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Transformative Pedagogy of English as a Foreign Language: Navigating Sociolinguistic Diversity to Enhance Critical Thinking in Globalized Classrooms

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Abstract: The paper theoretically examines the interaction between sociolinguistic diversity and psychological factors in students' critical thinking in English as a foreign language (EFL). The primary aim of this study is to analyze how sociolinguistic and psychological variables collectively contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in EFL learners. In a globalized classroom, the need to inculcate a transformative pedagogy in the teaching of EFLs has become central to developing critical, contemplative, and independent learners. This paper uses a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design. The sample comprised 150 EFL students, including bachelor's and master's degree students. The sample was divided into an experimental ($n = 75$) and a control group ($n = 75$). The analysis indicates that learning environments integrating sociolinguistic awareness with reflective pedagogical practices have greater potential to enhance higher-order thinking abilities. Based on current research in the international community, this article examines how the educational setting, social relations, linguistic context, cognitive processes, motivation, and learners' metacognitive awareness influence the development and improvement of critical thinking. By pointing out the loopholes in the existing EFL pedagogical paradigm, specifically the lack of sociolinguistic diversity integration, the review suggests a theoretical framework that places transformative pedagogy at the cross-sections of language teaching, sociolinguistics, and

educational psychology. The results highlight the circumstances in which the development of critical thinking in EFL classrooms can and should occur and provide useful insights into the work of teachers who want to equip students with the competencies for global communication and intercultural interaction. The study concludes that incorporating sociolinguistic diversity into EFL instruction is essential for fostering critical cognition. Practically, the findings offer pedagogical guidance for educators seeking to design inclusive, cognitively stimulating language classrooms.

Keywords: sociolinguistic diversity, educational psychology, critical thinking, applied linguistics, EFL, Transformative pedagogy.

Introduction

Globalized classrooms have transformed the English language teaching environment and require pedagogical strategies that can meet the needs of language proficiency and cognitive learning at a higher level. In contemporary educational research, higher-level cognitive learning is commonly understood as the development of advanced mental processes such as analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and reflective reasoning. This perspective aligns with cognitive learning theories that view language acquisition as an intellectually mediated process rather than merely a linguistic skill (Aghayeva, 2025). The modern classrooms are becoming increasingly characterized by sociolinguistic diversity, with students of different cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds converging in EFL classrooms. Sociolinguistic diversity in this study refers to the coexistence of multiple linguistic varieties, cultural identities, and communicative norms within a single learning environment, conceptualized through sociocultural learning perspectives that emphasize interaction and social context as drivers of cognition. Educators face special difficulties in such diversity, which manifests through language repertoires and methods of communication, and cultural contexts, and all these lead to the development of critical thinking in the students (Byram, 2022). Within this framework, critical thinking is operationalized as the learner's capacity to interpret information, evaluate perspectives, construct arguments, and reflect on meanings across linguistic and cultural contexts. EFL, which is traditionally based on grammar, learning vocabulary, and standardized language proficiency, tends to ignore the cognitive and sociocultural aspects of language learning required to develop analytical reasoning.

Recent research shows that transformative pedagogical models in which learners are critically involved in content, context, and culture can have a strong impact on critical thinking, learner autonomy, and metacognition (Byram, 2022). Transformative pedagogy is defined here as an instructional approach grounded in critical pedagogical theory that promotes reflective inquiry, learner agency, and dialogic engagement as mechanisms for intellectual growth. Incorporation of sociolinguistic awareness in EFL classrooms is, therefore, not only a desirable but mandatory process to equip students with the ability to communicate at intricate levels in the world. The broader significance of this issue extends beyond language instruction, as understanding how sociolinguistic and psychological dimensions interact in EFL classrooms contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship in education, cognition, and intercultural communication.

Research Problem

Although the significance of critical thinking in language learning has increased, the present EFL pedagogical framework does not fully consider sociolinguistic diversity. Most teaching systems are still regular, and they focus on standardized language skills, ignoring culture, social and cognitive dimensions that define critical thinking. This break restricts the capabilities of the students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information in different linguistic and social situations. In contemporary globalized

educational environments, language learning is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional process influenced by social context, identity, interaction, and cognitive engagement. However, existing pedagogical models rarely integrate these dimensions within a unified framework, creating a theoretical and instructional gap. This study gap indicates the need for a broader analytical perspective that connects sociolinguistic diversity, psychological processes, and pedagogical practice in order to better understand how critical thinking develops in EFL contexts.

