EXPLORATION INTO THE INTEGRATION OF CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Guna Raj Nepal

A Dissertation

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Guna Raj Nepal* for the degree of *MPhil in English Language Education* entitled *Exploration into the Integration of Critical Thinking in the English Language Classroom: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry* presented on May 11, 2023.

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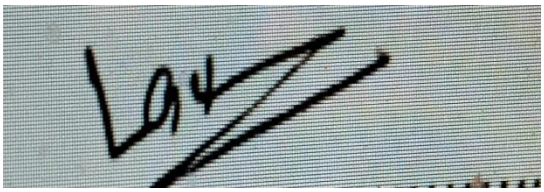

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Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

Why did I venture into the phenomena of critical thinking? As an English language teacher, my interest in critical thinking began with my reflection and introspection into the purpose of English language teaching. With experience and time, I came to realize that teaching is essentially for active learning and thinking and that students deserve to be thinkers, not merely repeaters of knowledge and information. However, I found that minimal literature exists exploring how English language teachers create the phenomena to meet the need of young thinkers and learners. In an educational culture like my own, I noticed that critical thinking is an overlooked phenomenon, both in research and within the discourse of teaching and learning English. Therefore, this study aims to explore the integration of critical thinking in the English language classroom.

While the prevalence of literature showed that critical thinking is an important attribute for meaningful learning and that there is a large body of theoretical and empirical scholarship on critical thinking, a relatively small number of studies explored it through the lived experiences of English language teachers. Several questions emerged from this cleavage: What exactly does critical thinking mean to Nepali English language teachers? How do they make sense of integrating critical thinking or its elements in the English language classroom? How are their lived experiences of such integration? How is

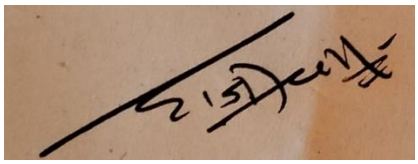
their understanding shaped by their experience? These questions are instrumental in producing phenomenological accounts that are important if we are to develop a fuller understanding of what integrating critical thinking means in the lived experience of English language teachers in the ELT context in Nepal. I could not find hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry on this subject prior to this study.

I used hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method which was congruent with the aim of this study. to explicate the lived experience of five English language teachers. I used multiple interviews, written protocols, memos, and anecdotes to explicate the lived experience of English language teachers. This exploration produced phenomenological accounts of the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom. I analyzed these accounts following the theoretical underpinnings of the interpretive qualitative research paradigm and social constructivism. The exploration into the integration of critical thinking resulted in the following three themes: questions as rooted inquiry, the sociality of critical thinking, and thinking through content. Likewise, an evolving understanding of the participants recognized critical thinking as inquiry-driven learning, as a valuing of multiple perspectives, and as an evolving ideal of pedagogy.

There were three major insights that emerged from this study. Firstly, an important shift is happening organically at the grassroots level, which stands against the collective rhetoric that Nepali classrooms are traditional irrespective of the generation and context. That is, the teachers translated teaching into the culture of inquiry by inviting students to discussions, debates, and conversations to nurture an inherent capacity of learners to exchange and produce knowledge naturally and contextually. By situating students in these social dynamics of critical thinking, they not only gave voice and purpose to their learners but also offered more space to use more of the target language for active learning and independent thinking. Secondly, they experienced critical thinking more broadly as inquiry-driven learning and the recognition of multiple perspectives, not just as a technical and rational set of hierarchies. Finally, they recognized and valued critical thinking as an evolving ideal of their pedagogy, which encompassed their gradual shift from narrating the textbook contents to fostering the impulse in students to think critically. This means that teachers are growing as an important agency in the entire orientation towards making the English language

classroom a site of inquiry and meaningful learning instead of a classroom that traps students into a life of conformity to textbook contents.

This work contributes to the international literature on the phenomena of critical thinking while revealing how phenomenological encounters with English language teachers can open lived locations and spaces for active learning and thinking across societies. Methodologically, it demonstrates the usefulness of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry for English language education scholars transnationally.



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Guna Raj Nepal

Degree Candidate

This dissertation entitled *Exploration into the Integration of Critical Thinking in the English Language Classroom: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry* by Guna Raj Nepal presented on May 11, 2023.

APPROVED BY

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May 11, 2023

Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

.....

May 11, 2023

Ram Ashish Giri, PhD

External Examiner

.....

May 11, 2023

Assoc. Prof. Hem Raj Kafle, PhD

Head of Department

.....

May 11, 2023

Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD

Dean/ Chair, Research Committee

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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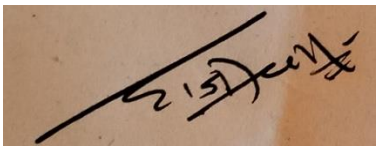
May 11, 2023

Guna Raj Nepal

Degree Candidate

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.



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Guna Raj Nepal

Degree Candidate

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my students who resourced me with their thoughts and experiences in the English language classroom and to bell hooks (1952—2021), a prolific writer and educator, whose practical wisdom on teaching critical thinking encouraged me to open new spaces for dialogue in my context.

"When we accept that everyone has the ability to use the power of mind and integrate thinking and practice, we acknowledge that critical thinking is a profoundly democratic way of knowing" (Hooks, 2010, p. 187).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been the experience of a lifetime. The journey has been rewarding around every corner. However, to get here, I have had to beat the odds, and I have had to back up my belief and courage time and again to keep me going. As I see it now, I am tempted to ask: what do I take away from the dissertation I wrote in my M.Phil.? Is it the product as it appears or the intellectual, cultural, and self-growth process that helped me achieve this? Obviously, the latter, and here I acknowledge the contributions that lie beneath this outcome.

To begin, I would like to thank all my research participants who showed immense patience and commitment to share their experiences and thoughts, both in interviews and written protocols. Their experiential accounts, their curiosities, and the questions that emerged out of those accounts not only provided me with a big frame of reference in English language teaching but also instilled in me the faith that teachers can make a difference.

My deepest appreciation is owed to Prof. Dr. Laxman Gnawali for his mentoring during the whole journey. I am humbled and grateful for his gurukul in my M.Phil. years at Kathmandu University and more importantly, for his considerable patience, kindness, and encouragement along the way. His insightful feedback in organizing the chapter and themes in this study was instrumental in shaping this dissertation in this form.

I am deeply indebted to Kathmandu University, School of Education, for triggering growth in my character, my identity, and my confidence. I offer my gratitude to all the gurus at Kathmandu University: Dr Suresh Gautam, for guiding me to attend to the big picture in research, Dr. Tikaram Poudel, for laying the foundation for qualitative research and initiating the seeds for a phenomenological inquiry, Dr. Hem Raj Kafle, for instilling in me the values of criticality and analytical thinking in reading and writing, Dr. Kashiraj Pandey, for engineering encouragement and relaxing the pressure, Prof. Dr. Jai Raj Awasthi, for being profoundly supportive and resourceful as always, and Dean, School of Education, Prof. Dr. Bal Chandra Luitel, for leveraging expectation and sharing

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I am grateful to Sukuna Multiple Campus for providing me with all the support that I needed to achieve this milestone. I express many thanks to my workplace friends, NP Bhandari, and Ushakiran Wagle, for always encouraging and pushing me to complete this work.

I dedicate my special thanks to my wife for garnering love and strength around every corner and to my children for being so caring throughout this journey.

Guna Raj Nepal
Degree Candidate

ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	Curriculum Development Center
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
HOTS	Higher Order Thinking Skills
IATEFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
KWL	(K)what I know, (W)what I want to know, (L)what I learned.
M.A	Master of Arts
M.Ed.	Master of Education
MPhil.	Master of Philosophy
MoE	Ministry of Education
NELTA	Nepal English Language Teachers' Association
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
SOS	Save Our Souls

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CHAPTER I
UNPACKING THE PHENOMENA OF INQUIRY

Can there be any meaningful teaching without giving students a range of opportunities for thinking and learning? This question has been a reflection question ever since I started my teaching career. Therefore, I begin the introduction chapter of my study with reflection on how my teaching pedagogy, over the years, had to do away with my fascination for pin-drop silence in the classroom which was nothing but an imitation of my college teachers of the time. Then I present the rationale for placing thinking and learning at the center of instruction, giving ways to the unexplored problem as I see it in the ELT context in Nepal. Thereafter, I set the purpose and based on which I set research questions for exploring the experiential and reflectional data. Finally, I fit the fence to delimit my study.

'Pin-Drop Silence' Syndrome

The pin-drop silence syndrome that I discuss in this section aims to set the background for this study. The background spotlights the germination of the topic, the context of it and its impulse to hook the prospective readers. This orientation for such a background is inspired by Adu (2017, as cited in Larsen & Adu, 2021) who stresses that a good background in a phenomenological study should have the following three components. First, the topic chosen for the exploration i.e., the phenomena or the experience of interest should speak to a wider topic, concept, conversation, or situation. Second, the topic should be introduced contextually. Third, the background should have the potential to help readers understand why it is important to conduct a study on the topic at hand. To materialize these expectations, phenomenological research requires of the researcher to live the research world in the fullness of their life and shared situations rather than fleshing out things or imposing their presuppositions (van Manen, 2015). In this context, I am guided by the idea that "to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (van Manen, 2015, p. 5). The discussion below nestles into my life world as an English

language teacher and attempts to bring to light why the topic is worth exploring in my context.

When I first began teaching English in a secondary school (then popularly called 'Plus Two') in 2006, I had five years of teaching experience in private boarding schools and a master's degree in English. My experience and understanding as a student in college was that teachers should narrate the details of the prescribed content and their classrooms should be fully controlled during the delivery. For many years, that understanding shaped the pattern of my teaching to a large extent. I replicated my teachers' legacy of narrating the details of the content rather than making the prescribed text a part of students' experience and thinking. I taught many great topics to my students maintaining 'pin drop silence' as my distinct feature as a teacher, and that 'controlled' classroom was always backed up by the administration. As a result, I rarely encouraged my students to discuss their experiences and understanding so that they could contribute to the lesson under discussion. Like many teachers from my college, I took the burden of narrating everything I had read on the topic and dictated all the details they needed to prepare for the examination. I would be happy if my students could repeat back what they heard from me or read from my question-answer/summary notes. Though I had read that 'banking education' devoid of learners' experience, knowledge and feelings cannot be desirable in education (Friere, 1996), I was not doing anything new for active learning and thinking.

I remember one incident which turned out to be a serious question about the way I was teaching. The incident happened sometime in August 2010. I was teaching Compulsory English of Grade XII and the textbook was *The Heritage of Words* (Lohani, et al., 2008). As usual, I gave my lecture to my students on the reading text entitled 'Two Long Term Problems: Too Many People Two Few Trees'. I narrated every detail of the text and was happy with the class because it was quiet during the whole narration. After the lecture was over, as usual, I had this question for them: do you have any questions? For a while the class was silent. Then one student said, "Sir, we found the details of the lesson difficult to understand. You spoke English fluently, but we understood very little!" As this was the first explicit dissatisfaction from my students, I at first could not believe it. In fact, I had not expected it. Then I desperately tried to get the support of other

students but ended up with more guilt and frustration. Their silence further confirmed that the material I narrated to them did not make much sense to the majority in the class. Not knowing what to do next, I repeated parts of the lesson in the same way I taught, because I had no learning about how to take teaching and learning beyond transmitting knowledge and information. For several days, I felt nervous, realizing even deeper why my students looked lost in my class. I took this incident as a warning call against the way I had been teaching for years.

Upon reflection, I realized that probably two things were wrong with my teaching: first, I did not try to bring in students' knowledge and experience into the discussion (for this lesson population growth and deforestation, for example); second, I did not encourage them to debate the scientists' concern and people's recklessness in terms of deforestation and environmental degradation. If I had invited my students for some thinking and doing around the problems presented by the writer of that lesson, they would have made some good sense of the text or issues at hand. I could have asked simple critical questions beginning with what, how, why, and where to lead them to discussions. But I was not prepared and trained to do all that then. Therefore, the discomfort led me to feel guilty about being unnecessarily difficult for my students. I regretted having failed to create an atmosphere for active thinking and learning in my classroom.

Over the years, as a college teacher and as a member of Nepal English Language Teacher Association (NELTA), I attended several trainings, seminars, and workshops on teaching English. Gradually, they changed my traditional teacher-focused attitude towards teaching and learning. I had many questions to reflect upon my teaching and the most pressing ones were: What was I teaching, or more specifically how was I teaching if the students had very little to do and share from their experience and understanding? Why did I always expect them to be silent and obedient in the classroom? Why did I not encourage them to share their prior knowledge and experience related to the text or ideas presented to them? Why did I always treat my students as if they come with an empty mind to listen to me? Questions such as these continued to make me realize that my whole teaching was teacher- centered and it was largely anchored to 'remembering' and to some elements of 'understanding' in Bloom's (1956) terms. Over time, my learning

from professional development opportunities encouraged me to integrate critical thinking into my teaching. I came to learn that critical thinking is vital in shaping the way students explore the interconnected logic of any subject (Elder & Paul, 2008) and that when students are led to think critically, they get opportunities to analyze the text, compare its message with their prior knowledge, consider different perspectives, and synthesize information (Pescatore, 2007). As I began to engage my students in activities such as warm-ups, brainstorming for ideas, questioning, and group discussion, I continued to witness more explicitly that students learn better when they get opportunities for thinking and doing, and all students can think, communicate, and create knowledge together with their teachers. As Gandimathi and Zarei (2018) stated, I began to see students' engagement in the subject matter improved after I started to integrate learning and critical thinking.

In 2020, I did an 8-week online teacher training course on 'Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting' delivered by The American English (AE) E-Teacher Program. After I completed this course, I realized

The American English (AE) E-Teacher Program

a program sponsored by the **U.S. Department of State**

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certifies that

Guna Raj Nepal

has successfully completed

Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting

an 8-week online teacher training course delivered by

World Learning

July 7, 2020 – September 1, 2020.

