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SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

Universidad de El Salvador
Hacia la libertad por la cultura

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MATERIALS AND THE ACTIVITIES THAT TEACHERS USE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM TO HELP STUDENTS TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING IN READINGS AND CONVERSATION I, SEMESTER II, 2013.

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the findings of a study conducted to investigate the effect of the materials and the activities used by teachers in the subject of Readings and Conversations I, over students' development of critical thinking. The study found that during this course, it is being applied a new teaching methodology that facilitates the enhancement of Critical Thinking not only inside but also outside the classroom. However, as the team could conclude, there are negative responses of students to such methodology, due to their position towards learning. These findings will help teachers to reinforce motivation through the use of their materials design in terms of helping students to develop reading habits and keeping on mind that: "If the focus is on learning, students should be given the freedom (and responsibility) to explore contents, analyze resources, and apply information. Unfortunately, students are not typically taught to think or learn independently, and *they rarely "pick up" these skills on their own* (Ladsman & Gorski, 2007; Lundquist, 1999; Rippen, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan, 2002)." This will lead to a more complete Critical Thinking building and to a better learning competence and production in students' academic and professional career.

INTRODUCTION

The following research was carried out with the purpose of observing the effect of the materials and activities used by the teachers of Readings and Conversations I at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, over students' learning and development of critical thinking, as part of reading competence. There has been a previous diagnosis, administrated to the students belonging to the groups of Reading and Conversations II during course I (April 2013). According to the results obtained in such diagnosis, the research team was able to continue the investigation thanks to the information collected, which demonstrated the existence of a researchable field. During the administration of the diagnosis, teachers were working with the traditional teaching methodology that consisted in the teaching of text analysis and reading strategies through the use of course books, articles and other reading resources. Critical Thinking was taught as one more reading strategy, and practice of text analysis and interpretation consisted in mechanical learning; controlled reading practice and production. Activities were limited to be developed inside the classroom, and students were assigned with tasks such as the reading of a book that teachers selected for them to be read outdoors, to later provide a personal description of the facts and contents related in the stories.

During course II (June 2013), the research team discovered that a new teaching methodology consisting in the use of media and the design of personalized blogs, the use of videos, audios, virtualized classes and so on, was being implemented by teachers of Readings and Conversations I, as a result, a deep interest for knowing and observing how these new resources and materials, and of course, the design of new activities were going to influence students' Critical Thinking learning. It was necessary to design three instruments focused on Critical Thinking development from different perspectives. A

sample of three Readings and Conversations groups was chosen, and the instruments were administrated to teachers and students, in order to contrast the gathered information from both sides: Critical Thinking teaching and learning. Analysis of data collected from the three groups was carefully analyzed, interpreted and represented in the contents that follow. This investigation was intended to contribute to increase the quality of the teaching and learning processes for Readings and Conversations academic strategies since critical thinking is the core of reading text interpretation and context comprehension the last subject in the Language Skill and Development Area of *Licenciatura en Idioma Ingles Opcion Ensenanza*, in which teachers are focused on developing the students' language skills.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Readings and Conversations I and II form part of the curricula of the majors of Licenciatura en Idioma Ingles Opción Enseñanza and Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas especialidad Inglés y Frances; this subject, as stated in the official programs has as one of its main objectives those activities that help students to develop their critical thinking such detecting the author's purpose in a reading text, interpret someone's intention or opinion and identify the meaning of reference in the text. Taking into account the new methodology modalities that the teachers from the Foreign Languages Department are applying during the last two semesters (semester I and II-2013) in some subjects, it called the research team's attention to investigate how the materials and the activities designed by the teachers helped students with the development of Critical Thinking skill as part of the subject's program. Then, thanks to the administration of a questionnaire especially designed by the research team to get a diagnostic from two groups of Readings and Conversations II from the Foreign Languages Department belonging to the University of El Salvador, the results obtained put into evidence that students did not agree with the quality of the materials and the activities to which they were exposed during their classes. This means, that the methodology and the resources used by teachers were not useful at all for developing students' critical thinking. In addition, according to students' answers, the time programmed by the teachers to develop all the activities that were designed for the same purpose, was not enough, bringing as a result an incompletion of the tasks; interfering with critical thinking learning. At this point, the research team considers necessary to formulate the Research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent do the materials and the activities that teachers use inside and outside the classroom help students to develop critical thinking in the subject of Readings and Conversations I from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador? As it can be seen, the importance of this research lies in the fact of investigating at which level these factors are contributing or diminishing students' opportunities to learn and develop critical thinking.

Subsidiary Questions

- *How do the objectives stated in the program of Readings and Conversations I are focused in the development of students' Critical Thinking skill?*

- *What role does students' background knowledge play to help them develop Critical Thinking?*

- *What are the criteria that teachers use to choose the activities that are most appropriate for the enhancement of students' Critical Thinking skill?*

- *How does the time established for the subject interfere with the activities addressed to develop Critical Thinking?*

JUSTIFICATION

Readings and Conversations I is a course in which teachers are focused on introducing and developing new reading skills to help students learn effectively. The research team was interested in knowing and discovering how the activities and materials that were used by teachers and students along the course lead to the familiarization with critical thinking. The importance of this research is evident when the research team knows that this subject was the students' basis to develop critical thinking as one of the most important reading skills for the term, and of course, as a skill that will allow students to easily get familiarized with the language they are still learning. This will help the research team to determine the quality of the teaching and learning processes as part of students' academic preparation and as part of their professional formation; contributing in this way, with the improvement of English as a second language teaching methodology.

OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

- To investigate how the materials and activities used in the subject of Readings and Conversations I during the semester II-2013 help students with the development of Critical Thinking skill at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador.

Specific Objectives:

- To analyze the type of activities that are being used in the course of Readings and Conversations at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador.
- To verify if the activities and materials used in the class enhance students' development of Critical Thinking.
- To identify the role of background knowledge as a resource that teachers use to help students enhance Critical Thinking.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a well and structured and complex activity in which a series of mental processes take place to interact with the information already stored in the brain and the information that is totally new, as well as the decoding of the messages expressed on the texts. Authors such as *Carrell* (1987), describe reading as an interaction between the reader and the text, based on the readers' background knowledge and the new structures contained in the reading material. *Spiro* (1977), *Brewer and Treyens* (1984), define text interaction as a process in which the new information is interpreted and analyzed through mental schemata and the text is analyzed at various levels going from simple words to a whole content of meaning.

Differentiating Good and Poor Readers

Authors such as Perfetti (1985) point out the importance of automaticity in word recognition by saying that decoding and comprehension compete for available short-term memory capacity. Good readers use less capacity to analyze visual stimuli, allowing cognitive processing capacity to be directed to comprehension processes at other levels. Alderson (2000) also states that readers' vocabulary knowledge is highly correlated with their proficiency level in reading and is "the single best predictor of text comprehension" (p. 35)

Mackay (1997) found out that good readers often have more access to reading strategies to undertake reading tasks successfully and that they use them with greater frequency and flexibility.

"Reading as Critical Thinking" Abu Shihab Ibrahim, Alzaytounah Private University. February 21th, 2011.

In addition, Block (1986) found that four characteristics differentiated good from poor readers: they are *(a) integration; (b) recognition of aspects of text structure; (c) use of general knowledge, personal experiences, and associations; and (d) response in extensive versus reflexive modes*.

It is of great importance to underline here that when readers focus on the author's ideas expressed in the text instead of relating the text to themselves personally and affectively, they are said to be in an extensive mode. On the other hand, when in a reflexive mode, readers tend to shift their attention away from context information towards themselves in an affective and personal way. Both modes are necessary depending on students' needs towards the texts.

The Role of Background Knowledge

The use of prior knowledge to aid reading comprehension is a good factor to help the reaching of comprehension (Bernhardt, 1991; Brantmeier, 2004; Haenggi&Perfetti, 1992; Spires & Donley, 1998). Teachers must be careful while providing students with background knowledge at the beginning of a reading lesson. Marzano, 2004 claims that to activate students' background knowledge building, teachers can make use of Direct and Indirect experiences. This refers to the contact of students through trips and guided visits to places where the topics and contents of the texts are taking place in their own reality. However, as it will imply a great investment of class time and planning, they can make use of media and resources like the Internet in order to make students' background knowledge teaching more interactive.