Research Focus

The paper is devoted to the description of the interaction of sociolinguistic and psychological factors in developing critical thinking among EFL students, with the focus on transformative pedagogy as one of the means to attain the desired outcome. This paper has used a quasi-experimental mixed-method design. The research specifically examines sociolinguistic diversity, learner motivation, metacognitive awareness, and classroom interaction as analytical dimensions influencing critical thinking development. These dimensions serve as conceptual variables guiding the analytical framework of the study.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The main purpose of the research is to give a detailed theoretical and analytical discussion of the sociolinguistic and psychological issues that make critical thinking develop among EFL students. The synthesis of the findings of transformative pedagogy, the sociolinguistic theory, and the cognitive frameworks will help the study to build an evidence base when designing and implementing the instructional strategies that will not only support the enhancement of the analytical reasoning and reflective learning but also support a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and motivational profiles of learners. In this way, the study will provide effective and theoretically supported recommendations to teachers and curriculum developers who endeavor to promote critical thinking in multilingual and multicultural environments of EFL.

1. What is the role of sociolinguistic factors in developing critical thinking among EFLs?
2. What is the psychological mechanism that supports critical thinking when it comes to EFL education?
3. In which conditions can transformative EFL pedagogy be effective in incorporating sociolinguistic diversity to develop critical thinking?
4. What are the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of the existing EFL models of instruction in terms of the development of critical thinking?

Literature Review

Transformative Pedagogy in EFL

Transformative education, anchored on the seminal writings, is based on the construction of critical consciousness, reflective learning, and autonomous choice using dialogic and participatory educational practices. This pedagogical approach regards learning as a transformation of perspective, in which learners critically analyze the assumptions behind perspectives, debunk the dominant narrative, and rebuild meaning in the form of reflective discourse. In the context of EFL, problem-based learning, collaborative inquiry, and other culturally responsive instructional strategies can be considered the extension of transformative pedagogy, which is not limited to linguistic competence but involves the active engagement of learners in the analytical reasoning process and critical reflection. These methods make the language classrooms places of intellectual empowerment where students are encouraged to deconstruct texts, challenge ideologies, and negotiate meaning in a variety of sociocultural settings.

According to recent empirical studies, there is a lot of evidence that transformative EFL practices such as critical reading practices, reflective dialogue, negotiated curricula, and intercultural learning tasks can greatly strengthen the critical thinking skills of learners and learner agency (Li and Zhang, 2022; You, 2021; Essabari and Hiba, 2025). The strategies will help to increase the level of engagement as learners can relate the forms of language to real-life matters, moral aspects, and culturally specific views. Moreover, modern literature focuses on the increased role of artificial intelligence in facilitating transformative language instruction because it allows creating personalized learning trajectories, reflective feedback, and interactive learning spaces that facilitate higher-order thinking (Kundu and Bej, 2025; Zhang and Umeanowai, 2025). In terms of the sustainability-driven approach, another area that transformative language teaching throws emphasis on is the role of EFL education to develop socially conscious and critically responsive global citizens who will be able to undertake complex issues plaguing society (Maijala et al., 2025).

Despite these developments, the current models of transformative EFL are in many ways restricted in the way they address sociolinguistic diversity in student populations that have become much more heterogeneous. Most pedagogical models presuppose homogenous language groups and standard communicative practices, thus ignoring how the dialects, identities and cultural repertoires in the dialects of learners determine meaning-making and critical practices. Due to this, the transformative potential of such models might not be fully achieved in the various contexts of EFL in the context of issues, where, in general, sociolinguistic variability affects the interaction, participation, and interpretive practices in the classroom. This weakness highlights the necessity of context-sensitive transformative pedagogies that explicitly incorporate sociolinguistic diversity, so that critical reflection, learner autonomy, and critical thinking are fairly achieved in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Sociolinguistics and EFL Learning

Social linguistic diversity is the dynamic change in the use of language depending on social identities, cultural practices, and the context of the situation. It is the variation of dialects, code-switching, register change, and pragmatic norms of meaning construction, interpretation, and negotiation in communication interaction (Crystal, 2020; Byram, 2022). All these sociolinguistic aspects are not only associated with the process of linguistic accuracy and fluency but also affect the process of comprehension, interpretation strategies, and communicative decision-making of learner's. The sociolinguistic diversity sensitivity in EFL contexts can help learners to understand language as a socially rooted practice, not an unbiased rule system, and creates a more profound cognitive process and critical thinking about meaning, power, and identity.