Katherine Bain
AE E-Teacher Global Program Officer

Kara McBride
Course Developer

World Learning
SIT Graduate Institute

more substantially that critical thinking is nested in good teaching. I came to learn that critical thinking is deeply pervasive in how I deal with the textbook contents, and how I view my students and their learning against the background of the English language curriculum. Additionally, it triggered the critical self in me. Upon reflection, I noticed that I was already a thinking teacher when I felt upset by the feedback from my student long ago. That was an impetus to my desire for change and growth in realizing that inculcating critical thinking in students is not just a necessity but a norm for meaningful teaching and learning. Fisher (2001) rightly views that critical thinking is a basic competency like reading and writing and the focus of teaching should be how to think. In addition, successful classrooms guide students to think for themselves and engage in critical thinking (Crawford et al. (2005). Therefore, the experience I had with my students and the training course I did complement the shift in my teaching pedagogy and my desire for exploration through the lived experience of other teachers in my context.

Inspired by the course I did on critical thinking and the students I taught over the last couple of years, I always looked for opportunities to advance my renewed focus on the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom. I gave three virtual sessions on critical thinking between 2020 to 2021, the first two were for teachers from Hetauda Municipality and Jhapa district and the third one was open for teachers registered at 'Stay Home Webinar Series' organized by the British Council. Here is YouTube link of my session on critical thinking at the British Council, Nepal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqiwHu5ZkmI&t=1434s

The experiences and feedback that I gained from such sharing encouraged me to investigate the phenomena of critical thinking in the Nepali context more closely. Upon reflection on all those sharing, I noticed that critical thinking is ingrained in English language teaching and done largely through intuition and experience. However, the lived experience of such integration has hardly been researched in the ELT context in Nepal.

Recent changes in the secondary level English curriculum of Grades 11 & 12 (Curriculum Development Center, 2020b) were equally important factors for me to push myself to provide reasons why this study is relevant. This new curriculum has sought and valued the critical thinking of the students and for that purpose, a wide variety of texts has been included in various themes and topics. The textbook exercises focus on

analyzing the texts, authors' perspectives, and assumptions, thereby encouraging students to connect ideas to form an opinion or to reach a decision, to think, reflect, and analyze the content, and be able to see things from their own perspective. These changes in the new curriculum further helped me to deconstruct the "traditional notion of learning in terms of filling up the mind of the learner with facts, knowledge, beliefs, and ideas as if the mind were a container" (Rychen & Salganik 2003, p. 57). Moreover, the curriculum has incorporated the elements of critical thinking in both contents and approaches, which can be taken as its renewed focus on developing a culture of knowledge construction between students and their teachers. Such a focus is on direct opposition to feeding the facts and information to the students, in favor of the phenomena of critical thinking which is the key to helping students explore the content they teach (Paul, 2005) and produce active rather than passive learners (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007). Therefore, as Brookfield (1987, 2012) suggests, uncritical transportation of the content from teacher to students makes little sense to me. Unlike in the past, I cannot sustain merely as the one who teaches content for content only and expects the class to remain silent throughout the delivery of it. In this context, this new curriculum has given me a purpose to lead my students to share their experiences and knowledge and debate the textbook contents. As I drive out my lectures and dictation in favor of interaction, 'pin drop' silence no longer matters to my classroom.

Placing the Phenomena of Critical Thinking at the Center of Instruction

Many teachers and educators would acknowledge that good teaching places students at the center of instruction where students are encouraged to actively think and learn. As learning to think is the central purpose of education (Dewey, 1933), quieter classrooms are destined to become teacher dominant, passive, and unproductive for meaningful learning. I took several years myself to disown this unproductive teaching. As mentioned in the earlier section, I reflectively positioned myself to the research phenomena to examine how the pin-drop silence syndrome conflicts with the essence of critical thinking. This critical positioning echoes van Manen's (2015) observation that we have to question the way we experience the world. Through this research, I want to critically reflect on my experiences by juxtaposing them with the lived experience of other English language teachers. It offers me one of the rationales for conducting this

research. Moreover, it opens the expanding horizon of research issues by keeping me well-informed about current research trends on the relationship between English language instruction and critical thinking.

Another concern of this research work is to be attentive to the increasing focus on the phenomena of critical thinking in education and English language instruction. In recent years, critical thinking has become an important topic of discussion among educators. Fisher (2001), for example, argues that "critical thinking is now seen as a basic competency, akin to reading and writing, which needs to be taught" (Preface). Likewise, the inquiry-driven process of knowledge exchange between teachers and students (Hooks, 2010) is gaining more focus and attention among researchers. Several studies recognize critical thinking as a critical element in language learning and suggest that critical thinking should be integrated into the English subject (Abrami et al., 2008; Alnofaie, 2013; Dornyei, 2005; Li, 2016; Larsson, 2017; Wilson, 2016). Therefore, there is an increased focus on the promotion of critical thinking (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007) as a means for processing and producing language (Dummet & Hughes, 2019) and for enhancing the English language and applying it to real-world situations (Butler, 2012). But knowing that critical thinking is important is not the same as learning how it is integrated it in the English language classroom. A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into the local ELT context in Nepal has the potential to reveal the new avenues previously unexplored. This cleavage offered another rationale for this study.

A practical concern for this research comes from the existence of the phenomena of critical thinking in all the content teachers teach. This concern follows that critical thinking is not just tucked in taxonomies but deeply ingrained in the content which is the product of the writer's thought. In this regard, Paul (2015) argues that each content/lesson contains some elements of critical thinking because they are the thinking of the writer. The contents teachers teach are, therefore, not separate from the phenomena of critical thinking. According to him, they are deeply interwoven to give us a fuller picture of understanding and knowledge. Considering this, it is natural for teachers to integrate the elements of critical thinking in their English language classroom every day, as it is

inevitable for effective English language teaching and learning to feature communication, questions, dialogues, debates, discussions, diverse perspectives, and so on.

In addition, as Nepal stands at the crossroad of major changes in the landscape of education and socio-political restructuring, the need for inquiry-driven learning is required more than ever before. In a pluralistic society like ours, critical thinking can help learners communicate with others, acquire knowledge, and deal with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes more skillfully (Vdovina & Gaibisso, 2013). One of the important goals of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal (CDC, 2019)) is "to produce citizens capable of creative and critical thinking" (p.19), and one of the objectives of secondary education is "to develop knowledge, skills, and life skills such as creativity, inductive thinking, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and analytical skills to meet the growing national and international challenges" (pp. 28-29). These educational goals require that "teaching approaches need to place greater emphasis on the tools for seeking and processing knowledge, rather than the actual knowledge itself (CDC, 2019, p. 14). It can help them expand or interrogate their knowledge and experience. By becoming a well-informed critical citizenry, they will see themselves as compelling agents of change rather than passive consumers of knowledge and information. However, the unique role of critical thinking is rarely acknowledged in research in the ELT context in Nepal. I believe that this work adds some new insights to the understanding of the phenomena of critical thinking in our local context and paves the way for a wider exploration into teachers' perception, classroom practice and pedagogical knowledge about it.

Finally, it seems obvious that there is a need for a tangible pedagogical mind shift that requires teachers to encourage and support their students to learn to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. Such a need garners a crucial concern about how Nepali English language teachers cultivate the habit of purposeful learning and thinking rather than transmitting content, and how they experience and understand critical thinking in their pedagogical considerations. Equally important is that if students are to become educated persons, teachers must place thinking at the heart of the curriculum; they must require students to actively use their thinking to work ideas into it (Paul& Elder, 2007). Teachers are considered the key agents in realizing the objectives and directions of the

curriculum, and their roles in the successful implementation of educational initiatives have been highlighted by many educators (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Groundwater-Smith, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994). This exploration might warrant further inquiry into what teachers do and think (Fullan, 1994, 2001) in changing times with changing learners. It can complement the ongoing discussion on bringing critical thinking to the core of teaching and learning across contexts.

Exploring the Unexplored

In a phenomenological study, the problem should have something to do with an experience of interest or a phenomenon of study (Larsen & Adu, 2021). Based on this drive, I try to explore what is yet to be explored under the topic of my interest chosen for this study.

It took several years for me to arrive at the realization that teaching in a passive, quieter classroom is unproductive for both students and teachers. My experience taught me that if there is an atmosphere of openness and interaction in the classroom, students get encouraged to ask questions, explore the content presented to them and learn to capitalize on opportunities for active learning and thinking. That is, effective teaching has the potential to encourage students not just to memorize, but to analyze, interpret, and debate the material in their courses (Crawford et al., 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers place their focus of teaching on fostering critical thinking skills in students. This imperative is reflected in the policy documents including the secondary-level English curriculum in Nepal. Within the School Sector Development Plan (MoE, 2016), for example, I can see a clear focus on preparing critical citizenry committed to democratic values, human rights, lifelong learning, and a positive disposition. Implicit in this focus is that teaching needs to be strengthened to foster critical thinking skills in students and enhance students' overall learning experiences. Such a lofty goal will require all the teachers to support students to develop their critical thinking skills. If students are not typically encouraged to think or learn independently, this objective simply remains as rhetoric. Similarly, the English curriculum for the secondary level (CDC, 2014) also makes an explicit mention of the critical thinking and creativity of the students and focuses on encouraging critical thinking activities. These two references indicate that critical thinking has been sought and valued in the curriculum. However,

there is still little evidence regarding what teachers effectively do in the classroom to teach critical thinking (Abrami et al., 2015; Larsson, 2017) and surprisingly, studies on critical thinking often overlook the work done by teachers (Caceres, et al., 2020). Such a gap is more visible in the ELT context in Nepal. This is a pressing concern for this study because exploring critical thinking from the teacher's perspective is instrumental in bridging the gap between theory and practice (Caceres, et al., 2020).

In the Nepalese context teacher education has not encouraged teachers to wonder about the nature of their teaching and learning that might mask the need for teaching critical thinking as an essential component of students' learning. That might result in a risk of losing the implications of critical thinking in the English language classrooms in the Nepalese context and teachers will continue to teach towards exams, while narrowing down the range of opportunities that critical thinking practices can offer to them. In addition, though teaching focused on fostering thinking skills in students has already become a pertinent issue in education and critical thinking is now considered one of the important 21st-century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007), there are no in-service and pre-service teacher training programs the objectives of which direct teachers to develop and assess these skills in students. Therefore, the vitality of how teachers are addressing and exploring the increasing demand of integrating critical thinking skills in the English language classroom in the Nepalese context is the focus of this study.

Several studies (e.g., Landsman & Gorski, 2007; Wong, 2007) suggest that the current educational trend to standardize curricula and focus on test scores undermines teachers' ability to address critical thinking skills in the classroom. Additionally, few instructional materials provide critical thinking resources (Scriven & Paul, 2007). In this context, the role of teachers can be taken as autonomous in embedding critical thinking skills into language classrooms. They can encourage students in doing the thinking, in modeling the thinking they want to inculcate in their students, and in building intimate relationships between content and thinking. However, the Nepali education system, as validated by standard tests, is marked by the extensive coverage of content knowledge while encouraging teachers to cover the content and students to passively consume information to repeat back in the exam. Therefore, this study is intended to explore how

English language teachers in our context explicate the lived experience of integrating critical thinking in the ELT context.

There have been different researches on different aspects of critical thinking, such as barriers to critical thinking (Labbidi, 2019; Synder & Synder, 2008), teachers' attitudes and perception, knowledge and understanding (Ardini, 2017; Stapleton, 2011; Mariji & Romfelt, 2016; Tuzlukova et.al., 2018; Kavanoz & Akbas, 2017), teachers' role in developing students' thinking skills in reading comprehension (Pyakurel, 2017), but none of them is a phenomenological work to explore teachers' lived experiences. While there is little disagreement about the importance of critical thinking (Alsaleh, 2020), not all educators create opportunities for students to think well (Pithers & Soden, 2000; Ennis, 2011). In this regard, a study by Jafarigohar et al. (2016) brought to light English language instructors' attitudes towards critical thinking which revealed that in the EFL classroom, familiarity with the concept of critical thinking is associated with instructors' willingness to engage their students with critical thinking instruction. However, there is very limited empirical knowledge on how teachers experience the phenomena of critical thinking and how their experiences shape their understanding of it. As I could not find any published research concerning English language teachers' lived experiences about integrating thinking skills in the English language classroom, I took some related studies as help to have an exploration into the phenomena of critical thinking.

As a phenomenological study that is recognized as a suitable approach to exploring the nature and meanings of the phenomena of pedagogical significance (van Manen, 2015), this study calls for phenomenological answers to several unanswered questions in the ELT context in Nepal. What does critical thinking mean to English language teachers? How do they make sense of integrating critical thinking skills in the English language classroom? How do they inculcate critical thinking in their learners? What do the learners do? How is their understanding shaped by their experience of promoting thinking in the English language classroom? Questions such as these are highly significant and need to have priority in any agenda for empirical research in integrating critical thinking in the ELT context in Nepal. In this context, phenomenological encounters with English language teachers are important as they help

us develop a fuller understanding of what it means to experience and understand the phenomena of integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom. Therefore, the problem as I see it is:

What are the lived experiences of English language teachers in terms of integrating the phenomena of critical thinking that lay almost unattended and unexplored in our local ELT context?

Embedding the Parts and The Whole

My critical reflection on my classroom experiences and the changes in my pedagogical considerations over the years provided me with a critical context to situate this research in the grassroots experience. Likewise, the rationale above offered me reasons for this study. Both the critical reflection and the rationale gave me a purpose to explore the phenomena of critical thinking in my context. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience about how English language teachers are creating the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom.

The nature of a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry dictates that the purpose is not simply a destination but a meaningful journey and practice. The focus is on how one recognizes, inquires, and thinks in a circular manner and therefore not bounded by any structured stages (Crowther, et al., 2016). Such an exploration of hermeneutic significance helps us act attentively and thoughtfully in our relationships with students and encourages us "to become more fully who we are" (van, Manen, 2015, p. 8) as teachers. Therefore, I explored the phenomena of critical thinking by moving back and forth "between the whole conceived through the parts which actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole" (Geertz, 1979, p. 239). I was always aware of keeping both the part and the whole in perspective to explore and understand the phenomena in greater details and depth.