Chen and Graves (1995), in a study on the effect of providing background knowledge before reading with university students in Taiwan, also provided evidence of the

positive effect of background knowledge on EFL learners' reading comprehension. On the other hand, some studies have also documented cases where poor readers often wrongly used their prior knowledge to compensate for their target language deficiencies (e.g., Lu, 1999). In the case that students have not acquired an acceptable management of their second language, it would be very difficult for them to try to fit with language structures that require a more advanced linguistic fluency. This often interferes with the way in which ideas are build and of course, with text interpretation while lack of vocabulary is presented. The role of background knowledge inside the classroom is to serve as a resource of students' motivation. Instead of being a long talk about facts that happened or happen, it must be introduced by identifying the opportunities to activate it. In other words, it will require teachers to introduce the topic of the reading passage interactively and with the use of other didactic resources to call student' interest. As students get more in deep, they will ask or express doubts about what is being read, since they do not know anything about it or maybe they have a different conception of the topic. As long as they start building their ideas, the teacher can introduce the new information as something that will complement context familiarization.

Metacognitive Focus

Flavell (1981), the first to propose the concept of metacognition, viewed it as consisting of two dimensions: *knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition*. Carrell et al. (1998) shares the idea that in reading, the two key metacognitive factors, knowledge and control, are concerned respectively with what readers know about their cognitive resources and their regulation. Regulation in reading includes the awareness ofand ability to detect contradictions in a text, knowledge of different strategies to use with different text types, and the ability to separate important from unimportant information.

(p. 101). This means, that students must know which are their own cognitive capacities, but also their cognitive deficiencies. This will help them to identify predispositions not only to second language learning, but to perform more abstract cognitive processes such as text analysis, decodification, interpretation and context meaning. Recognition leads to the awareness of text contradiction; the cognitive processes mentioned previously will take place here, requiring students to make use of differentiation of text content and author's ideas. This is necessary if we want students to get familiarized with the text critically, keeping a specific point of view, or moving from several perspectives to appreciate the richness of the reading text, keeping in mind that author's writing styles may vary and meaning will appear intrinsically and not often extrinsically.

Introducing Critical Thinking

Despite that, the concept of Critical Thinking has variable definitions, several authors agree in that it is an essential part of reading skills. The role of critical thinking goes beyond "criticizing a text" as it literally sounds. Several students and readers commit the mistake of reproducing the same ideas stated by the authors using different words to call in "interpretation". This is very common when they are exposed to texts that are overused with grammatical structures, inappropriate vocabulary that is not in agreement with their linguistic level, or texts that are not related with topics of their interest and do not motivate them to get involved into the context. *Harmon* (2010), states that the lack of vocabulary and text structure are meaningful obstacles that interfere with students' text understanding. In contrast, *Munby* (1978) suggests that the process of reading requires the reader to be equipped with several skills to apply.

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<u>Defining Critical Thinking</u>

Currently, Critical Thinking is an aim for professional in the field of education which needs to be developed in order to equip students. This term has been applied 2000 years ago for the first time by Socrates who was interested in carefully questioning people's claims. Seeking evidence and reasons and analyzing concepts to figure out what to believe. However, John Dewey (1993) an American philosopher, psychologist and educator, was the first to define critical thinking. He calls it ¨reflective thinking¨ and states the necessity for individuals to actively and persistently participate in their own thinking process through reflections, giving reasons and interpretations to the conclusions and evaluate it. According to him learning improves in the process of reflective thinking. Besides this, there is a variety of definitions such as the Delphie experts who define it as: ¨purposeful, self regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis evaluation and referents as well as explanation of evidential, conceptual methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. ¨ Therefore, from this point of view the ideal thinker is seen a well informed in relevant information, flexible, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, reasonable in selection of criteria, and prudent in making judgment.

Bloom (1956) defines critical thinking as the ability to gain knowledge through the explanation of ideas concerning the following six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Knowledge and comprehension belong to the low level of thinking skills. William Huitt (1998) defines critical thinking as the disciplined mental activity of evaluating arguments or propositions and making judgments that can guide the development of beliefs and taking actions. Based on this, it can be say that the thinker not only has to make good decisions but also have the capacity to intervene and propose solutions. Similarly, Fisher (2001) is another

important scholar who describes critical thinking as ¨a kind of evaluated thinking¨ which involves both criticism and creative thinking and which is particularly concern with the quality of reasoning and argument which is presented in support of beliefs or course of action.

Paul & Elder (2005) indicate that the essence of critical thinking is ¨the art of thinking about thinking in two ways: 1) identify its strengths and weaknesses and 2) recast it in improved form (where it is necessary). according to them the thinker needs to have the ability to analyze, evaluate, and to be creative thinking since it is necessary to make analysis of thinking by focusing on the parts of structures of thinking (the elements of thought), evaluation of thinking by focusing on the quality, (the universal Intellectual Standards) and improvement of thinking by using what you have learned (the Intellectual Traits). The authors have pointed out critical thinking as the ¨art of thinking¨ and the way to develop thinker's critical thinking ability through ¨thinking about thinking¨.

Based on all these critical thinking definitions, the research team concludes that most researchers agree that critical thinking involves analysis, interpretation, explanation, evaluation, inference, evidence, and clarity. In order to have a clear definition about what critical thinking is, the research team has gather the most important aspects from all those definitions above mentioned. Therefore, Critical thinking is an active and skillful process of analysis, interpretation, explanation, synthesis, and evaluation that students are required to have and include it in their competence in order to apply their knowledge to new situations to solve problems and make decisions to make them think critically rather than to repeat information or memorize it. All these information must be gathered from the students' experience, observation, reflection, and communication. Taking into account this viewpoint, the research team has also shaped a thinker profile.

In doing so, the research team consider theta critical thinker must develop some abilities such as the ability to infer, use his or her own criteria to think critically based on relevant and accurate facts, construct arguments supporting it with evidence, ask questions, identify assumptions, define and solve a problem, judge and analyze different situations.

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

Critical thinkers:

- ✓ Are honest with themselves, acknowledging what they don't know, recognizing their limitations, and being watchful of their own errors.

- ✓ Regard problems and controversial issues as exciting challenges.

- ✓ Strive for understanding, keep curiosity alive, remain patient with complexity, and are ready to invest time to overcome confusion.

- ✓ Base judgments on evidence rather than personal preferences, deferring judgment whenever evidence is in sufficient. They revise judgments when new evidence reveals error.

- ✓ Are interested in other people's ideas and so are willing to read and listen attentively, even when they tend to disagree with the other person.

- ✓ Recognize that extreme views (whether conservative or liberal) are seldom correct, so they avoid them, practice fair mindedness, and seek a balance view

- ✓ Practice restraint, controlling their feelings rather than being controlled by them, and thinking before acting.

"Research into practice". *Understanding the reading process*. Konza Deslea, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education and Arts, Edith Cowen University, Western Australia. Draft, June 2011.

The Importance to Teach Critical Thinking Skill

Nowadays, have the ability to think critically is an important skill that is required in order to be competent in different areas such as education and labor sphere. However, many people lack this. It is because in some cases the curriculums require students to retain enough information to do well on multiple choice tests or reading activities without actually making them think deeply about the material they are reading. Besides this, there is a lack of reading habits from students which interfere with the development of their critical thinking. In fact, students do not born with the ability to think critically that why it is necessary teachers model and integrate this skill in the classroom. According to Hemming, 2000 students must learn how to think critically before they can apply the skill to content scenarios. Modeling can be demonstrated in a discussion setting by asking a question and "walking students through" the process of critically thinking. Actually, there are many teachers who are constantly struggling in order to engaged students in different activities that let them to develop their critical thinking skill. In addition, teachers must challenge and motivate students to be independent thinkers. Hence, teachers should encourage students to participate in classroom activities and discussions in order to practice and improve their critical thinking skill.

Activities that Develop Critical Thinking

How do teachers can engage critical reading?

To engage in Critical Thinking, students must become fully aware of an idea or an action, reflect on it, and ultimately react to it. There are some important steps that teachers need to make students go through:

1. Summarize

Extract and restate the material's main message or central point. Here, students are required to apply reading strategies such as skimming and scanning that might be helpful to get the text's main idea quickly.

2. Analyze

Students must examine the material by breaking it into its component parts. By seeing each part of the whole as a distinct unit, they will soon discover how the parts interrelate.

3. Synthesize

Students make a puzzle of what they have summarized and analyzed by connecting it to their own experiences, such as reading, talking with others, watching television and films, using the Internet, and so on. In this way, they create a new whole that reflects their newly acquired knowledge and insights combined with their prior knowledge.

4. Evaluate

Now students need to judge the quality of the material after they have become informed through the activities of summary, analysis, and synthesis. The approach developed by *The Critical Thinking Consortium* suggests that success in any critical thinking Endeavour depends on the level of development of five kinds of "intellectual tools" (Case and Daniels, 2002). We believe that these tools are vital to lead students to the building of Critical Thinking application and appropriate use. Students need to understand the value of activating the information they are getting when making meaning from text. It is already a great advantage that students are being exposed to technology and activities especially designed to enhance Critical Thinking inside and outside the class.