There is empirical data that EFL learners exposed to several linguistic varieties and language practices rooted in a specific culture are more adaptable and show better problem-solving skills and more advanced critical approach to the instructions. This is exposure that allows the learners to contrast language forms, judge the suitability in context, and contemplate communicative purpose, which are key elements in critical thinking. Recent studies also point out that curricular and instructional resources, which incorporate cultural-linguistic approaches, can also help to develop a stronger awareness of learners in relation to discourse variation and pragmatic norms and encourage more reflective and context-sensitive language use (Latic, 2025). On the other hand, those pedagogical frameworks where the standard version of the language and the homogeneous nature of instruction are treated as privileged terms put at risk the marginalization of the linguistic repertoires of learners, thus limited cognitive development and critical thinking.

Modern research also shows that sociolinguistic diversity plays a significant interaction with technology mediated EFL teaching. Interventions based on AI and digitally assisted (e.g. pronunciation aids,

ChatGPT-aided writing, interactive online learning platforms) can be beneficial in stimulating learner engagement and linguistic growth when designed in a way that allows sociolinguistic variance to be accommodated instead of enforcing the homogenized language models (Xodabande et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). In addition, the perception of linguistic investment and the willingness of learners to engage in various communicative situations are also highly dependent on the ways in which the teaching conditions affirm or limit sociolinguistic identities (Fereydoonfar and Ghorbani, 2025). Social and interactionist based learning models such as virtual exchange and ICAP based online interaction models also show that active and socially based learning activities will be more engaging and reflective of the language used when sociolinguistic diversity is considered (Rahimi and Sevilla-Pavon, 2025). Generally, the sources emphasize that sociolinguistic diversity cannot be a secondary issue, but it can play a central role in shaping effective EFL pedagogy. Instructional methods that ignore sociocultural and linguistic diversity can hamper interpretative adaptation of the learners, diminish critical activity, and discourage substantial language investment. Conversely, the pedagogical models that explicitly embrace sociolinguistic diversity enable students to be able to negotiate complex communicative scenarios, critically assess the language use in different contexts, and acquire transferable cognitive and analytical skills. This dimension is thus critical to consider when coming up with transformative EFL instructional models that will synchronize linguistic competence with critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

Psychological Factors in Critical Thinking Development

The process of critical thinking in EFL learning is a multidimensional phenomenon that is determined by cognitive processes, metacognitive awareness, motivation of learners, and autonomy levels of learners in teaching processes. The basic theories also highlight that higher-order thinking is not only a result of language exposure, but also more importantly, when learners can monitor, manage, and analyze their own thinking process when using language (Flavell, 1979; Facione, 2020). Empirical studies have repeatedly shown that reflective practice, self-regulated learning, and goal-oriented strategies play an important role in improving the ability of learners to analyze arguments, identify underlying assumptions, identify bias, and synthesize complex concepts in response to linguistic tasks (Yurt, 2025; Normile, 2025). Intrinsic motivation combined with extrinsic motivation is vital in influencing the level of interest that learners have in a task that is cognitively challenging and critically oriented. The intrinsically motivated learners have a higher tendency to be more deeply cognitive, persistent, and engaged in reflection, and the extrinsic motivation can offer structural support that will support persistence in the complex analytics tasks when properly scaffolded. It has been shown that independent learners with increased metacognitive awareness find it easier to maneuver through different linguistic and sociocultural situations, and they are more capable of applying critical thinking more flexibly and effectively in the EFL environment (Li and Zhang, 2022). This correlation is also enhanced by the fact that current studies reveal that self-efficacy and creative thinking dispositions are mediating variables in the development of critical thinking, especially when the learners find instructional tasks meaningful and contextually relevant (Yurt, 2025).

Meanwhile, new digital and AI-mediated forms of learning spaces have started to transform the processes of critical thinking in language education. Studies of the interaction of AI-based chatbots and argumentation-supported learning processes will show that it is possible to support the development of analytical thinking, reflective dialogue, and evaluative judgment in case learners are actively involved in interacting with these technologies, but not passively consume the generated content (Fabio et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025). Likewise, the research that explores the role of social media use and the use of esports to learn various skills indicates that digitally enhanced settings can be used to facilitate the learning of critical and 21st-century skills, provided that learners are directed towards meaningful interaction, reflection, and cognitive control (Galindo-Dominguez et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025). But unless there is explicit pedagogical alignment, such settings will be used to encourage superficial interactions as opposed to long-term critical investigations. In general, critical thinking in EFL, according to the literature, can be

most effectively built on the premise that cognitive and metacognitive processes are reinforced by motivational structures and learner autonomy within intelligibly designed pedagogical frameworks. Although there is increased interest in radical digital tools and learner-oriented practices, a problem that still stands is the systematic envelopment of these factors in unified models that would encourage reflective, self-regulated, and context-driven critical thinking. To address this gap, pedagogical designs that specifically balance metacognitive training, motivational support, and autonomy-enhancing practices are needed to make sure that critical thinking is a deliberate and transferable product of EFL education and not an incidental by-product of language instruction.