Exploring the Experiential and the Reflectional

Phenomenological questions as meaning questions lead "to the lifeworld where knowledge speaks through our lived experiences" (van Manen, 2015, p. 46). As a phenomenological work, this study explored the experiential and the reflectional knowledge with the help of the following research questions:

a. How do English language teachers experience in integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom?
b. How does English language teachers' experience increase their understanding and practice in developing their learners' thinking?

Fitting the Fence

As a phenomenological researcher, I focused on the exploration into the depth of the phenomena and the oriented interest was pedagogic. Accordingly, among the several facets of English language teaching, I fitted the fence of this study around the phenomena of critical thinking as experienced and understood by English language teachers in our local context. Hermeneutic phenomenology provided me with an orientation to capture the phenomena "in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical" (van Manen, 2015, p. 39). That is, I did not isolate any specific language skill for details in them; instead, I explored the phenomena of critical thinking as embedded in the English language instruction. Phenomenological knowledge about how teachers integrate critical thinking and how their experiences increase their evolving understanding of it provided insights into the limited literature on lived experiences that gathered hermeneutic significance. The exploration had both practical and pedagogical value in the English language classroom.

While the findings of this study offered valuable insights into the lived experiences of the phenomena of critical thinking, the hermeneutic phenomenological method and the small size of participants avoid conclusions about it beyond the range of the lived experience of the participants. Therefore, this study had limitations, particularly with the generalizability of the findings or the explication of the phenomena. However, the exploration may resonate in similar contexts where similar socio-cultural and educational values exist.

Chapter Summary

I began this chapter with my critical reflection on my pin-drop silence syndrome which helped me identify and problematize the issue. Drawing on my experiences and other scholarly observations, I developed the rationale for my study. This facilitated me further to set my purpose for exploring the lived experiences of English language teachers with the claim that their experiences shape their understanding and practice in

developing their learners' thinking. This in turn helped me frame my research questions. Finally, I delimited my study by fitting the fence around critical thinking.

CHAPTER II
LOCATING THE PHENOMENA OF CRITICAL THINKING IN RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explore both theoretical and empirical assumptions that are related to the study. I begin by conceptualizing critical thinking and move on to exploring critical thinking as a dimension of social constructivism and then discuss different approaches to critical thinking. Next, I examine the recent focus on critical thinking both in English language teaching in general and in the secondary English curriculum of Nepal in particular. Thereafter, I present some previous research studies with reference to teaching critical thinking and teachers' experience and perceptions toward it. Finally, I highlight the research gap and present the conceptual framework of this study.

Conceptualizing Critical Thinking in Education

In a general sense, critical thinking concerns whether something is true, partly true or not true at all. The intellectual roots of critical thinking are believed to have emerged from the teaching practice and vision of the Greek philosopher Socrates (470 BC-399BC), who developed insight into learning by in-depth questioning of the knowledge claims of others (Elder & Paul, 1997). His method is popularly known as "Socratic questioning" (Fisher, 2001). Though Socrates proposed such a system of enquiry long ago and there have been discussions built around critical thinking throughout human history, the term 'Critical Thinking' first emerged in academic circles and literature in the mid-twentieth century. In a seminal study on critical thinking and education, Glaser (1941) defined critical thinking as "the ability to think critically" (p. 409). He stressed that critical thinking referred to the search for evidence to support or discredit a belief or argument. Another prominent contributor to critical thinking is Robert Ennis (1985), who is remembered for his classical rendering of critical thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 45). As such, critical thinking examines assumptions (Epstein, 2003) and keeps thinking free from bias and prejudice (Haskins, 2006), "taking different perspectives on familiar, taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviors" (Brookfield, 2005, viii). More broadly, it is "the

art of thinking about thinking in order to make thinking better" (Paul & Elder, 2006, p. xvii), which implies digging deeper and questioning what is offered on the surface. Based on the definitions presented above critical thinking can be viewed as an objective inquiry into people's knowledge, assumptions, attitudes, and biases.

In addition to the aforementioned thinkers, several scholars have highlighted the attributes and importance of critical thinking in education. Dewey (1933) advocated the centrality of reflective thinking in education and viewed the main purpose of critical thinking as fostering democracies (Rodgers, 2002). A significant foundation for teaching critical thinking was laid by Bloom (1956) through a theoretical classification of educational objectives for the cognitive domain called 'Bloom's Taxonomy'. The hierarchical levels in the revised taxonomy represent six levels of questions and teaching objectives: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The idea was that "asking high-level questions and achieving the higher-level objectives require that teachers restructure classrooms so that they support the practice of critical thinking" (Crawford et al., 2005). Similarly, Scriven and Richard (2007) made the concept of critical thinking more explicit by listing the following attributes of it: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. Paul and Elder (2009) also supported fairness and empathy as traits and attributes of critical thinking. Fisher (2001) conceived critical thinking as essential in education, with a focus not on the content but on teaching how to think. In recent literature, some noted scholars in the field viewed it as thinking with logic or reasoning (e.g., Mulnix, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2019, 2020). Likewise, Lambert and Cuper (2008) took it as a necessary skill all students need to develop to fully understand the information presented in lessons.

Overall, the concept of critical thinking in education can be realized as the dynamic relationship between how teachers teach and how students learn (Mason, 2010). In that sense, as Hooks (2010) put it, critical thinking is an interactive process of the exchange of knowledge between teachers and students which involves finding answers to the inquiry-driven questions of the learners and utilizing that knowledge wisely (Hooks, 2010).

Keeping teachers' practical wisdom in terms of critical thinking instruction in mind, this study found UNESCO's (2013) rendering of critical thinking very relevant: A process that involves asking appropriate questions, gathering, and creatively sorting through relevant information, relating new information to existing knowledge, re-examining beliefs and assumptions, reasoning logically, and drawing reliable and trustworthy conclusions…Attributes such as curiosity and flexibility and a questioning attitude are closely related to critical thinking (p. 15). Based on the concepts and definitions of critical thinking presented above, I conceptualize it as the ability to ask good questions and find answers to them. I take it as an attribute that calls for active thinking and meaningful learning in the English language classroom.

Attending to Critical Thinking as a Dimension of Constructivism

I used constructivism as a theoretical lens to explore the phenomena of critical thinking. However, as this study is phenomenological, I used this theory solely for a descriptive purpose informing data analysis, not for an explanatory or confirmatory role (Larsen & Adu, 2021). I found that for several reasons, constructivism could be a very powerful orientation to exploring how teachers integrate the phenomena of critical thinking in English language teaching. One of the obvious reasons is that constructivism emphasizes the processes by which learners actively construct their knowledge, rather than simply absorbing ideas spoken to them by teachers (Fosnot, 2013; Phillips, 2000; Larochelle, 2010). The construction of new ideas knowledge and rather than parroting or memorizing the content is a desirable outcome in the classroom when critical thinking is promoted by teachers. Thus, constructivism provided a productive lens to explore the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom as it does not view learners as passive recipients of information but as builders of knowledge structures (Pass, 2005; Wadsworth, 2004). To view teaching from social constructivist orientation, Vygotsky (1978) argued that to facilitate learning, it is necessary to engage in discussions, share knowledge, and compare knowledge and beliefs with others. These ideas seem to have rich implications for active thinking and learning.

Constructivism provided a powerful premise on the role of teachers as well. According to Flynn (2005), "since students lack the experience of experts in the field, teachers bear a great responsibility for guiding student activity, modeling behavior, and

providing examples that will transform student group discussions into meaningful communication about subject matter" (as cited in Lunenburg, 2011, p. 4). It helped me derive a guiding principle for my present work in that teachers are not just disseminators of information and facts but are the ones who value student thinking and disposition. As Larsen and Adu (2021) suggest, I used the concepts associated with this theory to inform the generation of themes characterizing relevant extracts selected from participants' accounts.

Therefore, I used the following basic principles of constructivism (Brooks & Brooks, 1999) for a descriptive purpose in my study.

Principle 1: Posing problems of emerging relevance to students. By this principle, teachers are expected to generate interest in learning.

Principle 2: Structuring learning around primary concepts. By this principle, teachers are expected to present problems, questions, and diverse situations holistically, not as separate, or isolated parts.

Principle 3: Seeking and valuing students' points of view: By this principle, teachers are expected to have awareness of students' points of view which provide access to their reasoning skills.

Principle 4: Adapting curriculum to address students' suppositions: By this principle, teachers are expected to adapt the given curriculum to build on students' assumptions.

Principle 5: Assessing student learning in the context of teaching. By this principle, teachers are expected to focus on authentic assessment which includes analytical thinking and performance, as opposed to standardized tests that promote low-level rote skills.

Thus, these principles recognize teachers as facilitators of active, meaningful learning and thinking. In this context, critical thinking can be viewed as an integral conceptual and practical element of constructivist learning (Taylor et al., 1997). Pritchard and Woollard (2010) make their point very precisely by including the elements of critical thinking in such learning:

> Constructivist teaching is associated with learning that is made up of some or all of the following: critical thinking, motivation, learner independence, feedback,

dialogue, language, explanation, questioning, learning through teaching, contextualization, experiments and/or real-world problem solving (p. 37).

Therefore, I used constructivism as a theoretical orientation to explore the lived experiences of teachers as facilitators for active thinking and learning in the English language classroom.

However, I was aware that the use of theoretical orientation in a phenomenological study such as this is debatable. Though the phenomenological study does not use any explicit theoretical orientation because of its attempt to build the essence of experiences from participants (Creswell, 2007), I used constructivism for its theory of knowledge and related pedagogy as highlighted above. In my decision, Schwandt (2014) provided a vantage point for the use of theory even in a phenomenological study. I took two important clues that come from his theoretical stance: first, no qualitative study begins from pure observation and second, a prior conceptual structure composed of theory and method provides the starting point for all observations. I used constructivism for its inputs about active thinking and learning which stands in sharp contrast to passive transportation of knowledge and information by teachers to students.

Different Approaches to Critical Thinking

In the ELT context like ours where there is a growing focus on critical thinking, the question of what approaches are being used in critical thinking instruction is important. I found in the literature that there are basically four different approaches to critical thinking instruction**.** In their meta-analysis, Abrami et al. (2008) categorized instructional strategies in four ways: (a) a mixed approach, in which critical thinking was taught as a separate unit within a course of other content; (b) an immersion approach, in which critical thinking was a by-product of instruction and would involve a discussion on a contentious topic from multiple perspectives; (c) a general approach, in which critical thinking was taught as the explicit course outcome; and (d) an infusion approach, in which critical thinking skills were embedded into the course content and explicitly stated as an outcome. The knowledge of this categorization is helpful in delineating the focus on critical thinking as recognized and valued in the ELT context in Nepal.

It is obvious in our context that critical thinking is not taught as the explicit course outcome, but it has been a desirable element across the English language curriculum. It

has been given adequate space for the integration of critical thinking through competencies, learning outcomes and the principles of language pedagogy as delineated in the Secondary Education (Grade 11 & 12) Curriculum 2076 (CDC, 2020b). The curriculum aims at developing the following two competencies in English language learners: "read, reflect and interpret a wide range of texts" and "critically analyze and evaluate ideas in a wide range of level appropriate texts" (CDC, 2020b, p. 37). As part of the recent changes in the curriculum, critical thinking has been placed as the first unit in the English textbook for Grade 12 (CDC, 2021, p. 1). It has also been referenced under 'critical thinking questions' sections in the English textbooks for Grades 11 and 12. Thus, the phenomena of critical thinking seem to be spread across the dynamic continuum of the secondary level English curriculum. Based on the curriculum objectives and activities suggested in the textbook, English language teachers are required to inculcate critical thinking in their students. They can use immersion and infusion approaches to help their students process the content and develop their critical and analytical skills.

Critical Thinking in English Language Teaching

Before moving on to the meaning and significance of infusing critical thinking into English language teaching, understanding the role of teachers who are expected to create the phenomenon is very important. Brookfield (2012) recognized, among other things, the importance of teachers as a model to help develop their students' thinking. I was influenced by the following five major themes as delineated by him in terms of teaching critical thinking across different contexts:

> These are (1) that critical thinking is best experienced as a social learning process, (2) that it is important for teachers to model the process for students, (3) that critical thinking is best understood when grounded in very specific events or experiences, (4) that some of the most effective triggers to critical thinking are having to deal with an unexpected event (or disorienting dilemma, as it is sometimes called), and (5) that learning critical thinking needs to be incrementally sequenced (p. xii).

These themes provided me a vantage point to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers following the spirit of the themes mentioned above.

In addition, there are several good reasons for integrating critical thinking into the English language classroom. The successful integration of critical thinking has been a required skill for education today (Partnerships for 21st-century skills, 2007). It helps students to skillfully analyze, assess, and reconstruct any subject matter, content, or problem (Paul & Elder, 2008). In this context, the responsibility of foreign language teachers is to help their learners acquire critical thinking skills while learning the language.

Many educators have examined the practice and performance of critical thinking skills in English language classrooms from both teaching and learning perspectives. Kavanoz (2020) argues that "due to their unrestricted nature of the content, English teachers have abundant opportunities to incorporate critical thinking into their teaching" (p. 57). In a similar vein, Kabilan (2000) suggests, for learners to be proficient in a language, they need to be able to think creatively and critically when using the target language. That is, no language learning content is free from speakers' or writers' opinions, so students need to develop critical thinking skills to approach them critically. According to Pescatore (2007), critical thinking helps discern the deeper meaning, ideology, and bias expressed in the written and spoken word. Hughes (2014) states that the use of authentic texts in language class requires students to comprehend the meaning, match the argument to the supporting evidence and express their own views in response to the text. Dummet and Hughes (2019) suggest that critical thinking in the English language Classroom "can be used to achieve a greater understanding of individual words and sentences, of longer pieces of discourse, of ideas, and of different means of communication" (p. 1). That is, critical thinking plays a key role in the deeper processing and production of language. These observations show that critical thinking is an important attribute in the English language classroom.