Vocabulary is a key part of reading, but there is a particular kind of vocabulary that is central to reading as thinking. Vocabulary, help students think about what they are reading and about the interpretations they are developing. They include notions such as clue and evidence, bias and point of view, stereotype and generalization. To sum up, something that calls the research team attention is the fact that according to *Abbott*, ***the mindset that readers bring to text influences their interactions and thinking***. "Attitudes such as curiosity, attention to detail, persistence and open-mindedness orient how students engage with the text. We call these habits of mind". After class observation, we could notice that habits of mind interfere in the development of Critical Thinking affecting the process of students' learning and practice because students lack of reading habits and so, the knowledge that they have results being not enough to share information about the topics presented. In addition, motivation to participate in the different activities designed by teachers is another obstacle that interferes with the learning of critical thought. Teachers claim that although they are using new methodologies inside and outside the classrooms, students remain using isolated pieces of knowledge to build poor arguments when they are questioned. A big part of this relies on students' previous study habits and their own expectations about the course, which are highly limited to receive and keep the information that teachers provide in a very brief way.

Supporting Tools

	Background knowledge	Criteria for judgment	Thinking vocabulary	Thinking strategies	Habits of mind
Activate • personal knowledge and experiences • information from other Sources	• direct and indirect personal experience • knowledge of a variety of reference sources and merits/limitations of each one.	Efficient • relevant • useful • credible		• previewing • brainstorming • think of a time • visualizing	• inquiry minded
Anticipate • Micro: what happens next in the text • Macro: broader text structures	• text structures • elements of the text	• can be supported by clues in the text and prior knowledge • not obvious	•prediction • evidence • clues •conclusion • inference	know-wonder • gars • graphic organizers	•critical minded • attention to detail
Extract • Draw out the details of the text and the overall meaning both implied and implicit	• genres • themes • literacy devices (symbols etc)	based on what is known • makes sense in the text	synthesize • evidence • clues •conclusions • main idea •supporting details	Skim • scan • concept map • reaction codes • think aloud • i think i know • read between/ beyond the lines • 5ws	• persistence • attention to data
Challenge • Monitor emerging interpretation and understanding of the text • Question the merits of the text given its purpose	• knowledge of fiction and non-fiction • knowledge of variety of purposes	Relevant • grounded in the text • fair to author and yourself •comprehensively.	• evidence •argument •stereotype • bias • point of view • facts •assumptions •argument • counter arguments	• story boards • sq3r • character sociogram • evidence charts	• open minded • seeks corroboration • fair minded
Deliberate • Explore the ideas and issue presented in the text and their implications beyond the text	• knowledge of issues/ themes in the text	• relevant • beyond the obvious • reflect important considerations	•hypothesis •conclusions • assumptins	• used to think • so what? • discussion circled	• reflective • inquisitive

Mary Abbott, Project manager, The Critical Thinking Consortium

Teaching Strategies That Promote Critical Thinking

- *Cooperative Learning Strategies:* Cooper (1995) argues that putting students in group learning situations is the best way to foster critical thinking. "In properly structured cooperative learning environments, students perform more of the active, critical thinking with continuous support and feedback from other students and the teacher" (p.8).

- *Conference Style Learning:* The teacher does not "teach" the class in the sense of lecturing. The teacher is a facilitator of a conference. Students must thoroughly read all required material before class. Assigned readings should be in the zone of proximal development. That is, readings should be able to be understood by students, but also challenging. The class consists of the students asking questions of each other and discussing these questions. The teacher does not remain passive, but rather, helps "direct and mold discussions by posing strategic questions and helping students build on each others' ideas" (Underwood & Wald, 1995, p. 18).

- *Problem-solving:* is a process-an ongoing activity in which we take what we know to discover what we don't know. It involves overcoming obstacles by generating hypo-theses, testing those predictions, and arriving at satisfactory solutions. *Problem-solving* is, and should be, a very real part of the curriculum. It presupposes that students can take on some of the responsibility for their own learning and can take personal action to solve problems, resolve conflicts, discuss alternatives, and focus on thinking as a vital element of the curriculum. It provides students with opportunities to use their newly acquired knowledge in meaningful, real-life activities and assists them in working at higher levels of thinking.

- ***Think-pair-share:*** (TPS) is a collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This technique requires students to (1) think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and (2) share ideas with classmates. Discussing an answer with a partner serves to maximize participation, focus attention and engage students in comprehending the reading material.

- ***Know - Want to Know–Learned (K-W-L):*** (Ogle, 1986) is an instructional reading strategy that is used to guide students through a text. It is an introductory strategy that provides a structure for recalling what students know about a topic, noting what students want to know, and finally listing what has been learned and is yet to be learned. The K-W-L strategy serves several purposes: elicits students' prior knowledge of the topic of the text, sets a purpose for reading, and helps students to monitor their comprehension. The K-W-L strategy allows students to take inventory of what they already know and what they want to know. Students can categorize information about the topic that they expect to use.

In order to design an appropriate environment to develop students' reading skills, teachers must be aware of some important characteristics that their activities should have, especially when working with Critical Thinking enhancement inside the classroom:

Building Knowledge

- *Students compare expectations with what is being learned*
- *Revise expectations or raise new ones*
- *Identify the main points*
- *Monitor personal thinking*
- *Make inferences about the material*
- *Make personal connections to the lesson*
- *Question the lesson*

Benefits of Critical Thinking Skill

Good critical thinking skills bring numerous benefits such as:

- Improved attention and observation
- More focused reading
- Improved ability to identify the key points in a text or other message rather than becoming distracted by less important material
- Improved ability to respond to the appropriate points in a message
- Knowledge of how to get your own point across more easily
- Skills of analysis that you can choose to apply in a variety of situations

In order to understand the process of reading the research team has considered to stand out four characteristics that according to Paris & Myers, 1981; Pressley, 1998; Torgesen, 1982; 2000 characterize good readers.

Characteristics of Good Readers

- *Good readers are purposeful*

Good readers understand the purpose of their reading, and so are able to adjust their reading style accordingly. They know *why* they are reading and *how* they should read to accomplish their purpose.

- *Good readers understand the purpose of the text*

Good readers are not only purposeful themselves, but they also understand that writers are purposeful.

- *Good readers monitor their comprehension*

Good readers, because they are reading for a purpose, monitor their comprehension to ensure that there are no gaps in their understanding. They relate the information to personal experience or existing knowledge; they evaluate the information as they read to determine whether it confirms or contradicts what they know; they ask questions as they read and search for the answers in the text; they create mental images as they read; and they differentiate between key information and supporting detail.

- *Good readers adjust their reading strategies*

 As they monitor their comprehension, good readers are able to adjust their reading strategies when required. They may slow their reading rate if sentences are long and complex; or reread a section if they begin to lose meaning. If they encounter a word they don't know, they have a repertoire of strategies to call on: they can draw inferences from surrounding text to help construct the word meaning; they can scan the new word to see what parts of it they do know; they can chunk words into syllables; they can use their letter-sound knowledge in combination with their vocabulary knowledge to ascertain the meaning of unknown words. They can also stop and take notes to help retain complex information, complete a retrieval chart or semantic grid; gradually build a concept map as they read; or use a thesaurus or dictionary.

Good readers are not only required to have all these characteristics, but also they need a multiple strategies that help them to develop their critical thinking such as prediction, linking text content with their own experiences and knowledge, asking and answering questions, image construction, summarizing, and so on. Besides this, it is necessary teachers apply different strategies in the classroom in order to develop readers' comprehension. Strategies such as Prepare students before reading, Facilitate engagement during reading aloud, Facilitate students' comprehension during independent reading, Promote comprehension after reading, and Use questioning as comprehension strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied to carry out this investigation was divided into two aspects: teachers' methodology and students' responses to the activities applied in the classroom. Both areas were focused on how critical thinking was being or not being developed inside and outside the classroom, so that the Observation Technique was chosen to gather this important information. That is why the research team carefully considered the design of a checklist containing 10 questions focused on finding out how critical thinking was being promoted during the courses of Readings and Conversations I. This instrument was going to be used for a period of two weeks due to the fact that students were not receiving all their classes inside the classroom (some days they had classes on line, and the research team needed to talk to the teachers in the respective groups to make an agreement of the days in which they could be able to observe the classes) this was going to be helpful to observe students' behavior and responses to the teachers' methodology in different groups. In addition, a questionnaire containing from 10 to 15 questions was created with the purpose of obtaining direct information from the teachers, related with their methodology and the time they counted with to prepare and develop the material resources that serve as class support for the development of the classes. These instruments were administrated the same day that the research team members were allowed to observe the classes. To complement our results, an interview and an observation class checklist were used during the observation day's attendance to check some extra points that would help the research team to gather the information from simple but not less important details.

