Q1: Who is the target audience?  
 A1: The text was written for the conquerors.  
 A2: Conquerors who are white males from the upper class.
- Q2: Who is the marginalized group in the text?  
 A1: The conquered  
 A2: Females, Asians, African descents, Jewfish descendants  
 A3: Less developed countries
- Q3: If you want to agree with the author, what perspectives do you have to have?  
 A1: Progress is made by the conquest.  
 A2: Past military victories and colonization have shaped the world we live in today.

- A3: Colonialism is necessary for the economic development.
- A4: Colonialism is necessary for world peace.
- Q4: If you want to disagree with the author, what perspectives do you have to have?
- A1: I oppose colonization as a citizen of Korea which was once colonized.
- A2: A country which was colonized has a hard time being independent politically and economically.
- A3: It is not ethical for a powerful country to control a weak country.
- A4: The conquered country loses their cultural identity and their native language.
- Q5: What is your position?
- A1: I support the conquered.
- A2: The author says globalization comes from colonization. I think globalization is possible without war.
- A3: The author's opinion is prejudiced.
- Q6: If you want to make the text more democratic, what else does the author have to consider?
- A1: The author has to write more in favor of the conquered.
- A2: The author has to be objective.
- A3: There should more targets of the texts other than white conquerors.
- A4: The pain of the conquered should be included more than economic benefits.

The answers of the participants revealed that they were able to successfully analyze the text as instructed. The participants identified that the text emphasized the benefits of colonialism and was written in favor of the conquerors' position. Against the author's perspective, the participants advocated for the conquered and argued that the voice of the conquered should have been included more. While the second reports showed that the participants learned a reading against the text strategy successfully, the success might have been the results of direct guided teaching. Thus, the next step involved the participants' application of the strategy to a new text without the instructor's guidance.

#### 4.1.2. Reading against the text without an instructor guidance

The participants analyzed the second unit, multiculturalism, using the reading against the text strategy without an instructor guidance. According to the text, there were two different types of approaches toward multiculturalism: melting pot and mosaic. The unit described the melting pot concept as one national identity to which immigrants became assimilated,

while the mosaic concept is a multicultural policy in which immigrants keep their national identity as they integrate into the mainstream culture. The unit was written with an American-centered perspective, so mostly American, with a little bit of Canadian, examples dominated the text. In addition, the unit was rather critical of multiculturalism describing opposing perspectives of multiculturalism longer than advocating perspectives. The participants were first asked to critically analyze the text using the reading against the text strategy. To find out whether their critical thinking skills had developed, they were then asked to investigate the Korean multicultural policy and ways to make it more democratic for their third reports. Table 1 describes the participants' perceptions of the Korean multicultural policy.

**TABLE 1**  
**Themes and Subthemes of the 3rd Reports**

Theme	Mosaic or salad bowl	Melting pot	Korean ethnocentrism
Subtheme	1. Emphasizing humanism 2. Same treatment for all people	1. The Korean multicultural policy 2. Criticism of assimilation	1. Assimilation as a suitable model for Korea 2. Reverse discrimination

First of all, the majority of the participants identified the Korean multicultural policy as close to the concept of a melting pot, pursuing assimilation. Then, they were critical of the Korean multicultural policy and insisted that a mosaic or salad bowl model would be more suitable. The excerpt below shows such perspectives.

A-10 Korea is now using assimilation policies. For example, Korea is supporting foreigners to learn our cultures and languages... However, I think assimilation policy is kind of thing ignoring their cultures, so I support mosaic policy [not translated].

However, the perspectives of the participants who advocated the mosaic or salad bowl model were not without limitations.

A-03 There should not be different laws for people with minority cultural backgrounds because it is discrimination [translated].

A-08 We have to teach students that there is no inferior culture although some people are different from us [translated].

A-13 Making new laws for immigrants to defend their rights and human being and holding multicultural festivals and events can be effective solutions [not translated].

The statements above all emphasized that people are all equal. While the participants were positive toward multiculturalism, they did not question why certain people were discriminated against when others had privilege taken for granted. Their perspectives were close to those of liberal multiculturalism among the three types of multiculturalism.