The teaching of critical thinking has been influenced by the way teachers teach and students learn. Bailin et al. (1999) listed three pre-requisite elements for teaching critical thinking: i) teachers should engage students with tasks that require reasoned judgment and assessment; ii) teachers should help students develop intellectual resources for dealing with these tasks; iii) teachers should provide a learning environment where learners' critical thinking is valued and their attempts to think critically are supported and

encouraged (pp. 298-299). These elements highlight how important teachers are in inculcating critical thinking skills in their learners. Lipman (2003) also states that teachers are responsible for promoting critical thinking in the learners other than helping them to go from one educational level to the next. Nowadays students are no longer interested in being tied to rote learning and memorization because they are no longer appropriate for those who look for new and meaningful knowledge and think critically (Marin & Halpern, 2011). Students need skills that help them take ownership of their own learning by skillfully dealing with new information (Coughlin, 2010), which requires them to have critical thinking ability. Yang and Gamble (2013) explored whether it is possible to simultaneously develop English language proficiency and critical thinking skills by integrating critical thinking activities such as debates and peer critiques into the language classrooms. The findings revealed that the experimental group that was exposed to activities such as argumentative writing and debating made a significant improvement both in English language proficiency and critical thinking skills, whereas the control group that was not exposed to those activities did not.

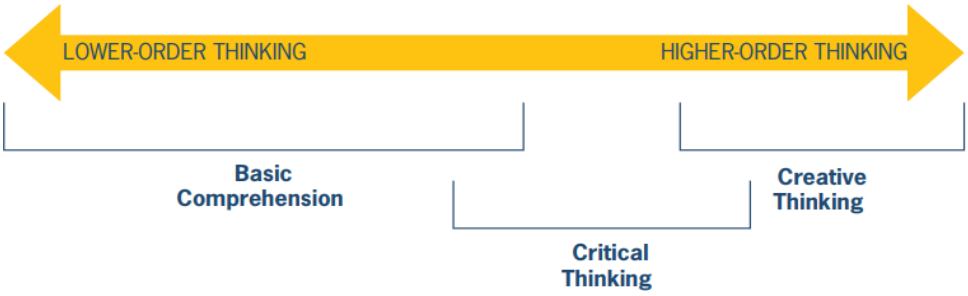
Thus, the literature presented above highlights growing concerns over learners' critical thinking skills and the active role of teachers in facilitating their students. Dummett and Hughes (2019) made such concerns more explicit and succinct by presenting the three core beliefs about language learning:

> I. Effective language learning involves a balance of higher and lower order thinking skills. II. No one type of thinking (lower or higher order) is inferior or superior. Rather, educators and teachers should strive to achieve a balance between them. III. Critical thinking plays a key role in the deeper processing and production of language (p. 1).

Therefore, instead of viewing critical thinking as a hierarchical layer or as taxonomies set to move from the bottom up, this study followed the spirit of a working model developed by Dummet and Hughes (2019) where they view critical thinking "as a mindset that involves thinking reflectively (being curious), rationally (thinking analytically), and reasonably (coming to sensible conclusions)" (p. 4). They agreed with a view of Anderson and Krathwohl's revised taxonomy which "reflects more closely the reality of classroom practice: Teachers initiate tasks that practice different thinking skills at

different times, and sometimes more than once, in no particular order" (p. 8). Central to the revised taxonomy was the idea that the different types of thinking are part of a continuum in which the levels overlap and flow back and forth from one to the other" (p. 8). In agreeing with Krathwohl (2002), they raised some questions to show how the levels overlap: "Is understanding really a lower order thinking skill? Aren't the skills of analyzing and evaluating part of understanding? What is the difference between applying knowledge and creating?" (p. 9). Guided by these fundamental questions, they devised the following framework which classifies the thinking process in three broader levels: basic comprehension, critical thinking, and creative thinking.

Figure 1



(Dummet & Hughes, 2019, p. 9)

By going through the framework of these overlapping levels, I came to learn that "much of what is traditionally done in language teaching is at the level of basic comprehension, and often less time is devoted to critical thinking and creative thinking" (p. 10). In this regard, Moon's (2008) observation also helped me view "critical thinking in relation to pedagogical issues and, in so doing, adopt a less structured approach to its identity… guide learners into being critical thinkers rather than treating the process as an entity in itself" (p. 11). This study followed the spirit of this flexibility or less structured approach when gathering lived experiences about the phenomena of critical thinking from the English language teachers.

Place of Critical Thinking in the Grade 11 and 12 English Curriculum of Nepal

How does critical thinking appear in the secondary level English curriculum of Nepal? How does the curriculum incorporate the elements of critical thinking in the

prescribed textbooks, especially in the English textbooks for Grade XI and Grade XII? Though these concerns are mentions above, here I briefly highlight the units, textbook contents and their approach to substantiate the place of critical thinking in the English curriculum and to look into the horizon of thinking opportunities available for English teachers and students.

The compulsory English textbooks for Grades 11 and 12 (CDC, 2020a, 2021) have been prepared based on The Secondary Education Curriculum 2076 (CDC, 2020b). The textbooks have incorporated both language and literature components of the English language with an aim to help learners develop their communicative, creative, and critical thinking skills. They have two sections. Section I includes a wide range of contemporary issue-based thematic units with varieties of exercises on all language skills, grammar, and vocabulary. Section II comprises genre-based literary texts followed by some analytical questions and exercises.

There are 20 units in section I in which each unit follows a similar sequence. Firstly, there is a reading section that begins with **the Before you read** section where learners are required to discuss certain questions in pairs or groups before they read the text. The main purpose of this part is to orient the learners towards the theme of the reading text. Secondly, there is a main section for **Reading** the text which is specifically for intensive reading. There are three sections after the reading text: **vocabulary, comprehension,** and **critical thinking**. While both the vocabulary section and comprehension section are intended to initiate students' understanding of the text, the tasks given in critical thinking require the students to think beyond the text. This section has provided probing, issue-based questions that are expected to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Through this section students are expected to develop their thinking, arguing, and analyzing ideas. Thirdly, there is a **Writing** section that aims at developing creative writing skills in the learners by engaging them in tasks and activities mostly from the main reading texts. Fourthly, there is a listening section that aims at developing listening comprehension skills in the learners. The **Listening** section contains three types of tasks: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. Finally, there is a **Speaking** section that introduces language functions to develop communication skills in learners.

Section II includes four genre-based units with 20 literary texts for extensive reading. They are short stories, poems, essays, and one-act plays. Each text begins with Before Reading followed by the main reading with a set of exercises. These reading texts are expected to develop learners' reading and interpreting abilities through the tasks and activities under three different sections: Understanding the text, Reference to the context and Reference beyond the text.

The division of textbook contents and the focus suggests that though the present curriculum has incorporated all four language skills, its focus is rested on reading and writing skills. With a focus on the intensive reading of diverse literary texts, it has made the inclusion of critical thinking explicit: "Soft skills including critical thinking and creativity of the students have also been given due importance. For this purpose, a wide variety of texts have been included under various themes and topics" (CDC, 2021, p. 36).

Thus, in the new curriculum of English for Grades 11 and 12, every lesson is an opportunity for students to expand their horizons of thinking and learning. But as Numrich (2010) notes, it is important for teachers to promote critical thinking to enable students to truly think through lessons. This suggests that when properly learned, lessons or content presented to students transform the way they think. This means that curriculum "content dies when one tries to mechanically learn it" (Lunenburg, 2011, p. 2). In this study, therefore, I explored the lived experiences of teachers about how they incorporate critical thinking in English language lessons.

Empirical Insights

Before I intended to carry out this research, I studied previous literature related to my research topic. I noticed that research on the phenomena of critical thinking from the perspectives of English language teachers was scarce in the EFL context of Nepal. Therefore, I used the recent empirical literature to curate a concrete path for my research in the Nepalese context.

In the article "Explicit inclusion of thinking skills in the learning of second languages", Jacobs et al. (2018) offered paths that second language students can take as they develop their thinking skills. These paths were illustrated with examples from four lessons, two on writing and two in philosophy. Their study claimed that thinking skills are crucial to the futures of students and the societies in which they live, and teachers of

second languages must promote explicit learning of those skills. The study also highlighted that teachers should increase their understanding and applications of thinking skills along with their students to promote active learning and to address the challenges we all face as members of our planet. This study provided me with a clear idea to argue why teachers should enhance their understanding and application of critical thinking.

I found two studies dealing with the EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards critical thinking helpful as they connected critical thinking to the curriculum needs and teachers' ability to meet those demands. One of them was Asgharheidari and Tahriri's (2015) research on "A survey of EFL teachers' attitudes towards critical thinking instruction". The aim of this research was to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the concept of critical thinking, its place in their job and their opinion regarding the need for more training to enhance their ability in teaching CT skills. The survey result revealed that most of the participating teachers had a clear idea of the concept of CT. They indicated that CT should be part of the curriculum and that it is an important part of their job as a language teacher. In addition, most of them expressed the need for more training in how to teach CT skills. Similarly, Ardini (2017) carried out a descriptive qualitative study on "Teachers' perception, knowledge and behavior of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)", which showed that teachers encourage the use of HOTS as stated in the 2013 curriculum by the Indonesian government, and the problem-based learning model was the most used learning model among others. The study also revealed that teachers need to improve their knowledge of HOTS to be able to support their students. These two studies brought some knowledge about teachers' attitudes towards and perception of critical thinking, but they were limited in exploring how teachers experienced integrating critical thinking and how their experience shaped their understanding of it.

Scholars have also drawn our attention to the challenges and difficulties of teaching critical thinking. Laabidi (2019) conducted an online survey to examine the barriers that stopped English language teachers from using critical thinking in education. A total of 423 participants were involved in the study from different Moroccan high schools. Results indicated that the lack of successful integration of critical thinking in classrooms was attributed to several factors including large class size, time constraints

and content coverage (workload), student concerns about getting good grades, lack of training by the school, and lack of administrative support. This result was consistent with the findings by Snyder and Snyder (2008) in terms of barriers that impede critical thinking instruction. The study showed that lack of training, limited resources, biased preconceptions, and time constraints hinder learning environments that promote critical thinking. It suggested ways that can be used to promote critical thinking in students, which included using instructional strategies that encourage active learning, and thinking against lecture and rote memorization, focusing instructions on the process of learning rather than solely on the content, and using assessment techniques that provide students with an intellectual challenge rather than memory or recall. From these two studies I got the idea that critical thinking is a learned skill that requires teachers to actively engage, instruct and assess students.

I found other two studies that examined teachers' attitudes towards critical thinking. One of them was by Stapleton (2011) on attitudes toward critical thinking (CT) among Hong Kong secondary school teachers. The results revealed that the teachers' conception of CT was narrow, and a precise understanding was lacking. However, the participating teachers expressed strong support for the inclusion of CT in the curriculum. Similarly, the study by Marijic and Romfelt (2016) carried out a qualitative study to examine English teachers' attitudes towards critical thinking and methods of assessment in English as a foreign language (EFL) in Sweden's upper secondary school. This qualitative study investigated five in-service EFL teachers' conceptualizations of critical thinking as well as the strategies they use to infuse critical thinking into their EFL courses. The findings revealed that participating teachers have adequate knowledge about critical thinking, and they incorporate certain techniques to cultivate critical thinking among language learners. They recommended that there should be more focus on exploring critical thinking conceptions and practice among EFL teachers working at different levels. These two studies provided me with some valuable inputs that teachers can implement instruction geared towards critical thinking effectively only when they develop a sound conception of critical thinking and that teacher attitudes are influential factors for the development of critical thinking among students.

In a similar vein, Tuzlukova et al. (2018) conducted a study among higher education providers in the Sultanate of Oman that focused on teachers' knowledge and understanding of critical thinking, and their views and perception of critical thinking in relation to the English language classroom. This study covered a sample of 293 teachers from different higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. The instrument was a questionnaire both on paper and online. Findings revealed that though teachers perceive the importance of employing critical thinking skills in their teaching, they lack support in its implementation.

According to Hastuti et al. (2022), relatively few have investigated the integration of critical thinking into classroom instructions. A qualitative study on "EFL teachers' conceptualizations and instructional practices of critical thinking" by Kavanoz and Akbaş (2017) revealed that teachers have adequate knowledge about critical thinking, and they incorporate certain techniques such as reading between the lines, questioning, making inferences, and connecting the topic to daily issues and concerns. The findings of this study were based on five in-service EFL teachers' conceptualizations of critical thinking as well as the strategies they use to infuse critical thinking into their EFL courses. The study also found some barriers to promoting critical thinking which included standardized test format, students' ability, and teacher training devoid of critical thinking practices. This study gave me some ideas about what EFL teachers can do to promote critical thinking and what kinds of problems they face in that. However, this study was conducted only in a private high school and was limited in exploring the meanings, structures and essence of teaching critical thinking which is the focus of my study.

In the Nepalese context, I found that research in critical thinking in an EFL setting is scarce. Here I include three studies to develop a space of inquiry for my study. I found one study on "Critical thinking practices in Mathematics Classroom in Nepal" by Pokhrel (2010) which showed that critical thinking perceptions and practices are found to be different in teachers. His study revealed that teachers are using the necessary conditions which are not sufficient to address students' critical thinking appropriately. This study encouraged me to have a similar study in the English language classroom as it found out that teachers' perceptions and practices about critical thinking are different. Along with it, I found one related study entitled "Developing reading skills through cognitive process

dimension in EFL learners: An action research" by Pyakuryal (2017) which helped me advance why teachers' role is imperative to developing students' both lower order and higher order thinking skills in reading comprehension. Particularly, its claim that teachers should know how to use cognitive processes if they want to help their students improve their reading skills is very relevant to my study. Finally, a study entitled "Critical thinking in ELT classrooms: Teachers' perceptions and practices" by Bhetwal (2014) provided me with a lens for the qualitative rendering of the phenomena of critical thinking using hermeneutic phenomenology. This study, carried out on six lower secondary level English teachers through interviews and classroom observation, revealed that teachers are positive towards the use of critical thinking in teaching the English language, and they have been doing their best to incorporate it. The study also pointed out that teachers had certain limitations due to lack of training, guidance, and practical exposure to its application.