Because of being a qualitative investigation, the method to analyze the information collected consisted in the selection of the most meaningful questions from each instrument used. These questions and answers were analyzed and interpreted by the

research team to contrast the answers provided by the teachers and the reactions of students, at the time they were observed. Quantitative data analysis was used with the graphs showed, in order to clarify the information and to provide validity to the results obtained. Each graph contains an interpretation and an explanation. Not all the items presented in the instrument were taken into account to be analyzed; there were a few "key items" that were intended to be the ones that were going to provide the most relevant information to help the team to establish the connection between the research and the subsidiary questions, with the answers to them.

Sampling

The sample selected to carry out this research consisted in three groups out of a population of seven, belonging to the subject of Readings and Conversations I, course II/2013 from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador. There was a total amount of three groups chosen to work with the students who were observed during the development of their classes, and three respective teachers, who belonged to each group, and who were interviewed through three questionnaires, with the purpose of obtaining the necessary data. The research team focused in these three groups to have a variability of schedules in each group (During the morning, the groups have more members attending to the class. In the afternoon and at night, the amount of students attending is reduced due to the fact that some of them work, (or already have family responsibilities to support). **Group 01** was observed in the schedule of 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. During 3 consecutive Wednesdays (October 16th, 23th, and 30th). **Group 04** was observed from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. during 2 consecutive Tuesdays (October 15th and 22nd). Finally, **group 05** was observed from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. during 2 consecutive Wednesdays (October 16th, and 23th). Some groups were observed only for two days,

following the agreement with each teacher and due to the rest of activities they had already programmed for their courses.

Instrument Design

Data Analysis and instrument design for data gathering descriptions

Each instrument was carefully designed with the purpose of giving as much validity as possible through data results. In classroom checklist observation, each question has been compared according to the schedules of the classes that were previously selected to attend. Students' behaviors were observed paying special attention to the variability of their moods and their responses to the activities and materials they were exposed to during the classes.

A) Teacher's questionnaire

In the case of teacher's questionnaire administration, these were delivered to a teacher belonging to each group. Specific questions were organized in two different areas: *personal aspect* and *methodology* in order to evaluate the quality of Critical Thinking instruction inside the classroom.

Personal aspect: it was necessary to know how teachers assume critical thinking into their role personally. In other words, the research team was interested in knowing how serious and important teachers consider critical thinking as part of their teaching courses in the subject, and which are the ways in which they think Critical thinking is being achieved and which are the major factors they consider are contributing or interfering with this process.

Methodology: a vital part on this research is the fact of knowing which are the teaching strategies and methods that the teachers from Readings and Conversations I apply to

introduce and familiarize students with Critical Thinking. Questions here were specially addressed to find out specific activities and resources that teachers were developing inside and also outside their classrooms as part of their courses.

B) *Class observation checklist*

Students' behaviors and responses to methodology were observed according to the schedules previously programmed with each teacher of the groups chosen. Specific items were designed to be observed through students performance in the classroom also divided in two main aspects to evaluate: ***methodology response*** and ***strategies management.*** Answers were compared to contrast students reactions with the methodological aspects that teachers claimed were the most appropriate to be used in their classroom to stimulate critical thinking. As an extra-resource, a second classroom checklist observation was used by the research team to focus in simple aspects such as general behaviors, as the way in which students are sitting, the way in which they answer to questions, the attitude they show while they were asked to perform a specific activity, etc. the research team had the chance to add some comments on what they were observing and what they thought about it, positively or negatively.

Methodology response: a set of items was focused on observing how students were reacting to the methodology they were immersed to work in. Behaviors such as personal motivation and participation inside the classroom were very important points that could help us to find out how students are reaching critical thinking.
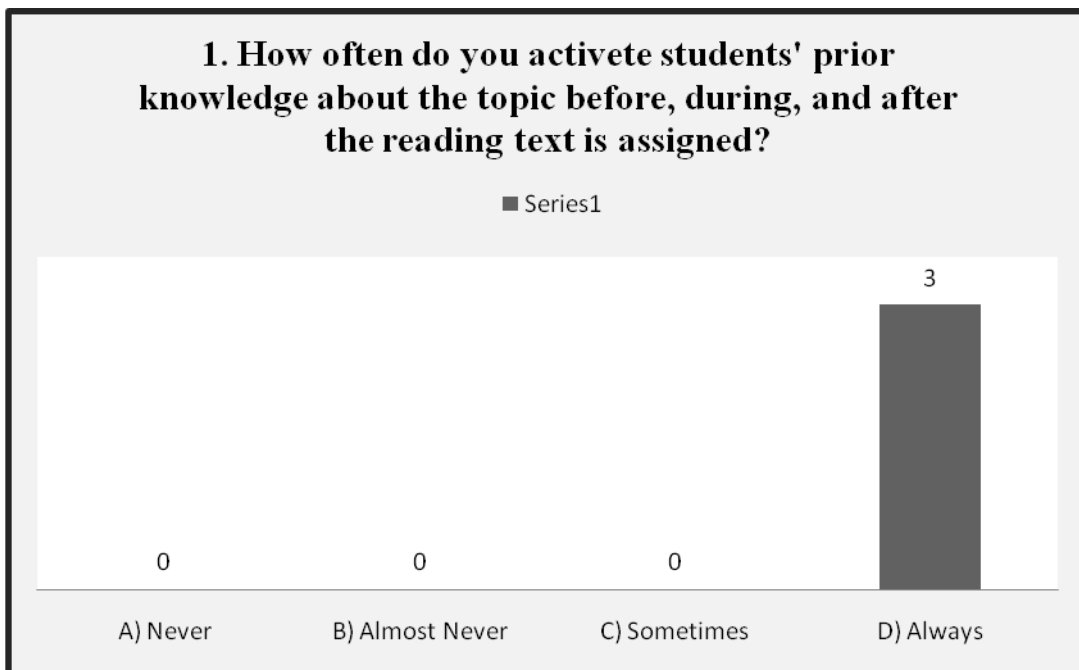
Strategies management: students use of strategies such as skimming and scanning, debate argumentation, creativity, and of course, the use of Critical Thinking was observed along the development of the different activities students performed during their classes.

RESULTS

The following graphs illustrate the 6 main questions addressed to the teachers of each group, and their respective interpretation, with the purpose of summarizing the most important results obtained.

Teachers' questionnaire results

This graphic shows that teachers claimed that activating students' prior knowledge every time they provided reading passages or texts is a matter of essential importance. As the research team could observe, teachers often introduced new topics by providing students with information about dates, events, facts, and details.

1. How often do you activete students' prior knowledge about the topic before, during, and after the reading text is assigned?

■ Series1

0	0	0	3
A) Never	B) Almost Never	C) Sometimes	D) Always

3. Which of the following resources do you provide students with to foster critical thinking inside and outside the classroom?
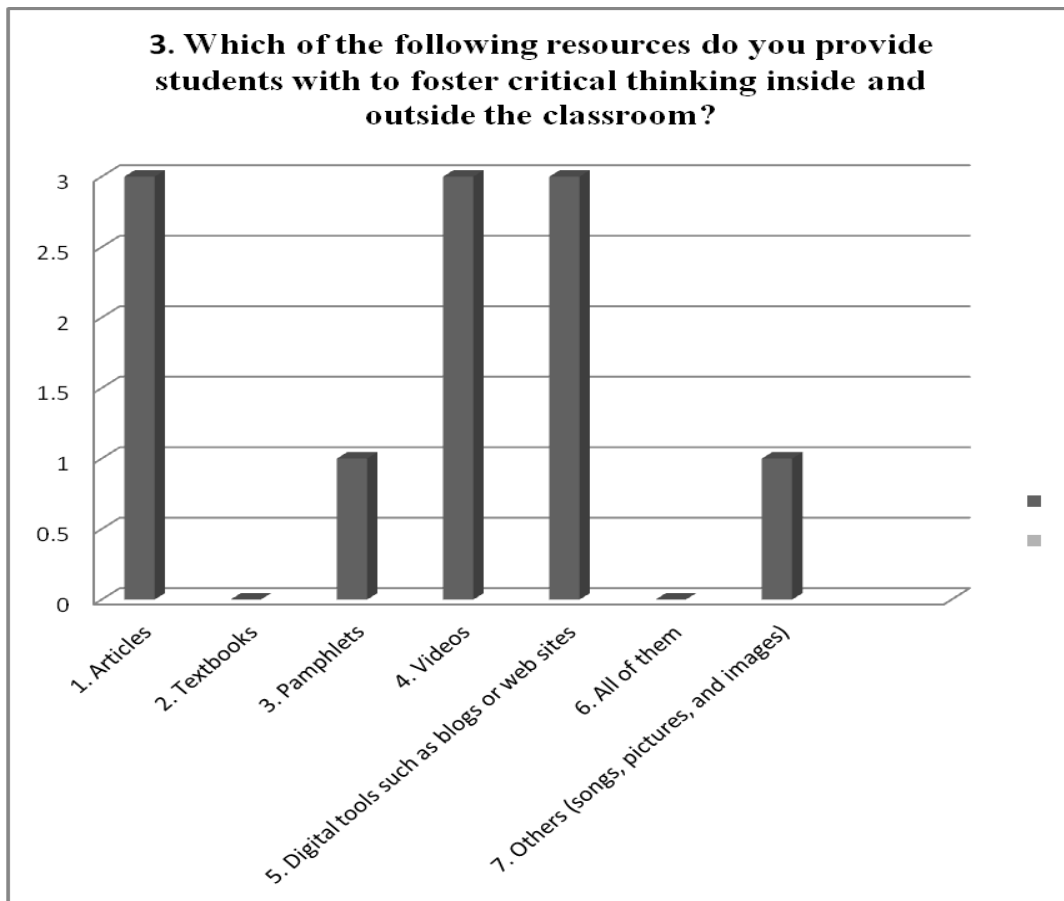
Graphic number three illustrates how digital resources such as blogs, websites, videos and articles were chosen by teachers as the most appropriate to enhance students' critical thinking inside and outside the classroom. This use of innovative media, offered students a more interactive environment where they were closer to situations of their interest, and became part of them. However, teachers called special attention to the fact that due the use of this new methodology, it continues being a hard and difficult process to motivate students to participate in these activities, due to their negative attitude towards learning. Disadvantages obviously emerged in cases where students had problems to access to websites or blogs, because of lack of technical maintenance, electronic failures and others.