Conflicts and Gaps in Current EFL Methodologies

Although various types of pedagogical methods, including communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), and content-based instruction (CBI), are widely applied in EFL classrooms, their ability to develop systemic critical thinking is still incongruent in different sociolinguistic and intercultural settings. Previous research indicates that CLT is mostly associated with fostering interaction, fluency, and learner engagement, but does not pay sufficient attention to the explicit instruction of analytical reasoning, critical assessment, and reflective judgment, especially in cultural and linguistically diverse learning settings where communicative practices of learners are influenced by various norms and identities (Egitim, 2025). Similarly, TBLT previews problem-solving, teamwork, and work delivery, but its emphasis on practical results can counteract any possibility of scaffolded critical reflection unless premeditated in pedagogical planning (Taufiqulloh et al., 2025). Although CBI can be useful in the combination of linguistic and subject knowledge, it often emphasizes mastering content over metacognition and thus neglects the training of critical thinking skills as an explicit idea rather than an implicit one.

More current pedagogical solutions that feature digital and AI-enhanced learning settings, such as AI-assisted academic writing apps, metaverse-based instructions, and VR-assisted interaction, have shown potential to improve the engagement of learners, transferable skills, and higher-order thinking (Lee and Ko, 2025; Muthmainnah et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). However, such emerging practices usually take place within the context of standardised instructional models, which incorrectly consider the sociolinguistic backgrounds of learners, intercultural competence, and context-related communicative demands. The incorporation of AI literacy into teacher education, as Daher (2025) posits, should go beyond the technical integration of AI into pedagogy to the critical pedagogical integration to ensure that technology facilitates the process of reflective and analytical learning and does not reinforce superficial engagements. In the same regard, research findings on the acceptance of AI in academic research indicate that perceived advantages of critical thinking are limited in a learning environment that does not incorporate contextual and cultural aspects of learning (El Hosayny et al., 2025). As a result, there is a considerable gap in the literature in terms of the poor integration of sociolinguistic diversity into the transformative EFL models of education. The existing instructional models are mostly based on homogenous, one-size-fits-all approaches, which makes the evolution of critical thinking dependent on the generalized approaches instead of the interculturally responsive, context-based one. This loophole highlights the necessity of pedagogical models that clearly connect sociolinguistic awareness, intercultural competence, and instruction on critical thinking, which will allow learners to undergo a more profound level of cognitive processing, which is both socially situated and linguistically meaningful.

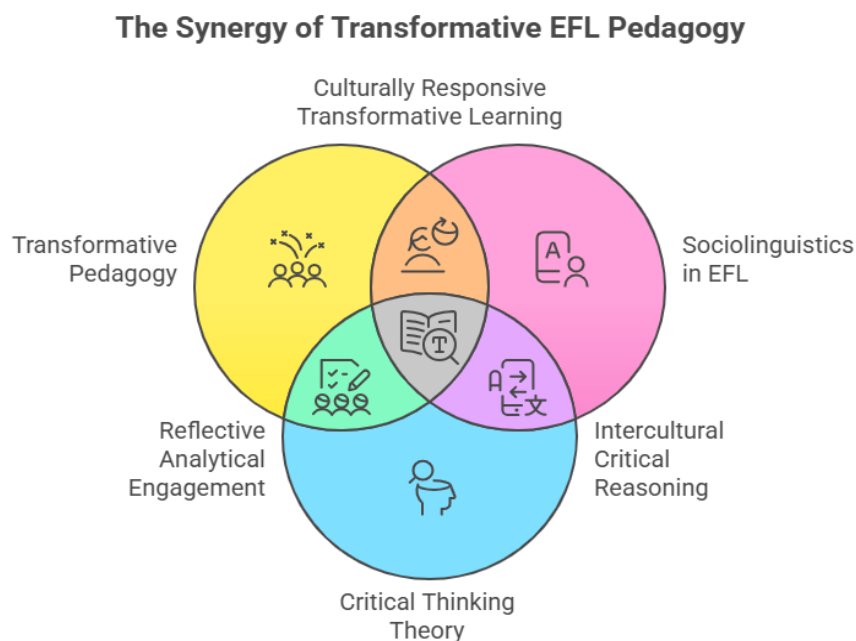
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research is a composite of three interconnected approaches, namely transformative pedagogy, sociolinguistics in EFL, and the critical thinking theory. Based on the earlier writings of transformative pedagogy. It is used to formulate the concepts of reflective learning,