In addition, in terms of the instructional approach, I found that both explicit and implicit approaches are in practice and can improve learners' critical thinking. According to Abrami et al. (2008), a meta-analysis of over 1,300 experimental studies from 1960-2005 revealed that instruction that included critical thinking components improved learners' critical thinking skills, whether delivered implicitly or explicitly. Similarly, O'Reilly et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review of 25 empirical studies (2015-2021) to address various ways of teaching for thinking focusing on young children. Their study revealed the three common pedagogic strategies used to promote critical thinking: 1) classroom interactions and inquiry-based techniques, 2) the use of thinking language, and 3) story-based pedagogy. But this study was focused on early childhood context.

The review above shows that though educators have laid quite a good emphasis on critical thinking, there has been few qualitative research in exploring teachers' lived experience of integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom. Accounts of how teachers perceive the phenomena of integrating critical thinking and experience about developing learners' critical thinking skills to support their students are particularly scarce.

The Gap as I See It

The literature reviewed above shows that critical thinking instruction is an important phenomenon in Education in general and in English language teaching. I noticed that most of the works focused on teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching critical thinking as well as their readiness to teach this skill and the barriers to it in different contexts. However, the studies cited here clearly show that there is potential space for a qualitative inquiry that aims at exploring teachers' lived experiences about how they integrate critical thinking in the English language classroom. Most essential to this study, the available literature did not seem to specifically focus on how teachers experience about integrating critical thinking in the English language lesson and how their experiences have increased their understanding and performance in the classroom. Besides, the research cited here had little focus on how teachers create the phenomena of critical thinking. In addition, the research studies were not about the Nepali English language teachers, nor did those studies investigate the experience of teachers from the hermeneutic phenomenological lens.

This research is, therefore, an attempt to fill the gap by "gaining important access to all sorts of important manifestations and appearances of the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2018, p. 54) of integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom. Hermeneutics phenomenology as its method and the Nepali ELT context and English language teachers are important decisions for this research to claim its fresh approach and outcome.

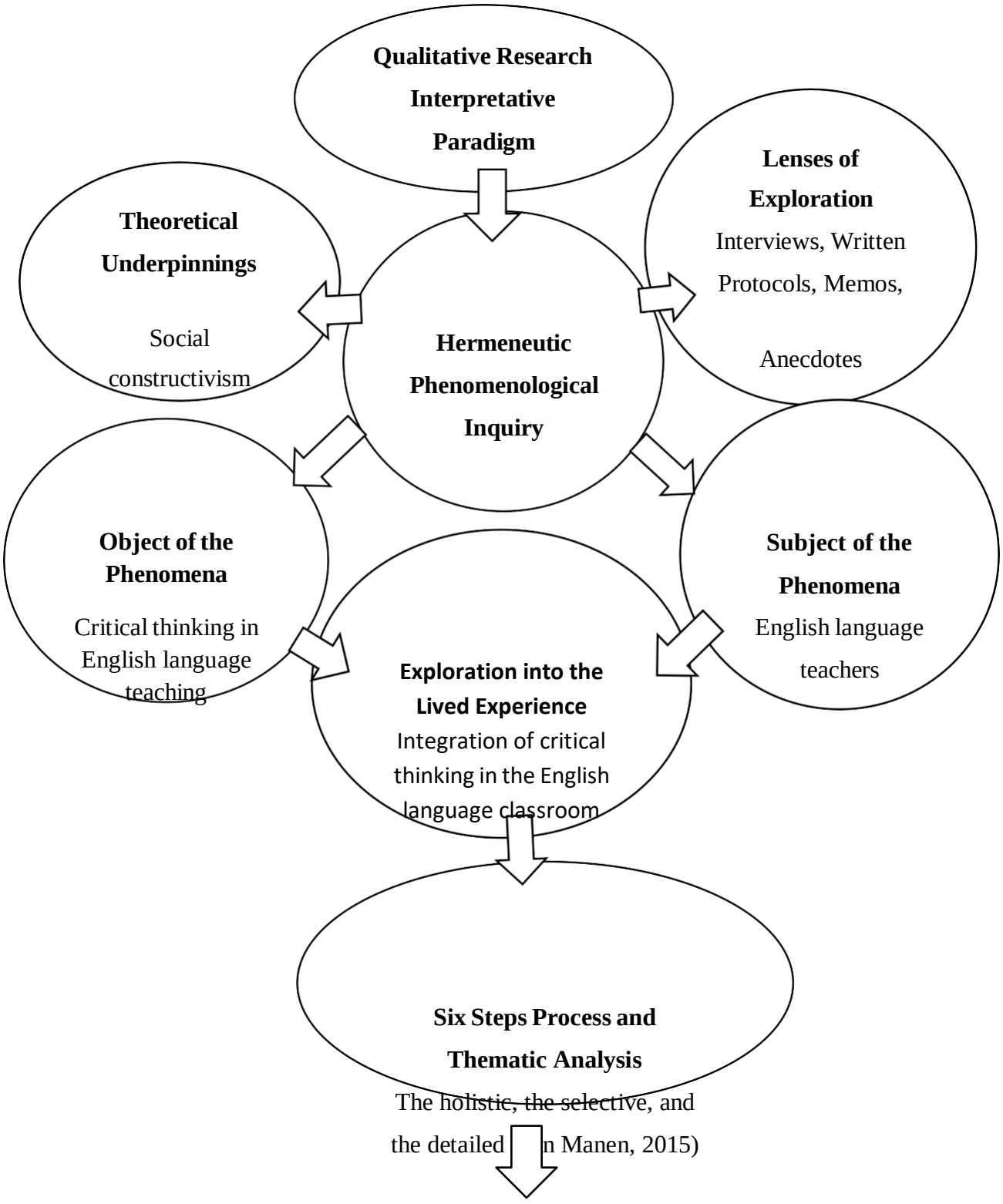
Conceptual Framework of the Study

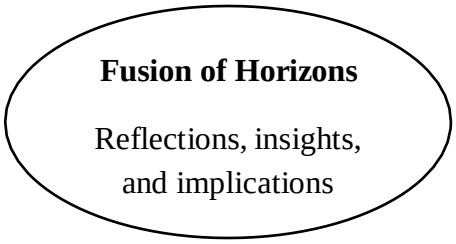
The literature that I analyzed and the gap I noticed helped me generate some concepts related to the present study. I devised the conceptual framework for this study on the basis of the fundamental assumption and the findings from a review of the literature on critical thinking instruction. Though a theoretical framework is deemed necessary in dissertation research in order to guide and align the components including the problem statement, the research questions, the data analysis, as well as the conceptualization of the findings (Grant & Osanloo, 2015), I was aware of the fact that there is a risk of using the theoretical framework as a guiding principle in a phenomenological study as it may serve as a theoretical hegemony leading to the

suppression of underlying meanings in the data (Maxwell, 2013) . Following his concern, I used conceptual framework to sustain an inductive perspective where different components work together as a whole and present the entire research process in the form of a diagram. As Svinicki (2010) put it, I used this framework as "an interconnected set of ideas (theories) about how a particular phenomenon functions or is related to its parts" (p. 5). The framework presented below indicates all the components of my research work as connected to one another. As shown in the framework, this study is informed by an interpretative paradigm, inspired by social constructivism, and driven by hermeneutic phenomenology. The aim of this research work is to explore the integration of critical thinking in the English language classroom. The lived experiences shared by the English language teachers illuminate the phenomena of critical thinking. As a set of interconnected ideas, all the components in the framework are meant to explore the integration of critical thinking in the English language classroom as experienced by the English language teachers.

Figure 2

Conceptual framework of the study




Fusion of Horizons
Reflections, insights,
and implications

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explored both theoretical and empirical assumptions that are related to the study. I began by conceptualizing critical thinking and moved on to exploring critical thinking as a dimension of social constructivism. The philosophical underpinning of social constructivism gave me descriptive points to explore the phenomena of critical thinking as experienced by the English language teachers. Then I presented different approaches to critical thinking instruction with an aim to situate the phenomena within the scope of the ELT context in Nepal. Next, I examined the recent focus on critical thinking both in the field of English language teaching in general and in the secondary English curriculum of Nepal in particular. Thereafter, I presented some previous research studies with reference to teaching critical thinking and teachers' experience and perceptions toward it. But to my surprise, I found few qualitative researchers focusing on the lived experience of English language teachers. Following it, I generated the research gap. Finally, I devised the conceptual framework of this study to guide me through a set of interconnected ideas.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCHING PHENOMENOLOGICALLY

In this chapter, I reason with details why and how I made my methodological choice. I begin the chapter with the research worldviews where I clarify my philosophical assumptions related to this study. Then I describe the process of doing hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry within the qualitative research design. Here I present in detail the lenses of exploration and the data-gathering strategies used in this study. Next, I present the participants' background information. Following it, I make the researcher's role explicit within the scope of hermeneutic phenomenology. I conclude the chapter with sections on quality standards used to authenticate my research and ethical considerations to be considered in my research work.

Unfolding My Research Worldviews

In this section, I describe philosophical considerations to present the assumptions that I as a researcher made about my research. Such considerations led me to choices that were applied to the purpose, design, methodology and methods of the research, as well as to data analysis and interpretation. According to Seamon and Gill (2016), the "philosophical stance one assumes in relation to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge largely determines how the researcher conducts research, what he or she considers as legitimate research evidence" (p. 117). Under philosophical considerations, ontology, epistemology, and axiology were considered.

My Ontological Assumption

Ontology refers to the ways of being and becoming. It deals with the nature of being or what exists (Neuman, 2016). It tells us that multiple, socially constructed realities (Patton, 2002). Ontologically, I believe that reality and truth are not fixed entities but open new meanings and experiences in context. In my research process and data analysis, I maintained the ontology that there are multiple realities about teachers' experiences and understanding in terms of integrating critical thinking in the ELT context in Nepal.

My Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how it gets produced. Schwandt (2014) defines it as the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. Epistemologically, I generated knowledge about the phenomena of how English language teachers experience about integrating critical thinking and how their experiences increase their understanding. To explore these phenomena, I used multiple interviews, protocol writing, memos, and anecdotes. The interpretation of such knowledge was realized as the double hermeneutics as proposed by Smith et al. (2009) which places its emphasis on understanding through the vehicle of interpretation. But the knowledge generated from this study is not completely new; it will add to the existing knowledge already in place.

My Axiological Assumption

It refers to what we value in our research. My research captured the value question of what is intrinsically worthwhile to integrate critical thinking in the English language classroom. I valued my participants' views, their own values, and experiences in terms of developing critical thinking in their learners. However, my value as a researcher might have been biased in the research study (Ihuah & Eaton, 2013) as I kept myself open and involved through memos and anecdotes in the entire research process. According to Seamon and Gill (2016, p. 117), the "philosophical stance one assumes in relation to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge largely determines how the researcher conducts research, what he or she considers as legitimate research evidence" (p. 117). As a researcher I included my experience and interpretation in conjunction with my participants. I openly discussed them as part of the researcher's values, experiences, and world views. Therefore, I admit the value-laden nature of this study.

Immersing in Interpretive Inquiry

The goal of this research was to explore the phenomena of critical thinking as experienced and understood by English language teachers in the ELT context in Nepal. This goal called for an interpretive perspective which allowed me to accept and seek multiple perspectives and explore what the participants in my study have to say about their experiences (Willis, 2007). As an interpretive researcher, I tried to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalize the findings to the whole population (Creswell, 2014). Situated within the

interpretive paradigm, I constructed meanings depending on their context and personal frames of reference as I engaged with the world I was interpreting (Crotty, 1998). I was aware that in the research informed by the philosophy, strategies, and intentions of the interpretive research paradigm, findings emerge from the interactions between the researcher and the participants as the research progresses (Creswell, 2007). This awareness enabled me to treat the context of my research and its situation as unique considering the depth of individual experiences that comprised diverse thoughts, perceptions, and perspectives (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Therefore, the goal of choosing an interpretive paradigm of research was to explore the lived experiences of the English language teachers and interpret those experiences to inductively derive meanings.

Phenomenology as Research Approach

The approach of this research is phenomenological in that it attempts to explore the phenomena of integrating critical thinking within the context of English language teaching. This approach is considered suitable to explore the phenomena of pedagogical significance (van Manen, 2015). Through the exploration of the lived experiences of my participants, I tried to recognize and value the phenomena of critical thinking in the ELT context in Nepal. In the entire exploration, I was inspired by van Manen (2017) who argues that phenomenology is different from other qualitative research in its focus on gaining insightful descriptions of the world as it appears, by exploring it pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. Accordingly, I focused on the exploration of the phenomena of critical thinking in their fresh appearance in the lived experiences of English language teachers.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Research Method

Within the phenomenological research approach, I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as a method for this study. The key objective of this choice was to produce "rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively" (Smith, 1997, p. 80). I was fully aware of the fact that "the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation," (Heidegger, 1962, p. 37). As van Manen (2015) put it, hermeneutic phenomenology is both descriptive and interpretive in nature. He states,

> It is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (p. 180).

Inspired by his observation, I tried to exploit its descriptive and interpretive traits. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology helped me explore participants' experiences with further abstraction and interpretation, which added the interpretive element to explicate meanings and assumptions in the participants' texts that participants themselves may have difficulty in articulation (Crotty, 1998). In addition, it offered me a way of understanding lived experiences captured through language and in context which was instrumental in explicating the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom.

I followed van Manen's (2015) six steps referenced for the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into the phenomena chosen for the study. My decision to draw on his methodology was purposeful as his phenomenology is essentially hermeneutic and has an educational focus (Friesen & Saevi, 2012). His first stage 'turning to the phenomena of interest' was realized by making a connection to my original experience to formulate research questions and by continually referencing them in the analysis of the data. The second stage 'investigating experience as we live it' was realized by conducting multiple interviews, by asking the participants to produce written protocols of their lived experience and understanding and by writing memos and anecdotes. The third stage 'reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomena' was realized by selecting experiential words and statements and by critically reflecting on them to let them form themes and sub-themes that gave meaning to the phenomena of critical thinking. The fourth stage 'describing the phenomenon—the act of writing and rewriting' was realized by treating the texts as dynamic documents for both revisions and restructuring. The fifth stage 'maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon' was realized by staying focused and devoted to the phenomenon under exploration. The final stage 'balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole' was realized as a back-and-forth movement, by constantly moving between the

parts of the phenomenon under investigation and the whole picture that emerged out of them.