4. Which of the following strategies do you use to develop students' critical thinking inside the classroom?
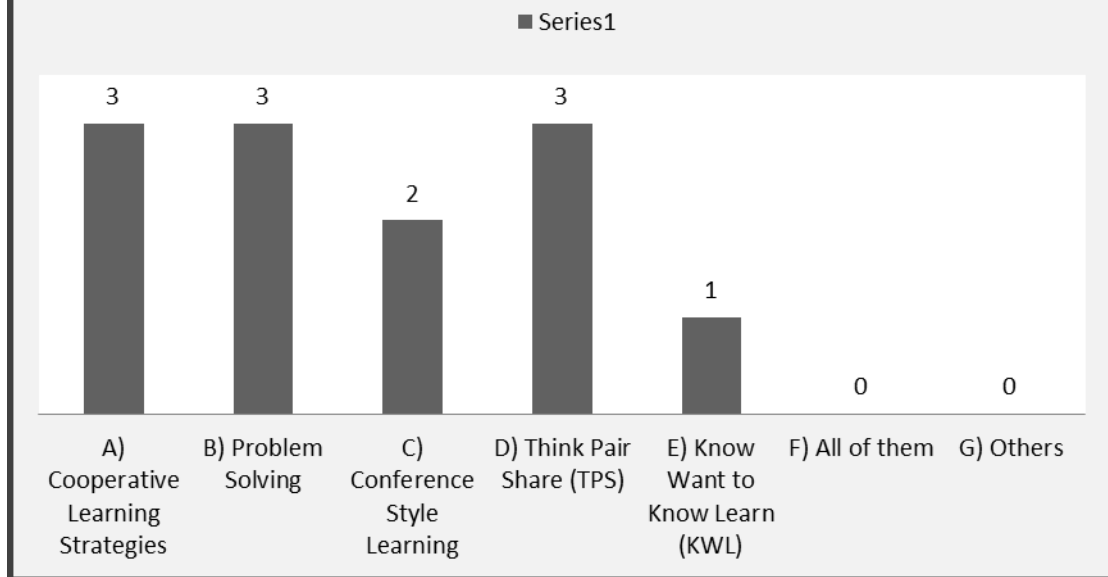
In graphic four, it can be seen that teachers agreed in the use of teaching strategies that can stimulate students' use of background knowledge in cooperation with partners. However, they recalled that students had to learn to think by themselves and not only to wait for others to think instead. Cooperative Learning Strategies, Problem Solving and Think Share Pair were the most used strategies chosen by teachers at the time of helping students think critically.

5. Which of the following activities do you use to promote students' critical thinking inside the classroom?

■ Series1

3	3	3	2	2	3	0	0
1. Debate	2. Discussion	3. Analysing	4. Drawing conclusion	5. Synthesizing	6. Inferring	7. All of them	8. Others
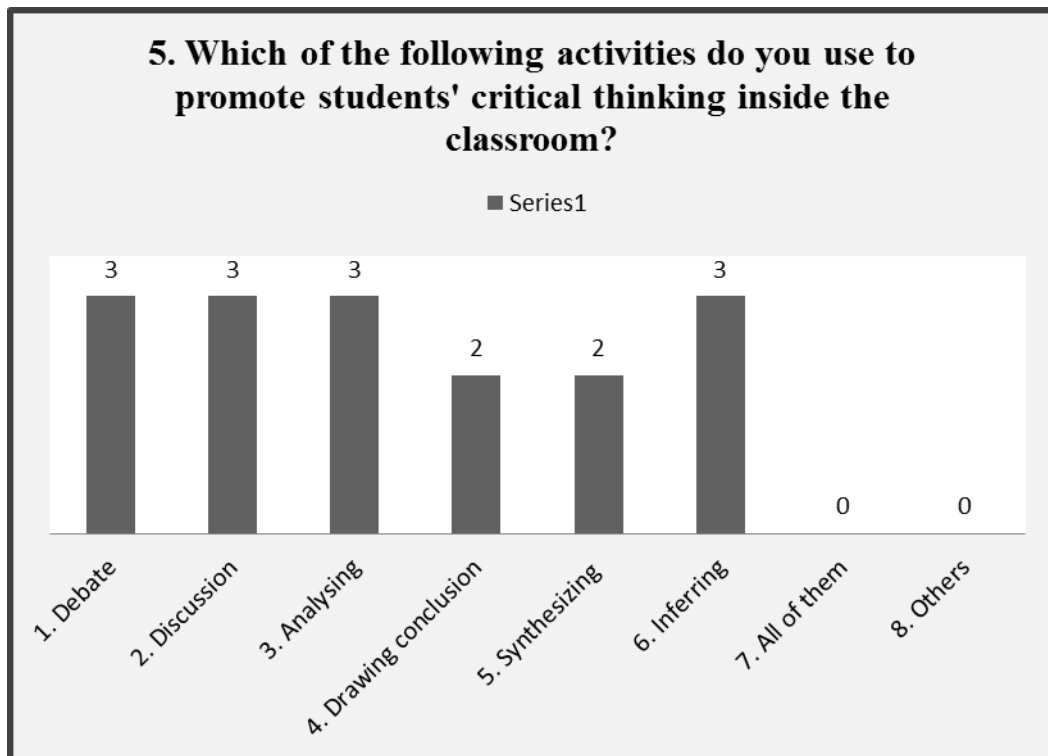
Following graphic five, we can see how teachers promoted students' Critical Thinking inside the classroom; teachers preferred the use of activities that enhanced students' active participation in their own learning. Class debates, Discussions, Analyzing and Inferring were activities, in which students were able to express, learn and think critically about situations that were part of their reality. Analyzing and inferring were processes where students were required to go deeply in contextualizing the information they were reading. Cognitive processes were connected with students' background knowledge to produce new schemata built from the information they were receiving.

6. How often do you promote the activities above mentioned to enhance critical thinking inside and outside the classroom?