critical consciousness, and analytical engagement. To add to this, sociolinguistic theory in EFL, as forwarded by Byram (2022) and Canagarajah (2020) puts a lot of emphasis on the role of language variation, intercultural interaction, and socially situated communication in influencing the meaning-making processes of learners. These views are also combined with the well-known critical thinking systems suggested by Facione (2020), and Siegel (2019), defining the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational levels of the reasoning and judging process. The proposed framework is situated at the crossroads of sociolinguistic diversity and cognitive development and, thus, conceptualizes transformative EFL pedagogy as a mediating process that allows supporting the reflective, context-sensitive, and analytically oriented learning experiences and provides a theoretically sound platform to improve critical thinking in the various contexts of EFL.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Source: Author's development

Materials and Methods

Research design

This paper has used a quasi-experimental mixed-method design to identify the impacts of transformative EFL pedagogy on the growth of critical thinking among learners. The quasi-experimental nature of the design arises from the use of pre-existing intact classroom groups rather than random assignment of individual participants, which allowed for practical implementation within the school setting. Teachers were consistent across groups to control for instructor-related variability, and steps were taken to prevent contamination between groups by conducting sessions separately and limiting cross-group interaction. The design was a combination of both quantitative and qualitative designs to serve in the giving of a comprehensive picture of the interaction between sociolinguistic diversity and psychological factors in the EFL classroom. The quantitative aspect was used as the main method, as it was possible to measure the factors of critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness prior to and following the pedagogical intervention. The qualitative component was supplementary, as it provided detailed

information about the experiences, perceptions, and interaction of the participants with the sociolinguistically diverse teaching setting. This practice was informed by the theoretical presumption that an effective application of transformative EFL pedagogy in the classroom with diverse language backgrounds promotes significant gains in analytical, reflective, and evaluative proficiencies of students.

Sample and Participants

The sample size was 150 EFL students of bachelor's and master's degree students. The sample was divided into experimental ($n = 75$) and control group ($n = 75$) where the former group (experimental) was provided with the transformative EFL model and the latter one (control) received the conventional EFL instruction. The experimental group was a reflection of the learning, team-based problem solving, and critical engagement with sociolinguistically diverse reading, whereas the control group adhered to traditional methods that emphasise grammar and vocabulary, as well as standardised drilling. The stratified random sampling was used to balance out the gender, prior knowledge of English, and academic year, which guaranteed parity between the groups at the beginning of the study. The sampling plan was also appropriate in the sense that it enabled the generalization of findings in the higher education EFL learner population.

Participants were drawn from a single institution across two programs, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or educational contexts. Therefore, while the sampling plan supports internal validity and group comparability, the external validity of the results is context-specific and should be interpreted with caution when applied to broader populations of higher education EFL learners.

Instrument and Procedure

The study variables were measured using two major instruments. Critical thinking was evaluated using an adapted version of the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA), which assesses inference, identification of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and argument analysis. The adaptation involved slight linguistic simplification to fit the EFL context while retaining the original constructs; back-translation was performed to ensure conceptual equivalence. Construct validity was re-evaluated in the adapted version to confirm that the instrument accurately measured critical thinking among EFL learners. The instrument was reliable, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$. The level of sociolinguistic awareness was gauged using a modified Sociolinguistic Sensitivity Questionnaire, designed to assess awareness of language variation, pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

This researcher-developed questionnaire underwent pilot testing, and its factor structure was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis. Reliability was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$), and validity evidence was collected through expert review and theoretical alignment with sociolinguistic constructs. Moreover, ten students of the experimental group were interviewed in semi-structured interviews to investigate the qualitative aspects, such as the perceptions of transformative strategies by learners, their experiences with diverse linguistic input, and how such experiences affect the development of critical thinking. All these instruments delivered a solid measure of both cognitive and experiential results

The design of the study was a pre-test, intervention, post-test study that was conducted in eight weeks. Firstly, the experimental and control group took the pre-test measurements of the critical thinking abilities and the sociolinguistic awareness. The experimental group then attended transformational EFL pedagogy, involving reflective writing, critical analyses of texts reflecting different varieties of English, group-based problem-solving activities, and discussions that led to analytical thinking and cultural awareness. The control group did not move to the more current EFL teaching with focus on conventional language competencies without direct incorporation of sociolinguistic diversity. Post-test measurements

of critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness were done at the end of the intervention by all participants. Moreover, the chosen members of the experimental group were interviewed to define their views on the pedagogical approaches, classroom life, and the perceived emergence of critical thinking.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and ANCOVA were used to analyze quantitative data to control for pre-test differences and to evaluate the effect of the intervention. Effect sizes were computed with the help of Cohen's d to identify the strengths of changes. Paired t-tests were applied to examine within-group pre-test and post-test changes, while ANCOVA was used to control for pre-test differences between experimental and control groups.