In the interpretation of the phenomenological accounts that emerged from this study, I acknowledged hermeneutic sensibility (Finlay, 2009) at its core, following the idea that researchers need to come to an awareness of their preexisting beliefs in order to examine and question them in light of new evidence (Halling et al., 2006). As hermeneutics recognizes that the researcher brings prior knowledge and assumptions into the research process (Gadamer, 1975), the interpretation is implicated to make sense of data by drawing on the researcher's subjective understanding and life experiences (Finlay, 2003). Therefore, as a researcher, I moved back and forth, examining my personal experiences and assumptions and then looking at participants' lived experiences in their fresh appearance.

Research Participants

As qualitative studies are conducted on small sample of participants for the detailed case-by-case analysis of the individual transcripts, I preferred five participants which is considered a suitable sample size for hermeneutic phenomenology (De Gagne & Walters, 2010). I selected a relatively homogenous group of participants as required by phenomenological framework (Creswell, 2007). Participants selected to participate in this study were expected to have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context (van Manen, 2015), I selected the participants purposefully to ensure that they can share a range of experiences about integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom. I used the following two criteria: a) the participants were English language teachers; b) the participants had experience of teaching English at the secondary level, particularly in Grades 11 and 12. I recruited them by talking to them over the phone and forwarding an email to confirm their written consent. In the email, I stated the purpose of the study and provided the relevant details briefly. The participants' professional experience as teachers of English ranged from fourteen to twenty years.

The participants were English language teachers having an experience of minimum of five years. They came from those who were willing to talk about their experience, and they were diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (van Manen, 2015). As research participants they were 'self-interpreting' (Taylor, 1985) beings, which means that the participants can be actively engaged in interpreting the objects, events, and people in their lives. Below is basic information on the participants, or the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994) in this study as they were included in the meaning of the essence of the phenomenon along with the researcher. I have adjusted their names to respect their privacy.

Chandan

This participant is an M.Ed. in English language education. He works full-time in a community school. He has 14 years of teaching experience including his experience both in private and community school and private and public campuses. He has attended several online and face-to-face professional development programs and seminars and presented his papers at the national (e.g., NELTA conferences) and international level (e.g., IATEFL Conference).

Girish

This participant is an M.Ed. from Tribhuvan University and M.Phil. Nepal Open University in English language education. He works full time in a community school. He has around 20 years of experience. He successfully completed the AE E-Teacher Program's 2017 Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting Global Online Course (GOC), instructed by World Learning. He has attended several online and face-to-face professional development programs and seminars. He has also presented his papers at the national (e.g., NELTA conferences) and international level (e.g., IATEFL Conference).

Pawan

This participant has been teaching English for the last 14 years. He works full-time as a Post Graduate Teacher I at SOS Hermann Gmeiner Secondary School. Currently, he is an Assistant Lecturer at a public campus. He is an M. Phil. Scholar at Kathmandu University in English Language Education. He earned his M. A. in English

Literature from T.U. He completed an online course on Critical Thinking in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Curriculum course at the University of Oregon in 2012 with a scholarship provided by American Embassy, Kathmandu, Nepal. Besides, he has attended several online and face-to-face professional development programs and seminars and has also presented his papers. He is a creative writer and columnist at The Gorkha Times.

Sagun

This participant is an M.Phil. in English language education from Kathmandu University. She has had 19 years of experience in teaching at the secondary and bachelor levels. She has delivered several training courses as a master trainer. She has attended and delivered online and face-to-face professional development programs and seminars.

Urwashi

This participant is an M.Ed. and M.Phil. from Kathmandu University. She has had 14 years of teaching experience from across secondary level and college. She received an online course on Critical Thinking in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Curriculum at the University of Oregon in 2011 with a scholarship provided by American Embassy, Kathmandu, Nepal. Besides, she has attended and delivered several online and face-to-face professional development programs and seminars. She has also presented papers at the national (e.g., NELTA conferences) and international level (e.g., IATEFL Conference).

Researcher's role

One of the key features of hermeneutic phenomenology is the inclusion of researcher experiences in the processes of data collection and analysis (Bynum & Vapiro, 2018). In this study, I am speaking with my participants from experiences of 22 years of teaching, with an increased focus on integrating critical thinking in English language lessons over the years. Like some of my participants, I successfully completed the AE E-Teacher Program on Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting Global Online Course (GOC) in 2019. In this 8-week course, I got an opportunity to use my experiential learning to analyze personal experiences and classroom resources and think critically about the cultural assumptions and viewpoints embedded in my teaching content and process. I learned to examine myself as a cultural

being and assess learners' needs and goals to develop concrete lessons that reflected their view of critical thinking and intercultural competence. I explored several topics including multiple perspectives, intercultural communication, lesson planning for my context, and teaching critical thinking.

As a researcher, the challenge I faced was related to how I should describe my personal experience in experiential terms. To draw on Van Manen (2016), phenomenological research is an investigating experience as 'we' live it. The 'we' here includes both the researcher and his participants. Therefore, my life experiences as an English language teacher were equally important along with the experiences of my participants. But I had the challenge to offer "a direct description of my experience as it is, without offering causal explanations or interpretative generalizations of my experience" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, as cited in van Manen, 2016, p. 54). This experience was crucial in that "to be aware of the structure of one's own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all other stages of phenomenological research" (van Manen, 2016, p. 57).

My interest in this topic emerged from my role as a long-time English language teacher and trainer in diverse situations and demography. The drive was existential, cultivating a sense in me that I teach for thinking, not for dumping content and producing passive consumers. More specifically, the impulse to carry out a study on the phenomena of critical thinking grew stronger after I completed an 8-week-long course on critical thinking. As a researcher I am aware of the potential bias that my vantage point might offer to my exploration. Greene (2014) mentioned that insider research, in which the researcher has pre-existing knowledge of the subject being studied, can be beneficial when conducting research.

Exploring the Lived Experiences

I gathered data through multiple interviews, protocol writing, and memos. These techniques fit well to illuminate the phenomena studied as they provided access to the participants' lived experiences. I present the use of these methodological devices and the process of interpretation below.

Multiple Interviews

In this study, interviews served as basic means of inquiry which fitted well with phenomenological studies that typically involve conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) for text/data generation. According to Larsen and Adu (2021), interview is the primary data collection strategy employed to extract first-hand accounts of participants' experiences. Accordingly, this study being a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, I used interviews "as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material…and…as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 2016, p. 66). Guided by these insights, I used interviews as a powerful tool of inquiry to explore the phenomenon of integrating critical thinking as experienced by English language teachers.

I provided interviewees with the flexibility and freedom to elaborate on their responses and to introduce additional issues surrounding the phenomena being studied. Accordingly, I used the interview guidelines (Appendix A). The purpose was to develop a richer and deeper data text for exploring the phenomena being studied. I proposed two interviews with all five participants and conducted two interviews with each of them. But with two participants there was a third follow-up interview. Before the first interview, I explained to them about informed consent and collected their consent through email. Both interviews lasted one to one and a half hours. The first interview data, i.e., interview transcripts, were analyzed and used as a vantage point for the second interview. During the second interview, I initiated the conversation by reviewing the thoughts and experiences shared by the participants in the first interview. Thereafter, we engaged in a deeper conversation about how they infuse critical thinking in the English language classroom. During the other two follow-up interviews, I used probing questions to explore the phenomena more explicitly and address research questions more succinctly. I audio-recorded the interviews, transcribed, coded, and generated themes following the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic interviewing helped me use contextual follow-up probes that emerged in response to features of the ongoing conversation (Patterson & William, 2002). "Hermeneutics in its purest form is found in the living dialogues carried out

between people of real flesh and blood" (Svenaeus, 2003, p. 415). Therefore, it served as a powerful tool to explore and gather lived experiences of the phenomena of integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom.

As the study began around the COVID-19 pandemic fear looming elsewhere, all the interviews were conducted via Zoom considering the safety, convenience, and preferences of the respondents.

Written Protocols

This study used two protocol writing phases congruent with a phenomenological study. According to Vagle (2018), "any technique, process, or tool that you think helps you explore and illuminate the phenomenon is fair game—as long as you can justify why" (P. 42). I used this observation and decided to blend two types of protocol writing (Appendix B and C). Protocol writing refers to the nature of a particular experience, event or happening as experienced by the research participants. As van Manen (2016) puts it, "protocol writing is the generating of original texts on which the researcher can work" (p. 63). Accordingly, I asked my research participants to write down two protocols: one, by describing their particular experience in the English language classroom which featured their pedagogy of English language teaching most vividly, and two, by drawing on their understanding, application and reflection about the phenomena of critical thinking.

Protocol Writing I

Those descriptions and follow-up interviews helped participants reflect on their English language teaching experiences in terms of the phenomena of critical thinking and its integration into the English language classroom. Based on that I obtained the individual data texts which helped me explore essential themes of their experience. They provided greater breadth or richness in data sets in combination with follow-up questions during the final interviews.

Protocol Writing II

This protocol writing comprised of their lived experience under three headings: understanding, application, and reflection (see Appendix B). It was designed to capture participants' developed sense of understanding about the phenomena of critical thinking after they have spent a considerable amount of time with the researcher through multiple

interviews and a writing protocol on select classroom experience descriptions. This writing protocol focused on their developed sense of understanding about critical thinking, its application in the English language classroom and their reflection over their multiple engagement on the phenomena of this study.

After multiple engagements with my participants through interviews and writing protocol, I wanted yet another concrete data source to capture their lived experiences and understanding more explicitly. Therefore, I requested them to write a final writing protocol (Appendix B) where they were asked to report what they mean by critical thinking, how they can employ critical thinking activities in the classroom and their overall reflection on the journey in this study.

The idea was drawn from van Manen's (1991) concept of pedagogical thoughtfulness which refers to the way teachers grow, change, and deepen their interpretive intelligence, practical moral intuitiveness, sensitivity, and openness in dealing with the world of their learners. He argues that teachers need to have some sense of what it is that young learners bring with them, what defines their present understandings, mood, emotional state, and readiness to deal with the subject matter. The main purpose of this writing protocol was to attend to the notion of pedagogical thoughtfulness which fitted well within the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology and the objective of this study.

Memo Writing

Memos refer to important notes or write-ups developed by the researcher. According to Saldana (2021), "Memo writing, an integral tool in qualitative analysis, invites the researcher to think holistically about interviews as well as the home in on specific text segments to make sense of the parts in relation to the whole" (p. 243). In my study, I made good use of memo writing which helped me re-examine the data at different stages in the data analysis process. It served as a thinking capital which allowed me to make meaning merging the voice of the participants and the researcher. As Turner (2016) pointed out, I was aware that "respondents will not always say what they mean, and sometimes there is an unspoken agenda below the surface." (https://www.quirkos.com/blog/post/memos-qualitative-data-analysis-research/). Therefore, I exploited memos as channels to "speak with participants, not for them"

(Mihas, 2021, p. 24) both during and after the data collection. They not only provided me with some crucial access points to explore the unsaid, but also paved the way for exploring in-depth what my respondents might have indicated, or implied. I used key statement memos as suggested by Mihas (2021).

Key Quotation Memos

Key quotation memos refer to a powerful or evocative excerpt taken from the text. Unlike document memos, they are memos at the level of a text segment, the "most telling quotes in your data" (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2011, as cited in Mihas, 2021, p. 245). These memos provide opportunities for a researcher to consider implications and meanings at the micro level. They are used with the principle that even a short quotation can unlock insight that addresses the research question. Key quotation memos can focus on a process, behavior, or an implicit or explicit action--how participants act, react, or interact. Therefore, they take different forms of focus, such as a power paragraph, an especially evocative excerpt, or a story's fuse box.

Rhetorical/Linguistic Devices

Since hermeneutic phenomenology aims at explicating the lived experiences of the participants, the everyday language may not do justice to express what is intended by the participants. That is why hermeneutic phenomenology calls for typical rhetoric that best elicits the true intention of the research participants. A language mode rendered in an informal tone with ideographic expressions full of adages and maxims is considered suitable for reporting this type of research (Kafle, 2011). The choice of words and their phrasing in the title, the unconventional use of the lowercase 'i', the poems emerged out of the emotional current of the phenomena, and the language and style used in memos and anecdotes were all a part of rhetorical strategies.

Anecdotes

In phenomenological research, an anecdote is recognized and valued as a methodological device (van Manen, 1989). It is "more than a story and is valuable by way of providing a way of gripping the slippage" (Eilifsen, 2011, p. 2). In hermeneutic phenomenology, anecdotes as part of a whole text "lay validity upon the experience of the narrator" (Eilifsen, 2011, P. 7). So, I used anecdotes to contribute to the fullness of my lifeworld. In so doing, I allowed anecdotes to appear both as embedded in the flow of

reporting and as separate, but in both cases, they are part of the exploration into the phenomena of critical thinking.

Electronic texts

During the journey of this research, I entertained several emails exchanges (with all participants), WhatsApp (with one participant), messenger, text messages and telephone calls (with all participants), video calls on mobile phones (off the record chats, with two participants), post-interview reflection and best wishes (with all participants). They were instrumental not only in setting my perspectives on this study but also in connecting me with my participants within and beyond the scope of this study.

Interpreting Lived Experiences

Interpretation of the lived experiences refers to the process of meaning-making. According to Patton (2000), "interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world" (p. 480). The constructs of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1975), the six steps process recommended for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research (van Manen, 2016) and the fusion of horizons (Gademer, 1975) helped me consistently address and interpret the phenomena of critical thinking.

Hermeneutic Circle

I used the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1975) to look at the part in relation to the whole text and vice versa, which is recognized and valued in hermeneutic phenomenology. According to Kafle (2011), "to generate the best-ever interpretation of a phenomenon it proposes to use the hermeneutic cycle" (p. 187). In my study, I used it as the continual movement between parts and whole (Smith, 2007) in the entire process of interpretation in this study. In that movement, it served as a dialectic between the understanding of the text as a whole and the interpretation of its parts (Gadamer, 1975). Therefore, it was instrumental in exploring how the part and whole are embedded with each other in understanding and interpreting the components of experience and the whole they form together.