■ Series1

0	0	0	3
A) Never	B) Almost Never	C) Sometimes	D) Always
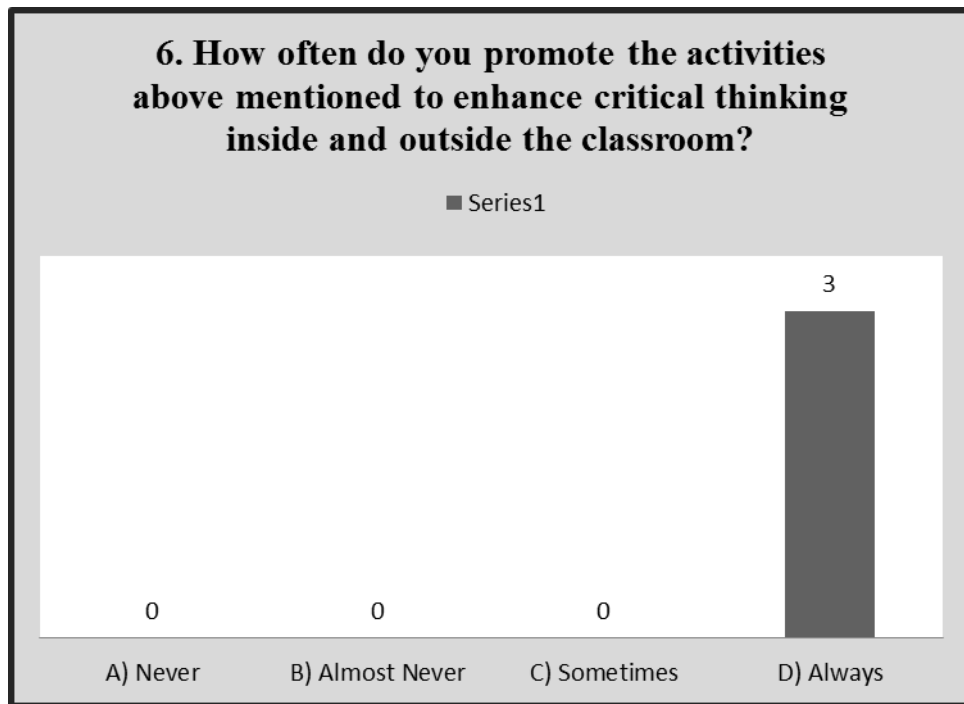
The results in this graphic, show a strong positive tendency of the use of the activities already mentioned in graphic number five. Teachers stated that they always used these kind of activities for the enhancement of critical thinking. However, the problem with the use of these critical thinking activities, consisted in the time and the number of students teachers had to organize with. As we have mentioned previously, time constraints determined the space for students to practice and assimilate the contents and the use of strategies to facilitate their learning. The amount of students inside the classroom played a definite role in terms of assessment and controlled practice. Most of the groups under observation were between 22 and 31 students.

7. How often do you ask students to find evidence to support their arguments about any topic given?

■ Series1

0	0	2
		1
A) Almost	B) Almost never	C) Sometimes	D) Always
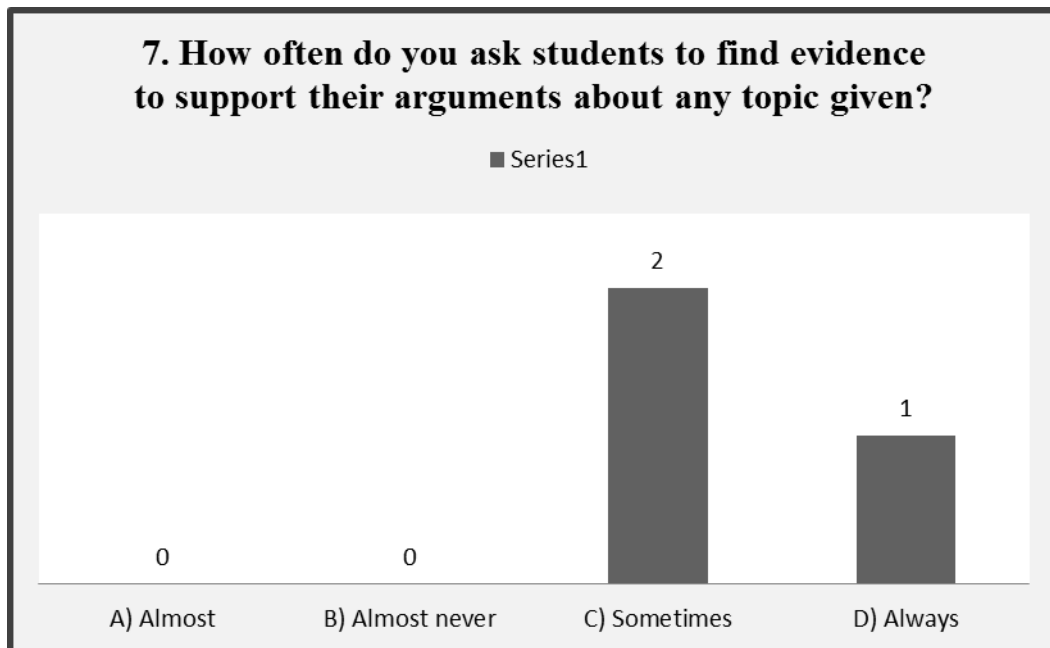
Here, it is clearly stated how most of the teachers agreed in that it was not a habit to question students' arguments about a topic. Sometimes this was caused not because teachers did not consider this important, but because they were aware of students' lack of reading habits and so, lack of background knowledge. This problem was almost always identified as an obstacle that interfered with students' use of critical thinking, and teachers had a limited role respect of it, being students' main responsibility to know and provide appropriate evidence to justify their opinions and positions toward a topic.

Extra Classroom Observation Checklist

The following chart, illustrates the different behaviors of teachers and students observed in each of the groups studied. The materials and activities used in each class are mentioned to provide a clear scheme of teachers' methodology use and students' responses to such methodology.

ASPECTS	Group 1 6:00-8:00 A.M.	Group 4 3:00-5:00 P.M.	Group 6 5:00-7:00P.M.
Major instructional resources used	CD player, board, songs, lyrics, laptop and articles	computer, projector, videos, handouts, lyrics, worksheets, laptop, board and audios	Board, worksheet, and articles
Content focus	Introducing vocabulary related to the unit. Making students provide possible solutions to environmental problems.	Reading texts, articles and reading passages are administrated with moderate measure. Problem solving skills are applied.	Make students aware of environmental problems such as Global warming. Students were asked to perform activities related with providing solutions to different problems caused by global warming.
Content delivery	Content presented accurately. Focus relies in providing opinions and solutions to the problems stated in the situations under study.	Content presented is accurate. Use of real world issues focus on problem solving.	The content was presented accurately through the use of a reading article in which there was presented a brief summary about global warming and its consequences in the environment. Students were asked to read carefully, analyze the text and provide their own solutions to diminish and solve the problems described.
Teacher Behaviors Observed	The teacher provided students with background knowledge before introducing students to the topics. Monitoring students during controlled activities and encouraging the use of reading techniques and participation into the activities assigned.	The teacher set up and guided students through the use o meaningful and real materials. Monitoring and questioning took an important role during the development of the class. The teacher encouraged considering multiple choice problem solving and promoted the use of prior background knowledge.	The teacher monitored students during the development of the different activities where they were required to apply Critical Thinking to provide their solutions. The activities designed enhanced students' participation in short presentations where they had to support their own points of view and the reasons why they considered the solutions chosen.
Student Behaviors Observed	Working in groups and individually. Participation is effective during oral and reading activities. Use of critical thinking to perform some tasks inside and outside the classroom. Use of reading skills when working with reading texts. Interchanging information while working in groups. Behavior is active and there are not major problems with critical thinking use.	Interaction with partners and group team working to facilitate problem solving application skills. Students discussed and defended their position about the topics in study. They shared personal information and opinions.	Individual use of reading skills to go through the reading passage. Team work, sharing opinions with partners, and interchanging some background, and new information. Sometimes, behavior became passive due to some difficult with reading skills application and interpretation. Some students needed more time to understand and produce conclusions about what they had read.
What the research team	There was an appropriate balance between technological resources,	The balance between the use of technological resources and time-class development was successfully	There should have been a balance between reading texts administration and the use of

thought	activities and time class development.	reached. The use of media and these new innovations inside and outside the classroom helped the teacher to get students' attention on the most important points of the class. Critical Thinking was stimulated thanks to the richness of content presented interactively through images, interviews, and so on.	technological resources to make sure Critical Thinking stimulation during and after the lesson. The majority of class time was focused on environmental problems but it could have been more appropriated to introduce the unit making use of a more interactive way.

Other key points evaluated by the research team during classroom observation

These key points were carefully observed and they are explained in detail, to provide a broader understanding on how they were similar but also different in each group, to get an idea of how critical thinking was being assimilated and used by the students, and how teachers developed their activities based on students' most important needs. It is important to keep in mind, that the research team decided to work with this instrument as an additional tool in order to complement the information acquired previously.

A) Students are provided with background knowledge before reading a text.

The teacher was aware of providing vocabulary meaning in context along with background knowledge before starting the introduction of a new topic in the class. The teacher motivated students to give opinions and facts about issues that they had been assigned to investigate previously. The research team could observe a similar use of the same procedure in group 04 and 06.

B) Students understand the vocabulary contained in the reading text without using a dictionary.

Thanks to vocabulary practice and background knowledge guidance, students did not have major problems with associations of meaning between old and new vocabulary contact during the lesson. Practice consisted in exploring vocabulary meaning with context, bringing as a result, and effective internalization of new words. Students

belonging to groups 04 and 06 showed some problems with understanding of vocabulary due to lack of reading habits and background knowledge related to the topics under study.

C) Students' analysis of the reading text is more focused on understanding grammatical structures rather than meaning of context.