Normality of dependent variables was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and homogeneity of regression slopes was verified before conducting ANCOVA to ensure the validity of the results. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data collected through interviews, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to participants' engagement with transformative EFL strategies and sociolinguistic diversity. The combination of quantitative and qualitative studies provided a comprehensive view of the outcomes and the processes of developing critical thinking among EFL students, as well as the psychological and social mechanisms that affect this process.

Results

The data analysis was conducted to assess the effectiveness of transformative EFL pedagogy in improving critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness of EFL learners. The changes were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and ANCOVA to compare the changes in experimental and control groups.

Critical Thinking Outcomes

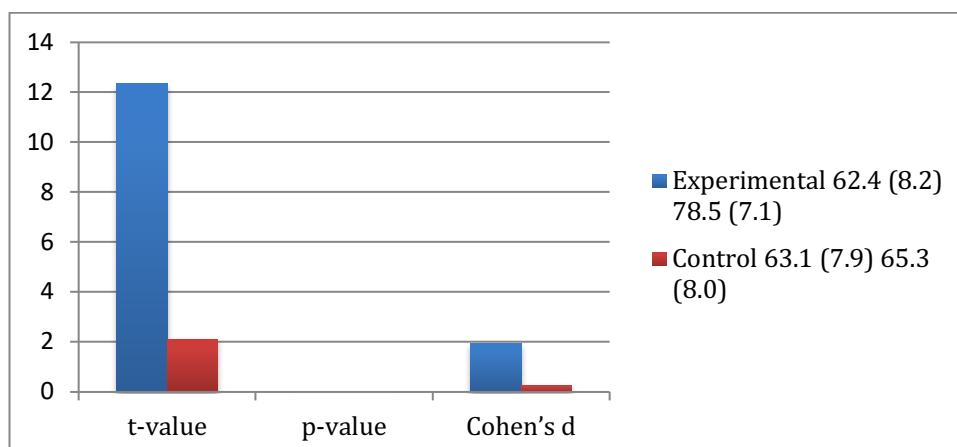
Findings showed that there was a great improvement in the critical thinking scores of students in the experimental group after the transformative EFL intervention. The mean score of critical thinking in the experimental group during the pre-test was 62.4 (SD = 8.2), and this score rose to 78.5 (SD = 7.1) in the post-test; thus, the difference is very high. However, the control group, which was traditionally taught EFL, recorded a humble improvement, where the pre-test mean of 63.1(SD=7.9) to the post-test mean of 65.3(SD=8.0) is small. The statistically significant improvement in the experimental group ($t = 12.34, p < 0.001$) but a marginally significant change in the control group ($t = 2.15, p = 0.034$) was confirmed by the paired t-test analysis. The experimental group had a significant practical impact of the intervention because the effect size of 1.98, calculated with the help of Cohen's d.

Table 1

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores, t-Values, p-Values, and Effect Sizes (Cohen's d) between Experimental and Control Groups.

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental	62.4 (8.2)	78.5 (7.1)	12.34	<0.001	1.98
Control	63.1 (7.9)	65.3 (8.0)	2.15	0.034	0.28

Source: Author's development

Figure 2*Critical Thinking Outcomes*

Source: Author's development

Sociolinguistic Awareness Outcomes

In the same manner, the experimental group showed that they had a substantial increase in sociolinguistic awareness. The pre-test mean of 58.9 (SD = 6.7) was positively changed to 74.2 (SD = 7.4) after the interventions, and this indicates the positive effects of working with sociolinguistic diversity in transformative pedagogical work. The control group experienced a minimum change, where it increased the scores by 59.2 (SD = 7.0) to 60.7 (SD = 6.8), which was statistically insignificant ($p = 0.065$). These findings suggest that the transformative EFL teaching strategy is effective in promoting the sensitivity of the learners to the language variation, pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

Table 2

Effects of Transformative EFL Pedagogy on Learners' Sociolinguistic Awareness: A Pre- and Post-Test Analysis

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental	58.9 (6.7)	74.2 (7.4)	11.01	<0.001	1.94
Control	59.2 (7.0)	60.7 (6.8)	1.87	0.065	0.23

Source: Author's development

To address possible differences in the baseline between the experimental and control groups, an ANCOVA was used to control the situation. The analysis established the fact that the post-test scores of critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness in the experimental group were significantly higher than their pre-test scores ($F(1,147) = 112.56$, $p < 0.001$ for critical thinking; $F(1,147) = 105.43$, $p < 0.001$ for sociolinguistic awareness). This supports the finding that the results of the transformative intervention in pedagogy helped to improve outcomes, as opposed to already existing group differences.