The three different approaches to multiculturalism are conservative, liberal, and critical (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Kubota, 2004). According to Kubota (2004), a conservative multicultural perspective is Eurocentric and regards multiculturalism as a cause of societal divisiveness. A liberal multiculturalism respects and values cultural differences. Thus, celebration of different cultures is often found in liberal multiculturalism. It also supports that all people are equal and deserve same opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds. The problem is that it implies everybody can succeed if they work hard enough. Non-differential treatment without consideration of different cultural backgrounds results in blaming individuals who are not successful because it does not consider different cultural privileges that people have. The third perspective, critical multiculturalism, finds a problem with respect to social construction and pursues social justice and equality among all people (Kubota, 2004). It admits social and economic inequalities rather than engaging in mere celebration of cultural diversity. As a result, critical multiculturalism promotes the establishment, application, and maintenance of social justice and equality and also ensures a social transformation (Gorski, 2010). Participants A-03, A-08, and A-13 did not think that discrimination resulted from social constructions. Their perspectives probably resulted in the solutions without social change as described in participant A-13's statement. One of the solutions to achieve more democratic measure was holding multicultural festivals and events in her statement.

The third theme of the reports, Korean ethnocentrism, was similar to a conservative multicultural perspective. Although the number of the statements decreased a lot, a few participants still exhibited negative perspectives toward multiculturalism as they had in the first reports or as described in the textbook. They advocated assimilation and sometimes exhibited Korean ethnocentrism arguing multiculturalism was the source of societal division.

- C-08 Other countries have abandoned multiculturalism, but we are accepting immigrants without discretion. Korea is one ethnic country, so a mosaic policy wouldn't fit [translated].
- D-10 I think assimilation policy has a problem, but overly helping foreigners has a problem of reverse discrimination [not translated].
- A-14 Some of the multicultural policy in Korea should be gone... For example, immigrants and their children have benefits when they enter university. Native Koreans are discriminated against them because of these benefits. If Korea is a truly democratic country, we should take care of our own people first [translated].

Participant C-08 quoted the text when she stated “other countries have abandoned multiculturalism”. Participants D-10 and A-14 believed that a multicultural policy caused reverse discrimination. Their perspectives were Korean-centered, so the ways to make the policy more democratic were 1) a more selective and limited acceptance of immigrants, 2) helping immigrants less, and 3) getting rid of some of the multicultural policies currently in place in Korea. Considering the fact that their perspectives had not changed much from their first reports, it can be inferred that reading against the text did not affect their perspectives much.

To conclude, the analysis of the third reports revealed that critical thinking skills had improved for many participants. The participants did not accept the opinions of the author and provided their own reasons for choosing different perspectives. While the author of the unit clearly indicated that a mosaic or salad bowl model was problematic, the majority of the participants were in favor of the mosaic or salad bowl policy. The results also indicated that the participants were able to apply improved critical thinking skills to new contexts, specifically Korean situations. Most of the participants were critical of the Korean multicultural policy, which pursued assimilation. Yet, a limitation of their critical thinking was noted. The reason for advocating a mosaic or salad bowl model for Korea was based on humanitarian perspectives rather than recognition of socio-structural problems. Also, some of the participants were not able to apply acquired critical reading skills to Korean contexts, and they kept the same negative perspectives toward multiculturalism.

#### 4.2. Definition of Multiculturalism Before and After the Presentations

The participants were asked to write their perceptions of multiculturalism before they learned how to read against the text. The analysis of the first reports showed that the majority of the participants reflected the characteristics of governmental policy without much critical perspectives toward it. The Korean multicultural policy is government initiated and designed to help immigrants assimilate into Korean mainstream culture (Yun & Park, 2011). The immigrants who receive benefits from the policy are those legitimately residing in Korea. In particular, only female marriage migrants and their children have been the primary subjects of assimilation policies into Korean society and culture (Won, 2008). In addition, Korean multicultural policies for social integration have begun only after 2004 (Lee, 2014).

While the results of the first reports did not present much of critical perspectives, the participants showed much of critical perspectives in the final reports. After the participants attended the presentations given by high school students with minority cultural backgrounds, they were asked to write a report on their perspectives about multiculturalism again. The first

noticeable change in the fourth reports was that most participants' viewpoints changed to show increased understanding of the people with minority cultural backgrounds. The subject of their sentences more likely began with "we", "our people", "our society", or "I" in their previous reports. However, "a multicultural family", "multicultural students", or "multicultural children" were more often the subjects in the fourth reports. This implied that the participants sympathized with the presenters and were able to put themselves in the presenters' position. Second, many participants either directly stated that their perspectives changed or their statement revealed a change in their perspectives.