In this study, the concept of the hermeneutic circle was realized from the beginning of the interpretation to the end. In order to illuminate the phenomena of critical thinking, I recognized and valued it in four different ways. First, I moved backwards and forwards through the data, by exploring the experience of an individual participant (part) and then developing the interpretation of the experiences of all the participants (whole). Second, in the process of interpretation, I experienced it as a movement between researcher and participant (parts) working together to form an experiential account (whole) (Smith, 2007). Third, I took the important elements of an experience as parts and the situated phenomenon of those parts as a meaningful whole (Davidson, 2013). Finally, I employed the circularity of the interpretation by writing, re-writing, re-naming themes, and re-organizing them until I reached them in their final form for the reporting. I was aware that "to be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (rethinking, reflecting, recognizing)" (Eilifsen, 2011, p. 242). In that process, as Smith (2007) put it, I took part as a composite of words, sentences, and paragraphs and the whole as the realization of the entire transcript. Therefore, the data analysis in this study recognized and valued the hermeneutic circle that constituted reading, reflective writing, and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverty, 2003). The figure below is devised based on Laverty's (2003) concept of interpretive process in hermeneutic phenomenology. It attempts to capture how such part-whole relationship was realized in terms of the dynamic and circular nature of the interpretation.

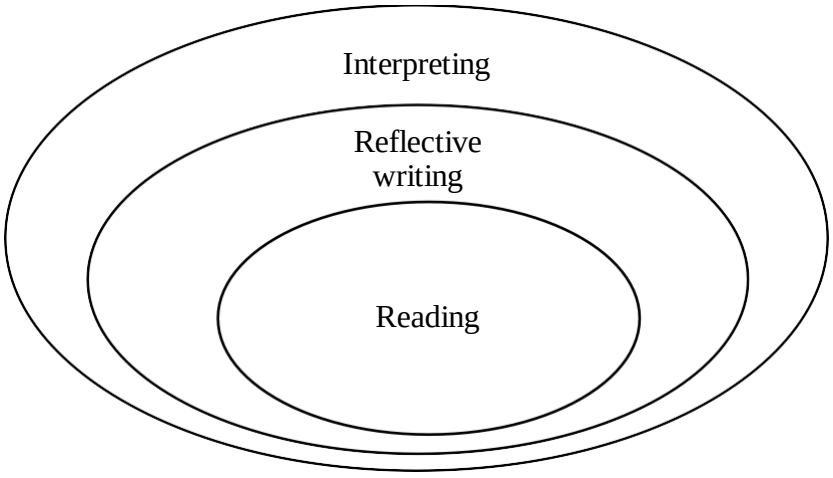


Fig.3

The circular nature of interpretation

With the help of the above figure, I wanted to make it explicit that as a researcher, my progress in understanding and interpreting the text was formed through the iterative process of reading, reflective writing, and interpreting. This back-and-forth movement over the same piece of text kept the possibility of dialogue open for further meanings and understandings (Stephenson et al., 2018). Therefore, the dialectical relationship between the part and the whole that resulted in the circularity of reading, reflective writing, and interpreting was substantially hermeneutic in nature.

Use of van Manen's six steps

With an aim to explore the integration into the phenomena of critical thinking, I tried to follow van Manen's (2015) six steps process of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Here, their description is tailored to capture how they were applied to the process of data analysis.

His first stage 'turning to the phenomena of interest' was realized by making a connection to my original experience to formulate research questions and by continually referencing them in the analysis of the data. The second stage 'investigating experience as we live it' was realized by conducting multiple interviews, by asking the participants to produce written protocols of their lived experience and understanding and by writing memos and anecdotes. The third stage 'reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomena' was realized by selecting experiential words and statements and by critically reflecting on them to let them form themes and sub-themes that gave meaning to the phenomena of critical thinking. The fourth stage 'describing the phenomenon—the act of writing and rewriting' was realized by treating the texts as dynamic documents for both revisions and restructuring. The fifth stage 'maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon' was realized by staying focused and devoted to the phenomenon under exploration. The final stage 'balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole' was realized as a back-and-forth movement, by constantly moving between the parts of the phenomenon under investigation and the whole picture that emerged out of them. Though the experiences with those stages were not linear, they helped me curate a swimming route to hermeneutic phenomenological research.

I carried out three levels of data reading: "holistic," "selective," and "for detail" (van Manen, 2015, p. 320). They are presented briefly below.

a) **The detailed reading approach**: I put this level into effect by looking at every transcribed experiential statement or cluster of sentences. I was always focused on exploring what that part of the transcript reveals about the phenomenon.

b) **The selective or highlighting approach:** I noticed that I was enacting this level by isolating thematic statements. I was revisiting the experiential accounts by selecting and highlighting their compelling impulse for inclusion as quotes in my study. I extracted the text, grouped them based on the similarity of the ideas and exploited them in my analysis by juxtaposing them together.

c)**The holistic reading approach:** I experienced this approach towards the end of my analysis process. As I understood, I had the opportunity to look at the text as a whole and in relation to parts. In so doing, I had to do several back-and-forth movements to do justice to key statements and phrases. Interestingly, even the participants of this study had a similar experience in their prolonged engagements in multiple interviews and written protocols.

The study recognized integrating critical thinking as its phenomena, i.e., the unit of analysis to explore how EFL teachers experience integrating critical thinking and how they give meaning to their experience. Data analysis was informed by the hermeneutic cycle that constitutes of reading, reflective writing, and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverty, 2003). The goal of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is a rich and full exploration of the lived experience of the participants in the study. I analyzed the interview transcripts in an iterative fashion, which is described as a desirable feature in the hermeneutic circle. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and these transcriptions, along with all lived experience descriptions collected from the participants, comprised the texts that were used for data analysis.

As with any qualitative data, transcribing the audio recording was the first step towards analyzing my data. I prepared a transcript of the recording by playing it back and typing in each word that was spoken, but I used sentences or cluster of sentences as more useful units of references in the analysis, and asked, “What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomena or experience being described” (van Manen, 2015)?

That was done with the help of memos. In order to extract pulse statements and phrases, I read the interview data in its entirety one or more times which helped me grasp an initial understanding of the interview content. This process, often referred to as 'immersion' in or dwelling with the data (van Manen, 2015), involved preliminary engagement with the meaning of the texts as well as interpretation of them.

The next step was to begin identifying and making meaning units within the transcript which then facilitated coding. Since not all meaning units in an interview were related to the phenomena being investigated, I focused on only those that provided insights into the phenomena being investigated. In the process that followed, relevant codes were sorted, collated, and combined to form overarching themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

Based on what the meaning units revealed regarding the phenomena being studied, I developed thematic labels under which individual meaning units could be grouped. In this stage, I focused on seeing, understanding, and explaining the interrelationships among themes, which is one of the key features of hermeneutic analysis. This involved reading and re-reading all the data, considering parts and whole in the process of understanding and interpretation by following a process informed by the hermeneutic circle.

From this process the interpretation of the research phenomena of integrating critical thinking evolved. This process was accompanied by the key quotation memos by the researcher. Writing those memos was to bring to life the experience being explored, using imagination, the hermeneutic circle and attention to language and writing (Laverty, 2003). Added to those memos were anecdotes that I used to capture a moment in time with some reflective thoughts. This value of reflexivity was informed by Finlay (2003), who argues that the process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied helps us move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings (p.108). The reflective nature of this study further helped illuminate and illustrate the phenomena holistically.

Finally, with a set of overarching themes, the data analysis moved to the write-up stage. I integrated the themes through critical debates and wrote a discussion of the interpretation that incorporated the empirical evidence for my study. Themes emerging

from the data and prior research were analyzed and discussed, juxtaposing against relevant literature. As this study generated data from multiple sources (interviews, two phases of protocol writing, and key quotation memos by the researcher), I embedded them with all these data sources to demonstrate the rigor of the themes. This helped me advance the themes as structures of experience (van Manen, 2015). I consolidated my analysis and interpretation around well- established themes and narratives capturing the essence of the phenomena of integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom.

Critical Reading

I followed the three modes of critical reading as suggested by Kurland (2000), who distinguished each mode of analysis by the content of the discussion. These three modes of analysis are reflected in the following three types of reading and discussion:
What a text says – restatement – talks about the same topic as the original text
What a text does – description – discusses aspects of the discussion itself
What a text means – interpretation — analyzes the text and asserts a meaning for the text as a whole.

Fusion of horizons

The interpretive process in this study consistently recognized and valued the participants' experiences and those of a researcher which allowed the fusion of perspectives. My perspectives got merged into the perspectives shared by the participants which are influenced by the fusion of horizon, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 301). As I was the reader of the texts that carried my participants' accounts, I had an intimate understanding of the lived meaning that evolved through the interpretative process in which interpretations are embodiments of bridging perspectives. This fusion of understanding sets out the boarders, the limits, and parameters between the subjective and objective, between the explored and unexplored, the spoken and the not spoken, personally and culturally. Therefore, the fusion of horizons was a kind of dialogical encounter through which I drew several key insights. Such a fusion not only increased my pedagogical knowledge but also opened spaces for constructive dialogue in and around the phenomena of critical thinking.

Quality Standards

The way of judging the quality of the research work is known as the standards for quality. I was aware that the research I carried out and the data I gathered should maintain quality standards on actual grounds. Keeping this in mind, I used the following as my quality standards.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is about acknowledging researchers' role in research. Practicing reflexivity is a significant component of qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002) as it attempts "to make the relationship between and the influence of the researcher and the participants explicit" (Jootun et al., 2009, p. 45). In this context, my study acknowledged the researcher's role with a self-awareness that the researcher's knowledge and experience do not exist independently of the research process. Palaganas et al. (2017) argue that it is not possible to remain outside of one's own study while conducting research. Therefore, I acknowledged researcher reflexivity as a "process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings" (Finlay, 2003, p. 108). Accordingly, I focused on the research participant and the phenomenon in its actual appearance.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one of the ways researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). In order to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I included participants' key background information, drew on data from multiple sources, had a small section on the researcher's role, and presented a detailed description of the methodology. I was fully aware that any misrepresentation and non-re-representation would lead to no trustworthiness. So, I paid full attention to the gathering of data, analysis, and the reporting of the findings. I did not alter any values held by the participants in terms of the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom.

Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

Pedagogical thoughtfulness refers to the way teachers grow, change, and deepen their interpretive intelligence, practical moral intuitiveness, sensitivity, and openness in

dealing with the subjectivity of their learners (van Manen, 1991). He argues that pedagogy is a self-reflective activity that always seeks to question critically what it does and what it stands for. He suggests that teachers need to have some sense of what it is that young learners bring with them, what defines their present understandings, mood, emotional state, and readiness to deal with the subject matter. For him, some attributes such as self-critical openness, thoughtful maturity, pedagogical understanding of the learners' needs, an interpretive intelligence, improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, and a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world are key to the idea of pedagogical thoughtfulness. This study heavily drew on such assumptions to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers. It used pedagogical thoughtfulness as a key quality standard to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers about the phenomena of critical thinking in the English language classroom.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to codes of professional conduct for researchers. This being a phenomenological study, I had deeper engagements with the participants. I maintained the following basic research ethics in my research.

Informed Consent

Before going to start the data collection, I made good rapport with the teachers to be interviewed. I collected data only after I received consent from the participants chosen for the study. I received their consent through the letter of consent sent to them for their commitment to participation in this research.

No harm and risk

There was no harm and risk to my research participants. Instead, as teachers of the English language for several years, they got an engaging opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences. In that prolonged engagement, I did not try to force them to give the answers to my questions. I created a friendly environment to keep the flow of conversation at their convenience. I used the best polite language to help them share their ideas and experiences easily and freely.

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

I was fully responsible to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of my participants. I used their pseudo names in place of their real names to identify while describing, transcribing, and analysing the data.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explicitly discussed why and how I made my methodological choice. The methodological discourse of this chapter is built on the research gap that I generated in the previous chapter and is oriented to describing how I did my research phenomenologically. I began this chapter by clarifying my research worldviews ontologically, epistemologically, and axiologically. Then, I presented in detail how I did the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry that included the lenses of exploration and analytical strategies. The lenses of exploration were multiple interviews, written protocols, memos, and anecdotes. The interpretation process included a hermeneutic circle, different stages of hermeneutic inquiry, critical reading, and a fusion of horizons. In the sections on participants, I presented participants' background information to authenticate the subject of the phenomena chosen for this study. I count their lived experience throughout this study. Additionally, I discussed the researcher's role to relate him to this study and provide him with a vantage point to speak about the lived experience of the participants. Toward the close of the chapter, I presented the quality standards and ethical considerations required to reason rigor, trustworthiness, and consistency in this study.

CHAPTER IV
TEACHERS' EMBODIED EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

This analysis chapter is designed to answer the first research question: How do English language teachers experience integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom? After performing the analysis of the data, three themes emerged from the interview transcript, written protocols, and memos, with sub-themes in each of them. The main themes were questions as rooted inquiry, the sociality of critical thinking, and thinking through content. The words representing the themes gave voice to the lived experiences of English language teachers. As the themes were the structures of their lived experience, the experiential words and statements used by the participants bear witness to the integration of the phenomena of critical thinking. Before moving on to the participants' lived experiences, the chapter presents the researcher's own reflections on the phenomena chosen for this study to situate him in the hermeneutic route to understanding right from the beginning.