Qualitative Findings

Semi-structured interviews with the members of the experimental group were brought to light using thematic analysis that revealed three prominent themes. Respondents said that being exposed to a variety of linguistics stimulated their more serious examination of the texts and arguments, which resulted in the enhancement of their analytical abilities. According to the learners, the contact with sociolinguistic

diversity helped them to be empathetic, critical and understanding of various cultural attitudes. Also, there was a growth of confidence and self-directed learning, and transformative activities have a role to play in motivating students to think independently and critically.

Representative Participant Quote

“The experience of working with the varieties of the English language enabled me to regard language not as a rulebook, but as a means of critical comprehension of people and ideas. – Student”.

Overall, the findings clearly indicate that transformative EFL pedagogy is a great way of improving critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness among EFL learners. The quantitative results have shown significant increases in the measured scores with large effect sizes, and the qualitative results have given an understanding of the processes of cognition, social, and motivational factors that have facilitated these increases. Conversely, the control group that was taught traditionally showed only small improvements, and this indicates the significance of incorporating sociolinguistic diversity and reflective practices in the teaching and learning of EFL.

Discussion

The current research offers strong arguments indicating that transformative EFL pedagogy with an inclination to sociolinguistic diversity contributes greatly to critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness of higher education learners. The quantitative findings indicate that the experimental group showed significant changes in the critical thinking scores and sensitivity to the language variation, with the large effect sizes suggesting the strong influence of the intervention. Conversely, the control group that underwent the traditional EFL training had very slight improvements. These results confirm the hypothesis that the old-fashioned, homogenous pedagogical methods cannot foster cognitive and sociocultural skills of the international classroom (Li and Zhang, 2022; Bobro et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2024). The findings of the study agree with the previous studies that underline the significance of transformative pedagogy in developing reflective and analytical learners. Critical thinking is fostered by organized chances when learners are allowed to question assumptions, consider different viewpoints, and reflect on their personal beliefs.

On the same note, emphasizes the role of dialogic and culturally responsive instruction in the facilitation of critical consciousness. Under the conditions of EFL teaching, not only did the interaction of the experimental group with the text, which is a representative of various English varieties, help learn the linguistic knowledge, but also the specific higher-order cognitive skills were developed. This highlights the topicality of instructional approaches combining cognitive, social, and cultural aspects of EFL teaching. The sociolinguistic part of the intervention became a factor that facilitated the development of critical thinking. The use of multiple linguistic registers, dialects, and pragmatic standards assisted students in comparison, the recognition of implicit assumptions, and the analysis of arguments critically (Bobro, 2024). The present findings align with those of Canagarajah (2020), who assumes that sociolinguistic awareness improves adaptive and interpretive competencies of learners so that they can operate in complex communicative situations. Additionally, the qualitative responses of the experimental group indicate the effects of cultural perspective-taking, indicating that the awareness of linguistic diversity is not only confined to the language proficiency level to affect empathy and intercultural understanding but also cognitive flexibility, which is an essential aspect of critical thinking (Byram, 2022). The presence of psychological aspects also contributed to the development of the manifested results. The tasks that facilitated self-reflection, problem solving, and self-regulation were used to promote learner motivation, autonomy, and metacognitive awareness. The results are in line with theoretical views of Facione (2020), who highlights that critical thinking is not only a cognitive ability but a combination of metacognitive functions, goal-oriented learning, and intrinsic motivation. The students of the experimental group developed their skills to analyze

arguments and comprehend the language background as their active participation in the sociolinguistically rich activities showed the synergetic relationship between cognitive, psychological, and social aspects of transformative EFL teaching (Mazur et al., 2025; Hamidkholgh et al., 2025; Kaygisız & Akar, 2025). Notably, the research fills a serious gap in the literature: the lack of sociolinguistic diversity integration in the EFL teaching models towards the development of critical thinking (Liu et al., 2025; Arslan, 2025; Dizon et al., 2025). Although both communicative and task-based methods place stress on interaction and problem solving, they tend to remain silent in terms of linking language learning with cultural and social diversity (Zou et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2024; Poupard et al., 2024). The existing results indicate that the combination of a transformative approach and the explicit consideration of sociolinguistic diversity can result in gains, that is, both critical thinking and sociocultural competence, which may be viewed as a more comprehensive perspective on EFL instruction. In a pedagogical sense, the study has identified that future-oriented EFL classroom design must be thought of to equip learners with the critical and adaptive skills required to operate in globalized settings.