#### 4.2.1. Perspectives toward multiculturalism

The biggest change before and after attending the presentations of high school students with minority cultural backgrounds was found in the participants' perspectives toward multiculturalism. Table 2 illustrates the differences of the participants' perspectives.

**TABLE 2**  
**Perspectives Toward Multiculturalism**

	1st Reports	4th Reports
Subthemes	1. Acknowledgement of Korea as multicultural society 2. Obligation to accept multiculturalism 3. Romanticizing multiculturalism 4. No interests in multiculturalism 5. Negative feelings toward multiculturalism	1. Critical multiculturalism 2. Complexity of multiculturalism

The most frequently appearing theme of the first reports was the participants' acknowledgement of Korea as multicultural society, and the acknowledgement was often accompanied with the statement that they felt obligated to accept it. The statement below is an excerpt from the first report of a participant from Group C.

C-01 I think we need to tolerate multiculturalism. Because nowadays the Korean society is a multicultural country like the United States. So we have to be used to living with multi-cultural families [not translated].

In participant C-01's statement, obligation was expressed by the use of modals, "need" and "have to". According to her, multiculturalism is a topic of tolerance that we "need" to do, and we also "have to" get used to living in a multicultural society. The participants' responses like this one might result from previous education to accept multiculturalism and not to discriminate against immigrants. The Ministry of Education, Science, and

Technology (MEST) set the goals of Korean multicultural education in 2008, and one of them was to promote cultural sensitivity and understanding among general students (Park & Watson, 2011). In fact, some of the participants directly stated that they were taught to embrace multiculturalism as shown in the statements below.

- A-01 I learned that discrimination against children of different cultural backgrounds was bad, so I tried to think they were not different, but I couldn't help staring at them [translated].
- D-05 When we were young, we learned that you should not discriminate other people [not translated].

Whether or not it was triggered by governmental efforts to promote multiculturalism, some of the participants also romanticized or idealized multiculturalism as described below.

- B-10 We Koreans have always lived together. Thus, I want us to be in a society where multicultural family and we help each other. I think people with different cultural backgrounds are the teachers to expand our experience and to teach us the different culture and thoughts [translated].
- C-14 I am positive toward multiculturalism. I can meet people of different ethnicities from different countries and learn about their cultures without going abroad. Having various cultures and information without going to the country, we can build familiarity and a sense of unity, and we can feel that we belong to the same community [translated].

These participants focused on cultural exchange and believed it would enable all people in Korea to build a united community. Yet, their responses might also mean that they overlooked possible conflicts among people with different cultural backgrounds.

Another response toward multiculturalism is having no interests in it despite education on it.

- B-13 I'm actually not interested in the definition of multiculturalism and why it is created although I learned about it in school [translated].
- B-07 Actually, I don't know much about multiple cultures and have no interest in multiculturalism because it's hard to find multiple cultures near us [not translated].

Participant B-13 confessed that she was not interested in multiculturalism although she had learned about it, and participant B-07 suggested that multiculturalism was not relevant to her because she did not have exposure to people with different cultures. However, her

statement is not reasonable because international and exchange students were in almost all of the classes on campus. In fact, international students were in the same class with her, and they once shared their difficulties in making Korean friends. The above statements imply that some participants in main stream Korean culture might live a separate life from other ethnic groups and that people from minority cultures are invisible to them.

The last but powerful perspective toward multiculturalism is a guarded attitude against it, exhibiting rather negative perspectives.

- A-03 I think the problem is immigrants' crimes. Discrimination is wrong, but I wonder if people, who promote multiculturalism or illegal aliens, could walk alone on the streets of foreign neighborhoods in Kyonggido at night [translated].
- A-12 Giving unfair benefits to immigrants is not protecting them. I believe it is reverse discrimination against Korean [translated].
- C-07 We can't deny that multiculturalism creates various social problems [translated].
- C-15 I think that the government's multicultural policy is incorrect because multicultural policy for foreigners is likely to lead to reverse discrimination. For example, crimes that Korean Chinese cause continue to increase. However, the government has been forcing multicultural policies to its citizens, ignoring their crimes. We need to be more deeply aware of the disadvantages of a multicultural society. Resulting in such conflict, there is a risk that leads to confusion of society. Government should be strict to foreign people's crimes [not translated].

