

## **EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIES TO FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN ONLINE EDUCATION**

**Symbat Junisbayeva**

*MA Student, Suleyman Demirel University,*

*Kaskelen, Kazakhstan, 191302008@stu.sdu.edu.kz*

**Kymbat Smakova**

*MA., Senior Lecturer*

*Department of Language Teaching Education,*

*Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan, kymbat.smakova@sdu.edu.kz*

### **Abstract**

The significance of critical thinking skills is highly recognized in foreign language teaching worldwide and in the Kazakhstani state curriculum of secondary education as well. However, the COVID-19 crisis obliged most educational institutions to adopt an online form of instruction, which is new for most teachers. Thus, this study analyses the Kazakhstani EFL teachers' perceptions of fostering critical thinking strategies in online teaching during the pandemics with the aim of investigating how EFL teachers view the core concepts of critical thinking skills and the strategies implemented during online lessons. Employing semi-structured interviews, qualitative data were collected from ten non-randomly selected EFL teachers. The findings reveal that teachers are aware of the core concepts of critical thinking skills and the strategies that can be adapted and implemented online. However, while using certain strategies to develop critical thinking skills, teachers encounter challenges that require greater support to overcome.

**Keywords:** *critical thinking skills, strategies to foster critical thinking, foreign language education, online learning, EFL teachers*

**Short bio Notes:** Symbat Junisbayeva is a Master Student of the Language Teaching Program "Two Foreign Languages" at Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan. Her thesis entitles "Strategies to foster critical thinking skills in English language classes during distance education in secondary schools".

Kymbat Smakova is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Language Education at Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan. She has many years of experience in teaching English, critical thinking and research methods in education. Her research interests cover the best practices of contemporary methods in EFL and intercultural communication in English language teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Significance of critical thinking in the state curriculum.**

Teaching students *how* and *why* to think rather than *what* to think is a primary goal of education (Daly, 2001; Myllykangas & Foose, 2007). Thinking critically refers to "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1985, p. 44). Owing to the recent reforms and update content of secondary education (hereafter UCSE) critical thinking (hereafter CT) skills have been recognized as one of the important aspects in foreign language teaching. The state curriculum in the Kazakhstani secondary education emphasizes the significance of developing students' 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, including creative and critical thinking. It is explained by the necessity to prepare students for a higher educational level and the demands of today's society (As'ari,2014; GOSO RK,2020). The analysis of UCSE and its particular requirements for the students' level of foreign language proficiency reveals that all foreign language skills consist of essential CT elements, which are stated, as follows:

- in listening- ability to distinguish between facts and opinions, identify and compare the discrepancy in the texts, predict the meaning of unknown words.
- in speaking- ability to conduct formal and informal speech, analyze and compare texts, assess events, opinions and problems, draw conclusions and propose solution to problem
- in writing- ability to critically evaluate the content of different texts; analyze and compare the meaning of the words

- in reading- ability to write problematic texts by expressing own attitude to the problem as well as edit and correct the texts of different styles and genres (GOSO RK,2020)

## **1.2 Online learning**

The productive development of students' CT skills requires selecting appropriate materials and implementing specific strategies and techniques. Nowadays, this is particularly important when a sudden outbreak of pandemic COVID-19 has forced most educational institutions to move to online learning, which now is an integral component of the educational system worldwide, including Kazakhstan. It has caused colossal changes in the various aspects of society in which education has suffered the most. Evidently, schools have encountered the challenges, and teachers without online teaching experience have had to deal with the consequences independently. Precisely, they learned how to work with new applications and platforms; adapted their standard teaching materials, styles, and strategies into the online format (Vladimirova,2020; Kozyreva&Olkhova,2020; Kruglova,2012).

## **1.3 Aim of the study.**

Considering the above-mentioned issues, the present study investigates how EFL teachers view the core concepts of CT and its strategies to foster CT in secondary schools during online education. Hence, the current study is significant for school teachers and school administrators interested in developing students' CT skills during this challenging time.

## **1.4 Strategies to foster critical thinking.**

Various instructional strategies are implemented to foster critical thinking. Although the term of critical thinking is widely used in education, the concept of thinking critically is "not always present in all students" (Walker, 2003). Students need to be immersed in diverse strategies and techniques that foster CT to launch the CT process. The thorough analysis of the

literature on the critical thinking strategies reveals the most common implemented strategies such as *Debate*, *Discussion* and *Socratic Questioning*.