During class observation the research team could asseverate that analysis of reading texts was more focused on the meaning of context. Grammatical structures were not ignored, of course as an important aspect of language learning and practice, but students' familiarization with context, played as a predominant matter. In groups 04 and 06 the lessons' focus is kept on students' Critical Thinking skills, having a balance with grammatical structures and practice of reading texts interpretation, discussion and analysis.

D) Students are asked to apply reading techniques in order to make text interpretation easier.

Some practice in the classroom consisted on making students produce their own opinions and facts about some issues summarized in reading passages. Students were asked to read and analyze the author's ideas to create their personal points of view about them. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to observe activities in which students could have had more chances to apply reading techniques during reading control practice. Group 04 was the only exception where students were asked to apply reading techniques such as skimming and scanning to interpret the text's ideas easier. In group 06, the situation was not observable due to time schedule constraints.

E) Students can apply reading techniques effectively, in order to understand the meaning of the text.

Application of reading techniques required more class time observation. During the schedule programmed with teachers, the research team was not able to verify if students' management of reading techniques was effective. As mentioned in the previous answer, only students from group 04 were observed to apply these techniques. However, some difficulties were detected in terms on which techniques to use despite teachers had already taught them in previous classes.

F) Students are asked to perform oral activities such as partner discussion, short group presentations or class debates to express their own ideas about the topics and contents on the reading texts.

Inside the three groups under observation the teachers promoted activities in which students had several opportunities to practice the language and to express their ideas. Critical thinking was stimulated not only inside the classroom and through reading texts, but also outside the classroom through assignment activities whose goal was to stimulate student participation and critical thinking by making use of creativity and team work thoughts sharing.

G) Students are exposed to different materials (such as videos or audios) apart from reading texts, in order to stimulate their critical thinking interactively.

Technological innovative resources use was part of the methodology the teachers applied in groups 01 and 04. Students were exposed to videos and audios containing issues and information about current topics. Illustrations, pictures and images are also part of the materials that the teacher and the teacher assistant prepared with the purpose of stimulating students' learning attitude as in the case of group 01. Reading texts were

provided without overload. Group 06 was more focused on reviewing reading techniques, due to students' difficulties identified by the teacher. For that reason, the use of technology and other resources was not observable during class observation.

H) The materials and activities used inside the classroom motivate students to apply critical thinking when analyzing a text.

Most of the students belonging to the groups under observation showed that Critical Thinking was effectively used by students through the use of activities such as group short class presentations, class discussions and reading controlled- activities. Reading texts were not provided in isolation. The teachers made sure that after making students go through a text, they need to transform the information they have received into new information that they will produce into a different focus. To ensure this, the teachers made students work with activities that reinforce the new contents learned from a critical point of view.

I) Students do not show serious difficulties to apply Critical Thinking during text interpretation.

Critical Thinking was assimilated in each group, through every single student learning style. The majority of students in the groups did not have serious problems to understand and apply Critical Thinking skills during and after text interpretation thanks to the activities they were exposed to during the classes. Some students showed difficulties when interpreting texts, but error range was acceptable, due to students' linguistic level. On the other hand, background knowledge and students' intrinsic motivation continued being remarkable problems on their individual learning inside and outside the classroom presented in the three observation groups.

J) Critical Thinking goes beyond reproducing the author's ideas thanks to background knowledge reinforcement and the use of Critical Thinking strategies.

The teachers motivated students to think critically while questioning the author's ideas about the opinions and points of view expressed in texts provided. As mentioned above, the lack of students' background knowledge was evident. The teachers frequently offered reinforcement but apart from group 01, in groups 04 and 06, Critical Thinking strategies were hardly managed as a mere result of students' lack of knowledge about the situations stated and the connection with the context was hard to reach.

MAJOR FINDINGS

In this chapter, the research team provides a detailed description of the most important evidence gathered to provide answers to our research questions.

- This investigation leads to the fact that the influence of the materials and activities used during the courses of Readings and Conversations at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, is highly presented as major stimuli that promotes the use of the appropriate skills and strategies that help them to become competent and advanced readers. To be an advanced reader of course, does not only mean to read fast, get vocabulary, and to apply strategies at the time the tasks make it required; it means, also, to know how to understand the context and the nature of situations in which events are taking place; which are the effects and changes that those events are causing, and how to make use of problem solving strategies to give possible solutions for them.

- Critical thinking is one of the most important skills applied to reading and that provides students with the ability to activate cognitive processes by getting involved into current issues that form part of their own reality. The problem here relied in that during the previous courses, the teaching of Critical Thinking was limited to the performance of activities and tasks that followed a course book and that were limited by the class time used inside the classroom. Students were conditioned just to follow some indications inside a range of specific time to get familiarized with reading strategies, but reading become a mechanical process, where Critical Thinking was seen as just one more step to read books and text materials, but not as a strategy that influences students' learning competence positively.

- The first point and finding that aroused was that the objectives stated in the program of Readings and Conversations were not specifically focused on the development of students' critical thinking. As long as we were getting familiarized with the objectives and the goals described to be achieved during the course, we could notice that these purposes were focused on developing specific reading strategies and vocabulary for students. There was not a single objective or goal that was focused on developing Critical Thinking as part of reading strategies and competence (At least not stated directly). There were some objectives which stated objectives such as: "Differentiating meaning from context" "Learning vocabulary in context" and so on. But there was not a specific intention to get involved with Critical Thinking despite beginner readers in the course should be stimulated to build reading and linguistic competence simultaneously.

- As a second point, we found that the role that students' background knowledge played in their process of critical thinking development, was pretty deficient, due to the fact they have still not developed reading habits on their own. This interferes seriously the process of building and producing new information from the one supposedly learned on their own, and the one being introduced in the topics that teachers present through the contents in the course. Background knowledge importance is the basis for making connections with new data and vocabulary storage. As it can be seen in instrument analysis, teachers agreed in that students need to start building reading habits on their own, to be able to participate in the process of information internalization, interchange and production. Lack of background knowledge produces a passive atmosphere in which students expect teachers to be the only information resource in the

classroom, and their attitudes towards learning start to fossilize, diminishing participation and motivation.

- Following a third point, we found that teachers' design of activities was based on students' needs. As we consider critical thinking as one of the most important students' needs, teachers claim that students need to be taught and reinforced continuously with the use of reading strategies and vocabulary. Some of the most common activities that students performed and that the team could observe inside the classroom were: group discussions, short individual and team presentations, pair share, brainstorming, individual and team text analysis, dialogues, role plays, and reading control exercises. The participation of students also was motivated with the use of resources such as videos, visual aids, projectors, songs, lyrics, worksheets, and handouts containing interesting topics and issues to discuss about. However, sometimes there is a considerable amount of time used in the reinforcement of vocabulary and reading strategies as mentioned before, but this is not because teachers do not consider critical thinking as something students need to know, but they know there is still some difficult with reading strategies use and text analysis and recognition.

- As the last point and finding to finish, the research team could be able to observe that the time programmed for the class development (two hours), was not enough for the practice and development of all the activities designed. However, thanks to the new methodology that was taking place in the department, teachers had the chance to compensate the necessary time for more practice with tasks and blogs that were created especially to work outside the classroom. Classes in the classroom are programmed only twice or three days a week, to let students work by themselves, or in groups.

We have described the four major findings we discovered along our investigation. These findings relate with our subsidiary questions stated previously and connected with the main research question. These findings reveal that the resources used by teachers influence students' Critical Thinking development positively, but they need to be more focused on the improvement of this reading strategy, since the major difficulties that students present have to do with their cognitive processes to build new schemata and to produce new information from the one acquired and learned before. There is no way of having competent readers either competent linguistic learners without the capacity of knowing how to think into this cultural and linguistically changing environment.

LIMITATIONS

Unwillingness to help: one of the most important limitations presented during the development of this project was the unability to get enough sample to carry out our diagnosis. Many teachers stated that there was not enough time to administrate questionnaires either to observe their classes due to students' evaluations schedules. For this reason, the team had to observe classes from the outside (with the respective authorization of teachers) but having several interferences such as the noise produced by other students and the weather condition.

Access to blogs as part of the new teaching modalities: a second disadvantage for the research team was the unability to access to the blogs that teachers had designed to have outdoor activities and tasks with students. The problem relied in that teachers are still getting familiarized with these new tools, since this new methodology has started to be used this course. Technical failures such as Internet signal interferences sometimes affect outdoor classes and activities, causing that teachers look for extra-schedules or extra- programmation to teach the contents and assign the tasks in the blogs.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the effect of the materials and the activities used by teachers of Readings and Conversations I, over students' Critical Thinking development. For this purpose, three instruments were designed to obtain the data required from the sample to analyze carefully the information provided by teachers and the information provided by their students. On the first place, a questionnaire was structured in order to gather specific information from the teachers who were applying a new methodology during the course. Questions about Critical Thinking importance and teaching were asked; in addition to the kind of activities and materials they expose students to in every class. Two class observation checklists were used to observe three groups selected, where the research team could directly be in contact with the exposure of the activities and the materials used, taking notes of students and teachers behaviors and students responses to the teaching methodology.