The statements above show that some participants believed multiculturalism was the source of social conflicts and immigrants were potential criminals. Furthermore, participants C-15 and A-12 felt strongly against the government's multicultural policy because they believed it caused reverse discrimination. Reverse discrimination is often cited to blame the governmental multicultural policy (Lee & Baik, 2012). According to Lee and Baik (2012), the Korean welfare policy in general is applied to the public based on income. Yet, the benefits of the Korean multicultural policy are applied to multicultural families regardless of income. Thus, some of the public thinks the policy is unjustifiable.

To summarize the analysis of the first reports, that most of the participants exhibited relatively poor critical thinking skills toward multiculturalism. The statements indicate that the majority of the participants did not make a conscious effort to have reasons and grounds for their opinions. Many of them repeated what they had learned and did not show a willingness to change. Some of them had biased perceptions which were not grounded by real facts. According to a report by Korean Institute of Criminology in 2016, the crime rate of immigrants is in fact much lower than that of Koreans. Yet, a few participants still considered immigrants as criminals. Moreover, they argued that the Korean government's multicultural policy was reverse

discrimination although the benefits of multicultural policy were limited to the female marriage migrants and their children. Even positive perspectives toward multiculturalism might not be completely reasonable. According to Kubota (2004), a difference-blind vision fails to acknowledge that social and economic inequalities exist in society. Superficial views on multiculturalism fail to deal with serious questions like what it actually meant to be multicultural. Thus, the differences between main-stream and minority cultures may not be easily overcome, as the participants with a positive view suggested they could be.

While the participants presented little critical perspectives in the first reports, they showed much more development in criticality in the fourth reports. The participants realized the problems were structural rather than individualistic. They also argued that social transformation against the problem would be possible by people. The statement below from the fourth reports represents such perceptions.

A-16 I think multiculturalism is being oneself. Regardless of citizenships, languages, and cultures a person has, not losing one's identity is really important. However, this is possible only when multicultural people can fight back to social discrimination like racism [not translated].

Participant A-16 defined multiculturalism as keeping one's identity and asserted that fighting against racism was the only way to maintain one's identity. In other words, she perceived that maintaining one's identity was not a given, but something to be achieved.

Another noteworthy comment among critical perspectives found in the final reports was on the complexity of multiculturalism, which had not been mentioned in the previous reports.

B-03 It is impossible to define the term "multicultural family" because it includes all people inside and outside of Korea [translated].

B-15 I have realized that multiculturalism was very complicated and hard to define with a long historical background...and immigrants come to Korea for very various reasons [translated].

D-09 It is really difficult to define what multiculturalism is. We can all become multicultural people. I noticed that I can become multicultural. That's not somebody else's problem [not translated].

The participants above realized that there were many different layers to multiculturalism. They began to recognize that multiculturalism could be more complex than they had thought. In particular, participants B-03 and D-09 understood that they were also people with different cultural backgrounds because multiculturalism could be applied to everybody as everybody comes from different backgrounds. Their comments indicated that

they rejected the governmental definition of multiculturalism and had begun applying their own thoughts to the concept of multiculturalism.

Application of critical thinking skills in one's own life was also discovered in another participant's comment.

D-05 I felt there was some structural power in high school... I felt rules existed for giving teachers power and for making students conform to the system... I think multiculturalism is in line with what I went through in high school. It is to make people from other cultural backgrounds conform to our culture. Most of them work in 3D industries. English teachers are mostly white. Why do we still make fun of black people as we did forty years ago even with a multicultural policy? The rules are not really for the people without power [translated].

Participant D-05 compared her own experience in high school to the experience of people with minority cultural backgrounds in Korea. She recognized the power relationship between teachers and students and that the rules were for reinforcing teachers' power and making students obey that power. For her, the problems of a multicultural policy were not different from the problems she had witnessed in her own experience, which were namely problems of power. She also made the connection of limited job opportunities for migrant workers to racism since a better job was open to white people. Lastly, she acknowledged that the policy was not for cultural minorities but for mainstream Koreans.