#### **1.4.1 Debate**

Debate is a strategy used to find a solution by exploring the facts and exchanging different views (Derouiche,2019). This strategy is implemented in various subjects. It enables students to master the material and improve speaking skills by actively engaging in the process instead of simply memorizing the material. The debate strategy helps to study the topic from different perspectives by using the authentic language of everyday usage and creating a positive classroom atmosphere. However, students' fear of not being understood and lack of necessary vocabulary to formulate a speech are stated as challenges that prevent teachers from implementing this strategy (Derouiche,2019; Kennedy,2007).

#### **1.4.2 Discussion**

Discussion is stated as a much more flexible strategy compared to debate, it allows students to express ideas or opinions in a freeway without following strict structures. The given strategy is also implemented during online education; however, it requires the consideration of certain criteria such as appropriately selected WEB tools; students' ability to ask the right questions, respect other's points of view and listen to peers (Kennedy,2007; Macknight,2000). There are two types of discussion that are possible to implement during online education: *Synchronous and Asynchronous*. In a *Synchronous type of discussion*, students join the session at the arranged time to express their points or dispute certain problems whereas in *an Asynchronous type of discussion* they can join the discussion at any time in order to answer or comment on certain questions that are posted in special platforms. In this case, the teachers are responsible for explaining the essence of meta-communication elements which covers smilers,

acronyms, grammatical symbols helpful for avoiding the waste of time and conveying the message of the reading task (Demiray et.al.,2012)

### **1.4.3 Socratic Questioning.**

Socratic Questioning is the most effective strategy that is used to foster critical thinking skills. The given strategy aims to lead students to deep thinking and answering open questions without right or wrong options. Socrates believed that “dead questions” do not facilitate efficient and smart thoughts therefore it causes only “dead minds” (Rashid&Qaisar,2016). Dead questions are easily answered questions based on the given text and do not stimulate thinking abilities. Socrates believed that teachers’ role is to help students to build concentration and gain new knowledge by connecting it to the previous one (Fahim&Bagheri,2012).

### **1.4.5 Previous studies.**

This section provides an analysis of the studies on the teaching strategies for CT, two of which were conducted in countries where English is used as a foreign language, which is similar to the Kazakhstani context. The study by Mkomele (2015) showed that teachers understand CT as an ability that enables students to provide a meaningful solution to social problems; to explain the concept in own words; to implement received knowledge in real-life situations. A participatory approach was mentioned as a commonly used way to promote CT, including discussion, debate, experimentation, and demonstration methods. However, a large number of students in classes does not always allow the use of the strategies mentioned above; thus, the classes tend to be conducted in lecture format, where a majority of activities come from the teachers. The researchers’ observation of some of those English classes revealed that while implementing the strategies such as debates and discussions, teachers faced difficulties related to the low level of language proficiency as well as lack of the will to express opinions. Besides, the low participation of students who preferred to stay passive the entire class, making an attempt unsuccessful was indicated as an obstacle as well. Moreover, teachers noted that

teaching critical thinking would not work in a place like Tanzania, where students struggle to understand the language, let alone comprehend the content. Teachers also pointed out that in order to teach students to think critically, teachers should be trained appropriately since the majority still do not properly understand and apply it in classrooms.

The study of Almulla (2018), conducted in Saudi Arabia, revealed that strategies to develop CT skills are practical tasks that consist of comparing and contrasting and open-ended questions. A positive atmosphere in the classroom was also mentioned as an effective aspect for CT development. The author emphasized that almost all teachers are aware of the importance and benefits of using CT skills. However, the established traditional paradigms of teaching that comes with the contemporary curriculum and classroom discipline and limited school resources are the factors that prevent the implementation of CT strategies.

A similar study conducted in Swedish secondary schools (Marijic&Romfelt,2016), analyzed five ELT teachers' awareness of CT, scaffolding techniques, and assessment tools they use to measure and develop CT. The researchers discovered that even though teachers have limited knowledge in the CT area, they understand its importance in language teaching, thus have a right attitude toward CT. Therefore, the study participants suggested their willingness to attend relevant courses to receive the necessary knowledge about the concept of CT. The ability to *interpret and analyze* was recognized as CT skills by the teachers; open questions, group discussions, and reading peer's essays were the most common among the CT strategies. The participants noted that these strategies help increase students' CT and have a favourable impact on their test results. However, the self-regulation strategy, which is an essential element in CT, was unfamiliar to teachers.