The results of this qualitative study led to four major conclusions:

- Being aware of needs that have to do with The Foreign Languages Department building, in terms of the high educational demand that is presented in every course, and in agreement with the respective authorities, teachers decided to apply a new teaching methodology that comprehends the use of innovative technological resources to work with the stimulation and development of critical thinking inside and outside the classrooms.

- Students responses to the new methodology are not always positive, and this is not caused by an inappropriate use of the teaching materials and resources, but by students' demotivation and factors that have to do with their personal reading habits and their own expectations for the subject.

- Students' disposition to think critically was a major factor that decreased their own learning quality, giving as a result a mechanical internalization on what to think, instead of how to think despite the stimuli provided by teachers' activities.

- Students have problems with reading strategies and Critical Thinking strategies application despite teachers provided them with enough time to learn strategies and perform the activities and the time to analyze and interpret reading texts.

This study permitted to know that teaching methodology needs to be reinforced hand by hand with students' motivation. We can firmly conclude that the materials and the activities that teachers use inside the classroom help students to develop critical thinking in the subject of Readings and Conversations I from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador but we must not forget that the use of innovative resources and the design of critical thinking activities must be focused on helping students how to think critically using those resources as a stimuli that supports their learning attitude and habits towards the development of Critical Thinking applied in real life situations as something that can take part of their life and not only limited to be applied in academic contexts and controlled practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further researchers:

- It is advisable to continue investigating about the effect of the implementation of the new methodology applied by teachers in the Reading and Conversations class groups in order to be aware and prevent possible future failures in teaching and learning Critical Thinking strategies.

- It is recommendable to explore how teachers conduct their classes outside the classroom through the use of blogs and web sites. For that reason, the design of an instrument such as a special checklist to observe intrinsic and extrinsic factors that take place during outdoor classes development would be very appropriate to ensure that students' responses lead to an enrichment of Critical Thinking and reading strategies learning.

- It is recommended to explore more types of activities that have as their goal, the stimulation and improvement of Critical Thinking due to the limitation of the research team to investigate only some specific activities.

For students:

- Students should get aware of the importance of learning how to think critically and not only to reproduce authors' ideas or others' ideas about real life issues.

- Students must be conscious about their lack of background knowledge as a result of an absence of reading habits; such situation represents a serious obstacle that interferes with their Critical Thinking learning and their reading competence.

- Students must be aware about their deficiencies in reading strategies use and their attitude towards learning. Participation needs to be improved inside and

outside the classroom as part of their learning process and Critical Thinking practice will not be worth without their disposition to develop it.

For teachers:

- Take into consideration students' responses to their methodology in order to detect weaknesses that might interfere with the learning of strategies and techniques in reading competence.

- Get aware of students' lack of reading habits and try to stimulate them through the use of extra activities and exercises outside the classroom.

- Develop specific strategies to develop Critical Thinking and reinforce it through the analysis of current life situations by including the habit of questioning what students' state teaching to question what they are told.

- Design activities and tasks to be applied inside or outside the classroom to help stimulate students' integration of background knowledge with the new contents in study.

For the Foreign Languages Department:

- To create innovative projects such as forums in which they present current world problems through videos and documentaries, and students can have the opportunity to design their own documentaries to be exposed according to their own points of view and facts that support their possible solutions or positions toward those problems.

- To organize and create along with teachers from the department, a special debate festival for students of Readings and Conversations, where each group can select or be assigned with one current topic of their consideration, and then

expose their opinions and facts with another group belonging to the same subject. A week can be programmed to have different groups of Readings and Conversations participating in a serious debate, being monitored by their teachers. Critical Thinking will be a requirement, so students could prepare their topics in a way that everybody could give support to their group.

- It is advisable to increase the participation of native speakers into the academic context or the exposure of students to projects that carry out the contact with native speakers in cultural and current issues of the Foreign Languages Department.

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Annexes

Annex 1

University of El Salvador
School of Art and Social Science
Foreign Language Department

CHECKLIST

To what extent do the materials and the activities that teachers use inside the classroom help students to develop critical thinking in the subject of Readings and Conversations I from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador?

Objective: To determine the effectiveness of the materials used in Readings and Conversations I classes on students learning.

Group: _____   **Schedule:** _____

N°	Items	Yes	No	Comments
1	Students are provided with background knowledge before reading a text.			
2	Students understand the vocabulary contained in the reading text without using a dictionary.			
3	Students' analysis of the reading text is more focused on understanding grammatical structures rather than meaning of context.			
4	Students are asked to apply reading techniques in order to make text interpretation easier.			
5	Students can apply reading techniques effectively, in order to understand the meaning of the text.			
6	Students are asked to perform oral activities such as partner discussion, short group presentations or class debates to express their own ideas about the topics and contents on the reading texts.			
7	Students are exposed to different materials (such as videos or audios) apart from reading texts, in order to stimulate their critical thinking interactively.			
8	The materials and activities used inside the classroom motivate students to apply critical thinking when analyzing a text.			
9	Students do not show serious difficulties to apply Critical Thinking during text interpretation.			
10	Critical Thinking goes beyond reproducing the author's ideas thanks to background knowledge reinforcement and the use of Critical Thinking strategies.			

University of El Salvador
School of Art and Social Science
Foreign Language Department

To what extent do the materials and the activities that teachers use inside the classroom help students to develop critical thinking in the subject of Readings and Conversations I from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador?

Objective: To know the opinion of teachers who teach the subject of Readings and Conversations I on the development of their students Critical Thinking skill.

Group: _____   **Schedule:** _____

Instruction: Underline or check the answer according to your criterion.

1. How often do you activate students' prior knowledge about the topic before, during, and after the reading text is assigned?
   A) Never   B) Almost never   C) Sometimes   D) Always

2. How often do you encourage and activate the students' participation during the class?
   A) Never   B) Almost never   C) Sometimes   D) Always

3. Which of the following resources do you provide students with to foster critical thinking inside or outside the classroom?

   ☐   Articles

   ☐   Text book

   ☐   Pamphlets

   ☐   Videos

   ☐   Digital tools such as blogs or web sites

   ☐   All of them

   ☐   Others (specify) _____

4. Which of the following strategies do you use to develop students' critical thinking inside the classroom?
   - ☐ Cooperative Learning Strategies
   - ☐ Problem solving
   - ☐ Conference Style Learning
   - ☐ Think Pair Share (TPS)
   - ☐ Know Want to Know learn (KWL)
   - ☐ All of them
   - ☐ Others (specify)

5. Which of the following activities do you use to promote students' critical thinking inside the classroom?
   - ☐ Debate
   - ☐ Discussion
   - ☐ Analyzing
   - ☐ Drawing conclusion
   - ☐ Synthesizing
   - ☐ Inferring
   - ☐ All of them
   - ☐ Others (specify) _____

6. How often do you promote the activities above mentioned to enhance critical thinking inside or outside the classroom?
   A) Never   B) Almost never   C) Sometimes   D) Always

7. How often do you ask students to find evidence to support their arguments about any topic given?
   A) Never   B) Almost never   C) Sometimes   D) Always

8. How often do you assess the students to know that they have inhered the critical thinking?
   A) Never   B) Almost never   C) Sometimes   D) Always

9. What are the major factors that are implicated to develop the critical thinking on students? _____
   _____
   _____

10. Do you think that there is lack of background knowledge in your students?
    _____
    _____
    _____

11. What are the mayor factors that affect critical thinking on students from this subject or from this department?

_____
_____
_____

12. Do you think that critical thinking is applied in this subject or in this department?

_____
_____
_____

13. Do you think the activities applied in the class of readings and Conversations lead students to develop Critical Thinking?

_____
_____
_____

University of El Salvador
School of Art and Social Science
Foreign Language Department

Classroom Observation Instrument

Objective:

Group: _____ **Subject:** _____

Schedule: _____ **Number of Students:** _____

Lesson Title: _____

What I see	What I think
Major instructional resources used	
Content focus	
Content delivery	
Teacher Behaviors Observed	
Student Behaviors Observed	

_____   _____

Observer signature   **Date**

Annex 2

Students belonging to Readings and Conversations group 01 performing a task consisting in the elaboration of a song as part of Unit 1

Students performed the task assigned making use of Critical Thinking and creativity

Students' lyrics described how they conceived environmental problems and how they propose solutions for them

Students working in groups to provide solutions to some environmental problems such as global warming

Students belonging to Readings and Conversations group 04 working in groups and listening to instructions to work with text analysis and interpretation

Students were provided with examples of how to apply reading strategies in order to find the information they were asked to look for