#### 4.2.2. Types of ideal multicultural societies

The second most frequent theme of the first reports was types of ideal multicultural societies. The participants showed much different perspectives as shown in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**Types of Ideal Multicultural Society**

	1st Reports	4th Reports
Subthemes	1. Complete assimilation to Korean mainstream culture without integration of minority culture	Mosaic or salad bowl model
	2. Integration A: Korean culture as mainstream and other culture as minority cultures	
	3. Integration B: Birth of new cultures	
	4. Coexistence	

Many participants in the first reports appeared to agree with an assimilation model. Their responses reflect the governmental policy to assimilate immigrants, who have a relationship to Korean culture by blood or marriage. In fact, the assimilation approach has dominated Korean multicultural education thus far (Hong, 2010). The research participants, who advocated the assimilation model, stated that we had to help immigrants to adapt to Korean culture by having them learn the Korean language and about Korean food. Some participants were more open to different cultures. They believed that integrating other cultures into Korean culture was ideal. There appeared to be three lines of thought on integration models: the first one is maintaining Korean culture as the main culture and accepting other cultures as minority, and the second one is allowing the birth of a new culture that is a combination of traditional Korean culture and other cultures. The third type, which overlapped with the first, was promoting coexistence, but it was the least favorite (only two of the participants mentioned it). They emphasized coexistence without merging. They argued that there was not a superior culture and we should embrace varieties of cultures in one nation. Yet, the majority of the participants appeared to repeat what they were taught without critical perceptions.

However, with more participants develop their critical thinking skills after the presentations, most of them reported that their perspectives had changed in the fourth reports, and they pursued a mosaic or salad bowl model as an ideal for Korea.

- A-15 The presentations have changed my perspectives. I thought it was important to protect our own culture, but now I think we should accept them as our own people [translated].
- B-10 We have to accept multiculturalism and choose a salad bowl model. Multiculturalism is people with diverse cultural backgrounds living together in one country [translated].

As shown in the statements above, many participants stated multiculturalism was coexistence and valued its positive aspects. They also mentioned that mainstream Koreans should be educated and should change to build an ideal multicultural society. That is, they came to think the target of multicultural education should be Koreans, not people with minority cultures. Although a few participants were still doubtful about multicultural society, even a participant who was strongly against multiculturalism had reported a change in perspective. She still maintained her opposition to multiculturalism but confessed she had learned that the number of the migrant workers who committed crimes was minimal, and migrant workers were people like her and other Koreans.

#### 4.2.3. People who are considered as multicultural

While it was the most frequent theme in the fourth reports, people who are considered as multicultural was the third theme from the first reports. Table 4 illustrates change of the participants' perspectives.

**TABLE 4**  
**People who are Considered as Multicultural**

	1st Reports	4th Reports
Subthemes	1. Female marriage migrants and their children 2. Female or male marriage migrants and their children 3. Migrants who obtained Korean citizenship 4. Marriage migrants and migrant workers	People with diverse backgrounds

The third theme from the first reports was people who are considered as multicultural. The participants tended to consider female marriage migrants and their children as multicultural. Again, this appears to reflect the Korean governmental policy without critical consideration since the policy actively encourages marriage migrants and their children to adapt and assimilate to Korean society successfully (Won, 2008). The majority of the participants viewed members of families with a Korean father and a mother from another country or vice versa as legitimately multicultural. Some of them narrowed down the membership even further; they viewed only marriage migrants or a person who obtained Korean citizenship as multicultural. A few other participants included migrant workers. Inclusion of migrant workers reflects the Korean governmental policy. Registered migrant workers are the subjects of segregation, not assimilation, in the direction of Korean governmental policy (Won, 2008). Since they work in certain industries under strict governmental control for a short period of time, only a bare minimum of support for registered migrant workers exists. In conclusion, the participants perceived people whom the Korean governmental policy supports as multicultural.

However, the analysis of the fourth reports showed the biggest change in terms of the people who are considered as multicultural. The statement below represents the general trend of changes.

A-10 It is surprising that there is a multicultural family that Korean blood is not mixed in. I thought "multicultural family" is only Filipino women and Korean

farmers or American men and young Korean women. I really didn't know that Filipino and American couple is multicultural family and they are in our country. This shows how much we are insensitive but also show that various media neglected multicultural families. They are not interested about families which are not Korean blood [not translated].

Participant A-10's reaction did not stop at surprise at the diversity of people who are considered as multicultural. She tracked down the reason for her ignorance as being rooted in the media and critically reviewed the media as not being interested in people with various cultural backgrounds but not related to Korean ethnic. This implies that she was able to apply her critical thinking skills to a real-life situation beyond analyzing a text.