The inclusion of a wide range of linguistic contributions, reflective, collaborative, and metacognitive scaffolding not only increases the level of cognitive abilities but also promotes social awareness and intercultural competence. The implications of this research are found in direct observations of curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers aiming to develop higher-order thinking skills and sociolinguistic sensitivity in the multilingual learning settings.

Overall, the research proves that transformative EFL pedagogy, with the assistance of sociolinguistic diversity and cognitive scaffold, can be an effective tool for teaching critical thinking in globalized classrooms. The findings prove the fact that the integration of sociolinguistic and psychological factors is not only theoretically, but also practically effective, which provides an evidence-based model of the language proficiency and analytical competence improvement among EFL learners.

Conclusions

The current paper presents sound theoretical and empirical data that transformative EFL pedagogy, when designed with a clear concept of integrating sociolinguistic diversity, can help EFL learners to develop a stronger critical thinking ability and sociolinguistic awareness. The results prove that exposure to multiple versions of the English language along with reflective, problem-based, and collaborative learning activities, promotes analytical thinking, cognitive flexibility, and metacognitive involvement. The outcomes support the research purpose as they indicate the essentialities of sociolinguistic and psychological implications in the development of higher-order thinking capabilities in the globalized classroom settings.

In theoretical terms, this paper confirms the applicability of transformative pedagogy in EFL teaching by stating that the critical thinking process of learners is best achieved when cognitive, sociocultural, and psychological aspects are combined. The results are relevant to the literature as they prove that sociolinguistic diversity is not a peripheral variable but the key mover to reflective and evaluative cognition. Also, the research contributes to the literature a significant gap within the realm of research by offering a conceptual framework, which connects the transformative pedagogical strategies, sociolinguistic awareness, and critical thinking, and provides a framework that can be used in different EFL.

Practically, the results of the study indicate that educators and curriculum developers should formulate future-oriented EFL classrooms, which strategically incorporate sociolinguistic diversity and transformative instruction procedures. The use of texts, tasks and discourse practices that reflect the variety of types of English should be included in language instruction so that learners are prompted to be critical of linguistic variation and contextual meaning-making. Moreover, the collaboration and reflective learning activities ought to be designed to emphasize analysis, evaluation, and intercultural understanding as well as to allow the learners to question assumptions and negotiate meaning in various communicative

contexts. The encouragement of learner autonomy by means of metacognitive scaffolding, goal-oriented learning techniques, and well-structured self-reflection is also needed to maintain critical engagement and independent thinking. Together, all these pedagogical practices not only enhance the critical thinking skills of the learners, but also prepare them to cope with the complex linguistic and cultural settings in both the academic and professional world, making sure that EFL teaching is in context with the communicative and cognitive needs of the ever more globalized world.

Suggestions for future research

Although the current research provides valuable insights into developing critical thinking in EFL settings, it also opens several significant avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies are required to examine the long-term, cumulative effects of transformative EFL pedagogy on learners' development as critical thinkers over time. Moreover, comparative cross-cultural research would be more insightful for understanding the workings of sociolinguistic diversity and transformative instructional practices across different educational, cultural, and language environments worldwide. Further studies can advance this work by examining the application of digital technologies and web-based collaborative tools to improve sociolinguistic interaction and foster critical thinking in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the inclusion of additional psychological variables (resilience, emotional intelligence, social cognition) may provide a more detailed account of the underlying processes that contribute to the development of critical thinking. To sum up, the current research shows that critical thinking among EFL learners is better developed through a combination of three approaches: transformative pedagogy, sociolinguistic diversity, and psychological scaffolding. The findings can also make a significant contribution to modern EFL methodology, as they will offer not only theoretical validation but also practical pedagogical implications for educators seeking to equip their students with the cognitive, communicative, and intercultural challenges of the ever-growing globalized environment.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2013). As the research involved educational practices with minimal risk and anonymised data, formal IRB approval was not required.

Data availability statement

The datasets are not publicly available due to ethical constraints. However, anonymized datasets are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. All summary statistics are provided in this article.

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Conflict of Interest

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