Thus, the participants of the reviewed studies did not demonstrate broader awareness of CT and its strategies as was expected by the researchers. Moreover, the researchers noted

that teachers use a limited number of strategies. Even though teachers face difficulties with applying particular strategies because of the students' passive participation, lack of time and low level of language proficiency, Discussion, Debates, and Questioning were mostly mentioned strategies in these studies.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

This section presents the methodological part of the research including research design, research sampling, data collection and analysis.

### **2.1 Research design.**

The aim of this study was threefold: to investigate how Kazakhstani EFL teachers view the core concepts of CT; to identify the strategies to foster CT they use in their online lessons; to determine the challenges they encounter while implementing these strategies. In addition, in order to determine how to overcome these difficulties, we questioned their suggestions for these challenges. Thus, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do Kazakhstani EFL teachers view the core concepts of critical thinking?
2. What strategies do these EFL teachers use to foster students' critical thinking during their online lessons?
3. What challenges do EFL teachers face while implementing these strategies?
4. What are their recommendations for overcoming these challenges?

In order to answer these research questions, the qualitative research design was employed, which enables in-depth investigation of the participants' points, perceptions, and awareness of the target topic.

### **2.2 Research sampling.**

Considering that as a result of a long going pandemic, visiting the EFL teachers in local schools in order to ask their participation in the survey is likely to be impossible; thus, the convenient type of sampling was chosen, which is "a type of nonprobability or non-random

sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study” (Etican et.al., 2015, p.2). Therefore, the participants of the study were selected according to the criterion of “easy accessibility”. The ten EFL teachers from different cities of Kazakhstan participated in this study. As seen in Table 1 most of the participants are young (ages 23 to29) and have little experience in teaching a foreign language (years 1 to 4)

**Table 1. Respondents’ demographic background**

<b>Respondents’ demographic background</b>					
<b>Participants</b>		<b>Teaching experience</b>		<b>Location</b>	
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Number</b>
23-24	3	1-2	3	Almaty	5
26-29	4	3-4	3	Almaty region	1
37-39	3	8-10	4	Taldykorgan	1
				Atyrau	1
				Dzhezkazgan	1
				Shymkent	1

**2.3 Data collection and analysis.**

A semi-structured type of interview was selected in this study. This type of interview “...are superbly suited for a number of valuable tasks, particularly when more than a few of the open-ended questions require follow-up queries” (Adams,2015, p.493). The data were collected via online interviewing. The participants were free to speak in whichever of three languages they felt comfortable. Once all of the audio recordings were transcribed and coded, data were categorized into three main themes such as “Teachers’ perception of critical thinking”, “Strategies to foster critical thinking”, “Challenges of implementing strategies to foster CT”. After identifying main themes, they were divided into several subthemes that were

coded and analyzed under the presented themes. The collected data were analyzed using inductive approach, with Braun & Clark's (2012, p.2) method of thematic analysis.

### 3. Findings

The findings revealed six types of strategies commonly used by these teachers. Several factors were claimed by participants as obstacles in using strategies to foster CT skills. The four teachers out of ten claimed not using the strategies and provided the reasons for it. As seen in Table 2 some teachers indicated more than one factor that prevented them from using strategies to foster CT (see Table 2).

**Table 2. List of used strategies and list of preventing factors to use strategies**

Used strategies		Participants not using strategies	
Types of strategies	Number	Obstacles	Number
Questioning	3	Lack of time	2
Debates	2	Curriculum issues	1
Discussions	2	Students' low level of language proficiency	2
Working with texts	2	Psychological aspects	1
Projects	1	Technical issues	2
Story writing	1		
*some teachers use more than 1 strategy		*some teachers indicated more than 1 factor	*Total number of teachers is 4

#### 3.1 Teachers' perceptions of critical thinking.

This section is divided into three sub-themes such as Multiple perspectives (code MP), Higher order thinking skills (code HOT) and Critical thinking through scaffolding approach (code SA)

##### *Multiple perspectives (code MP)*

The analysis of the teachers' perceptions of CT identified that most of the teachers understand the core concept of CT as an ability to analyze, interpret the given information or

particular situation from different perspectives. Participants indicated that when students think critically, they can assess all sides of the argument, its advantages and disadvantages:

*In simple terms, critical thinking is an objective assessment of a situation or event, a person's ability to question information and even one's own beliefs and conclusions*  
(Participant 4)

*As I understand critical thinking is kind of thinking that evaluate situation from different angles when we judge situations from different perspectives not just from 1 view*  
(Participant 2)

#### *Higher order thinking skills (code HOT)*

Participants who responded in association with code “HOT” understand critical thinking as an ability to promote higher order thinking skills according to Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson, 2001). They indicated that the development of CT is related to certain elements provided in the following example:

*It's a type of thinking about any topic, content, or problem in which the thinker improves his or her skills. It's like analyzing, problem-solving, evaluating, and visualizing.* (Participant 3)

#### *Critical thinking through scaffolding approach (code SA)*

Some teachers comprehend critical thinking as a substantial process that occurs in the scaffolding approach. Responders noted that the role of constructive cognitive support accommodates students to analyze the problem and complete complex tasks independently.