The fact that many participants were surprised at the diversity of people who are considered as multicultural can probably be attributed to the presenters having diverse backgrounds. There was not a single presenter with the same background as another; they were Pakistani-Korean, Filipino-American, Korean-American, Russian, and even of Korean ethnicity with a foreign background. Their one common feature was that they had cultural backgrounds different from the mainstream Korean culture. It perhaps problematized presenters' beliefs about people who are considered as multicultural, which had been demonstrated in their first reports. The results of the first reports showed that the participants considered only those with blood relationships with Korean and residing in Korea legitimately as multicultural. Their new knowledge of the diversity of people who are considered as multicultural provoked even more critical review. The excerpt below shows one critical review.

B-02 I had to understand things in order to be able not to discriminate. However, I was only not to discriminate, but nobody told me who I should consider as multicultural. Although there are numerous people who are considered as multicultural, the Korean government has focused on the cases of foreign wives and Korean husbands and has given them benefits. I think this focus obstructs our chance to learn real multiculturalism [translated].

Participant B-02's response shows her change in perspective from liberal multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism. As often is the perspective in liberal multiculturalism, non-discrimination for her was something not to be debated but something to be accepted. Then she realized that her education against discrimination was somewhat lacking because she did not know whom she should not discriminate against. She began questioning why she had not learned about all people of other cultural backgrounds in Korea. After that, she realized there was a structural problem

since the governmental multicultural policy limited the target of the policy to certain groups.

In sum, the participants demonstrated an enhancement in critical thinking skills when authentic resources of Korean contexts were provided. Many of them used the presentations of the high school students with minority cultural backgrounds as new information and critically examined their own previous knowledge. They were able to provide grounded arguments for their changes in perceptions, which led to social transformation or self- reflection. In other words, some of them found the structural problems in pursuing multiculturalism and insisted on social transformation. Furthermore, some participants realized the power relationship between cultural minorities and mainstream Koreans and compared the power structure to real life situations such as those at school.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

The present paper illustrates how Korean university students enhanced their critical thinking skills through scaffolding critical reading practice and the local input of the Korean contexts. While previous studies show that critical thinking skills are an essential academic skill for success in higher education and imply that it can be fostered through reading comprehension, the development of the critical thinking skills of Korean EFL learners through a mandatory English course has not been explored. The study is, therefore, meaningful in that it shows an empirical evidence to prove the feasibility of improving critical thinking skills through an English language course in higher education.

The results reveal that critical thinking skills can be fostered by critical reading. Students who had learned how to read critically through guided practice were able to apply it to a new text. This means that students can read other texts critically by themselves. Not only critical reading but also the authentic voice of high school students with minority cultural backgrounds contributes to developing critical thinking. The results show that students were able to think rationally with grounds to support their opinions and attributed their initial prejudice to social structural problems. Moreover, they re-evaluated their own experience and were willing to change their perspectives to make changes toward a better society.

Another important finding from the study is the possibility of teaching critical reading to all levels of EFL learners. Previous studies concern teaching critical reading to students with higher English proficiency or English-related majors. Yet, the present study demonstrates that teaching critical reading is possible for students with relatively lower

English proficiency and with majors other than English. The results are in line with Wallace (2003). She states that all readers are able to make meaning from texts and also are able to read critically from the earliest stage of language acquisition. In fact, students with lower English proficiency are found to focus more on social and cultural contexts than on analyzing the text (Ko & Wang, 2012). Thus, teachers might not need to wait until students' English proficiency reaches a high level before introducing critical reading.

It is also noted that the findings imply the importance of introducing materials with culturally broad spectrums when a given textbook contains limited perspectives. The required textbook contained Eurocentric perspectives, advocating colonialism. It was problematic not only for many Asians with scars from past colonial history but also for fostering critical thinking. Such biased perspectives may interfere with students' conscious effort to be rational. When students investigated the Korean multicultural policy and attended the presentations of high school students with minority cultural backgrounds, they were able to achieve multidimensional perspectives toward multiculturalism and develop criticism toward biased perspectives.

To sum up, the researcher found that students were able to enhance their critical thinking skills through an English language course regardless of their English proficiency. Also, culturally enriched information empowers students' critical thinking skills even more.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

As qualitative action research that focused on the description of fostering the critical thinking skills of Korean EFL learners, the study found interesting results. However, the findings from the study could have been more broadly generalized to all other EFL contexts if data had been solicited from four-skills-based language courses. Since the data were collected from two reading classes at one women's university, further studies might need to be conducted in various language courses in more institutions. How critical thinking skills are fostered by other language skills awaits further exploration.

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