*In my opinion, critical thinking is a process that occurs when the brain combines existing information with the newly received information. that is, we combine such information and analyze it in our minds. More precisely, we divide them into several groups. The first is agree, the second is disagree, and the last is neutral. We form this principle in our*

*minds. They are evident in our words and deeds, and they show how critical we are.*

*(Participant 5)*

### **3.2 Strategies to foster critical thinking**

This section is categorized into three sub-themes such as Questioning (code Q); Debates and Discussions (code DD); Story writing and creative projects (code SWCP), to the strategies that teachers implement in their online classes.

#### *Questioning (code Q)*

Questioning strategy is perceived as a key to promoting CT skills. Respondents adapted it according to their understanding and used different techniques such as open-ended questions, discussion questions, and multiple-choice questions to clarify students' comprehension of the given topic. The example of responses stated as follows:

*Usually, I ask open questions to some situations. I try to prepare situations like real-life events and encourage students to make decisions accordingly or ask some leading questions which they have to answer. Questions should not be yes/no questions.*

*(Participant 9)*

#### *Debates and discussions (Code DD)*

Even though the debates and discussions are separate strategies, some of the teachers' responses imply that they often mix or even prefer to use them together. Although these strategies are not easy to implement during online lessons, some teachers do not hesitate and try to make it work as much as possible. Moreover, participants mentioned that students have a positive attitude toward the debate strategy. The possibility to organize pair or group works and assign them to have debates or discussions also was mentioned:

*We are using "zoom" to conduct our lessons. There are also session rooms which are very useful and we use it for group activities, sometimes pair activities in order to discuss some questions or topics. (Participant 9)*

In some cases, the brainstorming technique leads to the discussions whereas in other cases the work with the texts leads to the discussion.

*I use the strategy of slow reading, that means, we read, then translate the text, we begin to discuss this text, choose a title for this text. (Participant 3)*

*Story writing and creative projects (code SWCP)*

Even though the “questioning”, “debates” and “discussion” strategies were the most popular among the teachers whether they use these strategies or not, there were few teachers who prefer to stimulate students’ imagination by implementing interesting strategies as projects and writing stories.

*As for critical thinking, usually, I give them a task like writing stories, in which they can use their imagination and creativity and also they must use grammar structures appropriately that also require good thinking skills. I think that they develop their critical thinking while they write such kind of stories. (Participant 10)*

In the first case, we can see that the teacher focuses on critical thinking and language accuracy as well as the role of creativity to create some stories. The second case provided below demonstrates that the teacher by assigning the project works develops students’ digital skills, and motivates them to work independently in their free time.

*So usually I try to give some creative project works...to use their well, creativity, for example, publishing a magazine or book lap. Sometimes I just give some project works like video or photo. For example, I give one topic like “Responsibility” and they have to shoot a video or audio on this topic, like a 1-minute film fest. (Participant 9)*

### **3.3 Challenges of using the strategies to foster critical thinking**

This section aims to describe the challenges faced by the respondents which were categorized into five sub-themes such as Technical issues (code TI), Psychological aspects (code PsA) Online learning (code OL), Lack of time (code LT), and Students’ low level of language

proficiency (code SLL). In addition, it provides teachers suggestions for overcoming these challenges which were provided under the given subthemes.

*Technical issues (code TI)*

Teachers recognized the problems related to the internet as the main challenge to implement CT strategies. Low Internet connection entails the poor quality of the lesson. On the other hand, the accessibility of information on the internet causes plagiarism and prevents teachers from controlling the process. For example:

*The biggest challenge for me is when students cheat or they can just open google and get answers from there and sometimes it is difficult to understand who wrote the work. During online education, we cannot control this process hence it is difficult to evaluate them. (Participant 10)*

Thus, teachers suggested that there is a need to develop teachers' awareness towards the digital technologies so the lessons will correspond to the academic integrity.

*First of all, I think that the internet connection should be of good quality, and teachers should know such kind of platforms or internet tools that will allow them to control their students while they are working. They should be able to check whether they open other websites and cheat answers from there or not. That's why we should be aware of these technologies (Participant 10)*

It was also mentioned that the majority of the students do not have fast internet, or simply cannot properly join the classes, so it makes impossible for teachers to avoid unnecessary pauses or stressful situations.

*.... I even find difficult to make speaking during the class because some students don't join or cannot join the classes. (Participant 2)*

*Lack of time (code LT)*

Even though, some participants also understand questioning as a key to stimulating critical thinking skills they do not use this strategy because of lack of time. Participants clarified that the time that is given for them (20-30 minutes) during online education does not allow them to cover the target content and the topic that should be explained, therefore they do not focus on CT skills.

*We just want to explain the material that needs to be explained, and its only 30 minutes given for explaining everything we need, because of it I can say that I do not use these strategies. (Participant 2)*

It is also impossible for another participant who needs text-based tasks to provide questioning since there is no time to read long texts during online education.

*There is a lack of time for reading during the class. It takes a long time to read a long text with additional tasks. Because now the texts are not just for reading and analyzing... they follow by tasks such as matching paragraphs with headings or to putting paragraphs in the right order, also complete empty spaces with given sentences according to the meaning. (Participant 6)*

*Psychological aspects (code PsA)*

Students' fear of getting low marks that prevent them from sharing their opinions was mentioned as the actual difficulty in implementing strategies to foster critical thinking skills.

For instance:

*... a lot of our students are afraid to make mistakes...They have such kind of stereotypes that if they make mistakes, they will get low points. (Participant 9)*

It was stated that fear of getting a low mark is closely connected with an inability to think independently.

*...a lot of students were not taught in the past to think independently they were taught to think only about the target topic exactly and they were always thinking about their marks. (Participant 9)*

Also, the participants added that students' self-confidence might be the reason why they cannot engage in free discussions or other activities that require sharing their point of view.

*They cannot express their opinion; they think that their opinion is not correct. That's why they say nothing and just keep silent. (Participant 9).*

Similar thoughts were provided by another teacher:

*I can say that students are embarrassed to express their opinion at the beginning but then again, after some lessons they become more confident. (Participant 7)*

When participants were asked to give some recommendations on how to overcome the challenges that they listed, approximately most of the responses suggested returning to the traditional format of teaching. For example:

*to switch to the previous way of teaching as soon as possible... because it is really difficult. (Participant 3)*

*Students' low level of language proficiency (code SLL)*

As for the key difficulties that prevent teachers to implement strategies to foster CT, students' low level of foreign language proficiency, were recognized. Thus, teachers cannot organize any critical thinking activities.

*I teach fifth-graders and sixth-graders and their level of English is elementary. Now we have been learning the most basic grammatical constructions as there is, there are, present simple ... we focused on grammar only and I want them to learn and know grammar well at first, that is why we do a lot of grammar-based exercises on grammar so that they can understand it well. (Participant 5)*

*I think that in order to develop critical thinking, it is necessary to work with texts and ask deep questions, have discussions, but because my students' level of English is quite low, it is difficult for them to even explain something in English, let alone to share their opinion in English. Therefore, in our classes, we don't think about critical thinking. (Participant 2)*

*Online learning (code OL)*

There was only one participant who indicated "curriculum" as a barrier in implementing this strategy during online education:

*I think that by asking questions, wanting to find out the learner's opinion, it is possible to stimulate students' critical thinking. However, according to the settled program we conduct the lessons through the application "Online School". That is why, we don't use this strategy... we are not allowed to use these strategies. (Participant 4)*

The next point is considered as a general difficulty related to online education rather than difficulties caused by implemented strategies; nevertheless, it is one of the widespread challenges that school teachers encounter nowadays.

*At the moment, due to online learning, the difficulty is that... parents are constantly trying to help, to prompt their child, and this... prevents the child from perceiving information and understanding what exactly he knows and what exactly he does not know. (Participant 3)*

Some participants considered that online learning is not a big problem, and all of the strategies implemented in traditional classes also might be implemented there. Therefore, encouraging students to make mistakes will stimulate them to express their opinion easily. For example:

*The recommendation is to let students make mistakes and let them act naturally. We have to permit them to make mistakes, it will help them to express their opinion independently. (Participant 9)*

For teachers that cannot afford some premium platforms with the function of dividing students into session rooms, it is difficult to organize critical thinking activities. Thus, it was reported as an obstacle to promote students' CT.

*These methods that I have listed (hot chair, a basket of ideas, discussions), actually... allow teachers to develop critical thinking of children, however, it demands classes to be conducted through applications like WebEx, otherwise, it will not work. (Participant 4)*

#### **4. Discussion**

The present study is aimed at investigating teachers' perceptions of CT; identifying the types of strategies implemented during online education; revealing challenges and obstacles of implementing these strategies and methods for overcoming them. Similar to the findings of Mkomele (2015) where the participants demonstrated familiarity with basic concepts of CT skills the results of the analysis of local teachers' responses revealed that the teachers are familiar with the concept of CT at the appropriate level. Our participants indicated problem-solving, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating as essential CT elements that are aligned with higher-order thinking skills of Bloom's taxonomy which were not mentioned in the studies of Marijic&Romfelt (2016), Almulla (2018). Thus, the researchers concluded that the participants had limited knowledge about CT. In our case, participants of the present study expressed deep awareness of the CT core concepts. Moreover, participants of this study tried to shortly explain and summarize the most essential strategies, thus it is suggested that a deeper investigation of this question can lead to better and in-depth responses. In comparison to the findings of Almulla (2018), Mkomele (2015), Marijic&Romfelt (2016) where teachers used a limited number of strategies participants of this study demonstrated various teaching strategies. The "discussions" and "debates" strategies are also popular among participants of the present study, and they also perceive them as strategies to foster critical thinking skills. However, peer assessment and

commenting peer's essay in an asynchronous way, was not mentioned by the participants of this study.

Finally, we turn to the challenges of implementing CT strategies, in concurrence with Almulla(2018) and Mkomele (2016), this study demonstrated similar difficulties such as students' low level of language proficiency that do not allow them to properly conduct discussion and debates; lack of time that do not allow teachers to cover target material which in this study's case related to online education; internet issues in *this* study's case were the obstacles to realize CT activities whereas in their cases the limitation of necessary recourses as televisions or libraries were challenges. However, compared to the study of Marijic&Romfelt (2016) who stated that because of the lack of awareness, teachers should be taught for CT courses, the participants of this study showed quite deep awareness of the concept of CT as well as its' strategies. Since the importance of CT is clearly defined in the state curriculum, it has also been considered that the organization of "Teacher training" courses can be helpful for local teachers allowing them to obtain additional knowledge, to find out how exactly CT should be developed, to understand how theoretical knowledge might be implemented in the practice. The results of the analysis of the teachers' suggestions and recommendations in overcoming the obstacles of implementing these strategies during online education cannot be compared to the previous studies since those studies were conducted in traditional classes where this issue was not addressed. Therefore, the local participants' responses are unique and valuable since their recommendations are under the established circumstances. However, in our opinion, the teachers' responses are not sufficient and rich enough in order to provide solutions for the problems since the recommendations were suggested from the general perspective, considering the problems of online education in general, instead of focusing on the problems of implementation CT strategies. Nevertheless, the study enabled us to identify their actual perceptions of these difficulties, thus results are needed to be taken into consideration in further

studies.

### **5 Conclusion.**

The current study provides an analysis of how Kazakhstani EFL teachers comprehend the core concepts of CT as well as what kinds of strategies are used by them during online education. The findings illustrated that several challenges such as lack of time, low level of language proficiency, technical issues and psychological aspects prevented teachers from using the strategies to foster critical thinking skills. Thus, the following recommendations were originated based on the reviewed literature. First, to integrate some types of strategies such as online discussions or peer assessment, which in its turn, are possible to conduct asynchronously via emails and special platforms in an online learning environment. On the one hand, it will allow teachers to stimulate students' self-regulatory abilities by orienting them to work independently; on the other hand, it will enable teachers to save class times that were noted as insufficient to cover the target program. Additionally, it will allow all students to be involved in task completion because the strategies mentioned above demand the implementation of writing skills, which, in comparison to speaking skills, do not require instantaneous fluency. Thereby, some problems such as students' passive participation, shyness in sharing opinions, lack of confidence, or internet issues will be avoided. Second, considering that the role of CT is highly important in the state curriculum and the fact that the new realities dramatically affected foreign language education and the education system in general, there is a need to organize "Teacher training courses" with critical thinking orientation. This would empower them to teach and develop students' critical thinking abilities properly; increase their awareness of appropriate strategies and techniques possible to use in online classes, and effectively implement theoretical knowledge in practice.

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