'i' **Think Therefore 'i' Teach**

What is in a lowercase 'i'? As 'i' prepare to move onto this section, an obvious question that would come to the mind of the readers might be this|: What encouraged you to write the lowercase "i", instead of the capital one? At the outset, I must accept that I was deliberate in moving away from the convention. I employed this typographic deviation as the phenomenological hook which is used to move the audience towards certain perspectives of the writer (Nespor & Barber, 1991) and as a part of the typical rhetorical strategy employed in hermeneutic phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). However, the linguistic convention programmed into my computer responded to my unconventional use of the first-person pronoun 'i' by labeling it red, indicating it as a grammar error, a typo. I was aware that it was not a typo, and neither was I lazy in my edits within my capacity. In fact, I was deliberate in decapitalizing myself, and the choice was driven by my experience in this hermeneutic phenomenological study. During the entire interviews, I got an opportunity to juxtapose my experiences with the participants' accounts, so I was tempted to replace my capital self with the uppercase "I" in favor of the small 'i'. By

projecting myself into lowercase, I wanted to remove the authority of the dominant capital “I”, the dot-less head. Such a move helped me experience an equal footing with my participants in terms of the naturalness of English language teachers as thinkers. In so doing, I became interlocked with the phenomena of critical thinking as a shared understanding with participants of this study. Therefore, moving away from the conventional use of the first-person pronoun ‘I’ was to signal from the title itself that the researcher brings prior knowledge and assumptions into the research process (Gadamer, 1975). In fact, that was a hermeneutic situation in which I can ask questions about myself, and about who I should be and become in it (Friesen et al., 2012).

Looking back, I see that I was often overwhelmed with fundamental questions in teaching. Such questions would emerge out of my own lifeworld where three different experiential continua of thinking would meet every day: thinking of students, thinking of the writer of the text, and thinking of myself as a teacher. So, the challenge I always experienced was about how to situate myself between these avenues of thinking so that they can be fused together and nurtured in students. Upon reflection, pressing questions were: What do I teach when I teach? How do I teach when I teach? Do I teach any text ripped of thinking, of logic? Do I teach any language lesson devoid of thinking? Can there be any content without the thinking of the author? Can there be any real learning robbed of thinking? How do I spend my time with young students in the English language classroom? When is my classroom not a thinking classroom? How important is this engagement for the development of students’ thinking and thinking of my own? Questions such as these led me to conceptualize “critical thinking as characterizing a way of being” (Moon, 2008, p. 47) and the classroom as a lived location for expanding experience and knowledge.

Fusing my experiences with my participants I came to realize more solidly that students are very potential thinking beings, not an empty vessel as Dewey (1933) said long ago. Therefore, their minds cannot be drugged with merely other people’s ideas. Their minds cannot be confined to what someone else said, because they are not meant to be repeaters. Then how can teachers meet the need to facilitate such learners? Based on Vygotsky’s conception of teaching in the zone of proximal development (1978) and much of the epistemological literature on critical thinking, Moon (2008) devised three

general principles: First, challenging learners by taking them beyond their comfort zone of knowing; second recognizing the significance of the atmosphere of a class where learners' critical thinking is fostered and nurtured and third, putting an explicit focus on encouraging students to engage in thinking. I found these principles closer to my experience and the accounts of my participants.

This research was, therefore, a part of the thinking continuum for me. As an English language teacher and researcher, I was asking the questions that the thinker will routinely ask: What do I think when I think? What assumptions am I making? What is the purpose of my thinking within the premises of this study? What precise questions am I formulating? How am I trying to answer those questions? How do I want to describe the information? What is my point of view? How am I interpreting that information? What am I taking for granted in my context? What conclusions am I coming to? If I accept the conclusions, what would be the possible implications? As I reflect, these questions emerged from my lifeworld as an English language teacher and triggered my persona as a phenomenological researcher. Naturally, they led me to think with the participants, rather than for the participants. Still, as I began to prepare myself for a long and iterative writing journey, I became overwhelmed by van Manen's (2015) observation that "hermeneutics phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity" (P. 7). Moving on, several questions clouded my mind: How to travel the road of phenomenological writing after I have generated the texts? How to capture participants' lived experiences in writing? How to deal with the deeper meanings their texts evoke? How to capture and write about the phenomena phenomenologically? Then again, I read van Manen (2005) to boost my confidence in phenomenological writing, but I felt dazzled by his postulation that "writing can mean both insight or illusion" (p. 237). I felt like I was swinging through the uncanny experiences of this 'writerly' phenomenon, and I wrote a poem as a refuse for some time.

Ode to a Writerly Phenomenon

Dear phenomenon
My fingers are turned on--
The moment and the mass
The extract and the whole

The tangible and the intangible
Where do you dwell in, dear?

My fingers are turned on--
The sublime and the commonplace
The virginal and the ritualized
The forgotten and the remembered
Do all experiences count for you, dear?

My fingers are turned on--
Critical and non-critical
Contextual and isolated
Deep and surface
Individual and group
Empirical and theoretical
Do all dichotomies submerge in you, dear?

My fingers are turned on--
English language and its ethos
Pedagogy and its pathos
Lesson and its logos
I am pathologically curious
Are we--you and me--separate or the same, dear?

My fingers are turned on
I preach not but build on
I bleed in thinking
Let me spin all experiences that could be yours and mine
Here I win the first part terror through rhyme!

Connecting with my poetic experience as the researcher, I present the themes below which are the structures of participants' lived experiences. These themes present

phenomenological accounts of all the five participants which ultimately took the shape of themes. The organization of the themes is grounded on the insights offered by van Manen (2015) who viewed that the experience that we live can be different, but they cannot be separated from one another. In the premises of this study, themes drew together the experiences of English language teachers to illuminate the phenomenon of critical thinking in the ELT classroom.

Questions as Rooted Inquiry

This theme provides a voice to the lived experiences of all participating teachers who put questions at the heart of their teaching thinking. Based on their sharing, they facilitated students' critical thinking ability by processing students background knowledge and by using questions as transactions between teacher and students, and students and texts. Therefore, the theme is divided into two sub-themes: brainstorming as a threshold for thinking and thinking driven by questions. This is demonstrated by multiple excerpts from interviews, written protocols, and memos.

Brainstorming as a Threshold

There is common knowledge that a good classroom is a fertile space for thinking and learning. When students come to their classroom, they do not come empty. They bring diverse forms of experience and thoughts. In a meaningful learning context, we cannot expect their prior knowledge and experience to go unattended. Therefore, drawing on participants' experiences, a focus of discussion here is on how English language teachers call up students' existing knowledge. My experience as a teacher and sharing of the participants revealed that students' natural fund of knowledge is a potential pool for developing students thinking.

In this study, all participants shared their experiences of taping the learners' existing knowledge as an entry point into the text/lesson at hand. Girish, one of the participants of this study, shared that knowing learners' backgrounds well was so crucial for him to match students' thinking levels. He reported, *"I start my class brainstorming how my students perceive the topic. When students bring multiple imaginations and perspectives, for me that's so important for setting the scene for the subject matter at hand".* Here he seems to be aware that the content planned to be presented should be made familiar to the students by making an attempt to understand students' perceptions

and new subject matter. Another participant, Chandan, had a similar experience in using students' background knowledge. He said,

> *Before starting a lesson, I always have a curiosity about what would my students think about today's lesson. In class 10, there is text on world culture…Our culture is multicultural, so I take our own cultural differences as a starting point and use questions such as, what do you know about your friends' culture? Share it with your friends sitting next to you. Then I ask students to recall and write the details of their neighborhood: their caste, what language they speak, their religion, their ethnic food, their lifestyle and so on.*

Here, Chandan's experience shows that students are involved in processing new knowledge on culture by processing their own knowledge of cultural diversity in their community. This is where students get opportunities for thinking and learning.

Literature suggests that assessing students' background knowledge and experience is an important part of critical thinking instruction. According to Moon (2008), for example, critical thinking is a tool for producing new knowledge by moderating prior knowledge and thoughts. In my experience as a teacher, brainstorming questions are always a boost for thinking. I do not take my students to any new lesson without making some use of their readily available knowledge and experience.

Critical thinking as a 'deep processing' learning strategy involves linking information to prior knowledge and personal experiences (Artino & Stephens, 2009; Phan, 2009; Phan & Deo, 2007). Brainstorming, as part of teaching thinking, became more than a necessity which is reflected in other participants' experiences as well. Pawan said, *"When I begin the text, I start with the title, inviting students to guess the context and meaning of the title. After they become familiar with the context, slowly and gradually I engage them to explore deeper meanings".* Here, students are predicting and getting immersed in contextual knowledge. By 'deeper meanings' Pawan indicated students' engagement with complex ideas. He used brainstorming as an engaged process to get to the truth of information. These experiences are congruent with the concept of learning in constructivism which views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts based on prior knowledge and/or experience (Kridel

2010). Sagun shared her experience in brainstorming and wrapping her lesson, as part of KWL thinking routine.

> *Mostly I follow KWL pattern in teaching. I start by asking questions, brainstorming what my students already know about the subject matter to be presented, and then I use some key things from the lesson and guide them through and finally, I assess what they have learned.*

Through KWL charts, she not only processed students' current level of understanding but also led them further to knowing more about that. Similarly, Urwashi drew on the text as an example and recalled her experience,

I remember teaching a poem grandmother from Grade XII. I opened the discussion with some easy questions like how many of you are lucky to have a grandma? It's a personal question. Some of them may not have grandma, so thinking came into place in a different way. Who are lucky or unlucky, and why…They came up with their own thoughts both ways which provided them a familiar context to approach the poem from another context. I was happy to observe the flow of thinking based on students' background experience and knowledge.

As her typical classroom experience showed, Urwashi used common knowledge, a personal experience of students to stimulate their thinking and that set the context for students for a wide range of reflections on having a grandmother.

Participants also shared their brainstorming experiences in their lived experience description protocol which was gathered to capture their typical classroom experience with examples of the elements of critical thinking. For instance, Chandan wrote his protocol on teaching a text entitled "A world guide to good manners: How not to behave badly abroad*"* and here is an excerpt from it.

> *I took advantage of the classroom diversity of students and highlighted ideas and values from each of their cultures. I tried to bring feelings to students while teaching. Amazing ideas can come from anywhere at any time. I kept their eyes, ears, and mind open. So, I encouraged multiple viewpoints and created a sense of wonder in students.*

Chandan's description also shows brainstorming at work where he immerses students in a deeper reflection and encourages their diverse viewpoints. In her protocol, Urwashi

connects students' understanding of environmental changes from the previous lesson with the chart paper presentation they are planning to do next.

> *You can see the environmental changes taking place around us. You can also see the devastating environmental condition that has happened because of human act. We have discussed multiple times the problems Earth is facing and the reason behind it. But if you were to present this problem in the chart paper, how would you present it? I will let you discuss the whole class today and prepare your presentation. Tomorrow, you will have your presentation.*

Here, Usha presented the link between knowledge from the previous lesson and facilitated her students on how they can use that knowledge through group discussion. Thus, linking new information with prior knowledge and experience of the students is rooted in participants' experiences. They demonstrated that failing to activate and make use of students' prior knowledge was to miss the important resources of knowledge coming from students. These experiences corroborate a study by Widiastusti et al. (2022) who made it explicit that the use of challenging questions in brainstorming enhances students' critical thinking ability. Therefore, teaching that fails to build upon a learner's existing knowledge might cause misinterpretation and distort the expected links (Tabler, 2001) in teaching the new content or information.

All the experiences and practices illustrated above are in harmony with social constructivist learning theory which regards learning as an active process in which learners construct knowledge based on their prior knowledge and experience (Cohen et.al, 2004). Constructivist approaches to language learning advocate learners' construction of knowledge through interaction with their social environment and through reflection on their experiences (Simina & Hamel, 2005). Therefore, as Brock (2007) pointed out, teachers ground their teaching upon students' existing ideas and knowledge to facilitate their thinking in language learning. In this regard, the experiences shared by the participating teachers revealed that the phenomenon of brainstorming served students as a threshold for stimulating their thinking, asking them to reflect on their previous experiences, and making connections to what they learnt.

Thinking Driven by Questions

It is common knowledge that questions trigger people's thinking. In education, questions have been taken as key tools for developing critical thinking since Socrates some 2500 years ago (Paul & Elder, 2007). According to Brookfield (2012), questions encourage critical thinking, uncover evidence, and generate multiple perspectives. Several research suggested the importance of questioning in developing critical thinking. (e.g., Boswell, 2006; Nappi, 2017; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). This is in harmony with constructivist philosophy in which teachers encourage students' inquiry not only by asking challenging questions but also by encouraging them to produce their own questions (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Based on my experience and sharing with the participants, I also came to realize that questions always generate a thinking environment in the classroom and foster students' thinking.

All the participants shared their experiences of using questions to drive students' thinking through the content they were teaching. Their experience showed that they infused questions to facilitate their students' thinking and learning. Chandan reflected, *"when I teach a reading text, then I always tell my students to read the text and make questions on their own. I believe that the person who makes questions is the best thinker".* This experience has implied the fact that questioning gives students a lot of in-depth opportunities for critical thinking. He gave an example of reading and said,

> *"I do not teach the whole reading text in one shot, I ask them to read just one passage, maybe the first passage first, and then encourage them to make as many questions as possible from just one passage at one time. This practice leaves my students thoroughly engaged. Because the pattern of sample questions that I provide to them do not simply include what, when and where, but also why, how, what if you were in the writers' place what would you do….?"*

His questions are rooted in the passage given to students and this questioning pedagogy has encouraged students to think within and beyond the text. This experience clearly indicated that students got opportunities for exercising thinking skills. Here, learners have been pushed from their comfort zone of knowledge to contextual knowledge (Moon, 2008). As teachers' beliefs and knowledge usually influence what teachers do in the classroom (Borg, 2006), this transfer of questioning job seems to have emerged out of an

interactive, encouraging and learner-centered teaching approach in classrooms to help students to think (Short, & Keller-Bell, 2021).

Girish had a similar experience, *"I use questions as a means for guiding the discussion, because they are the quick ways of triggering students' response to the topic, event, or information. I often feel questions are at the core of my teaching. I just wonder if there are no questions in the whole classroom presentation, is that teaching?... Questions always give my students a purpose, something to think about, something to argue for or against, something to explore.*

Likewise, for Pawan, questions were the most vital resources for engaging students throughout the English language lesson. He recalled his classroom,

> *I ask a lot of questions. I always design my classroom in that way. Very often, I encourage my students to ask questions...so I keep on interacting with them. I never gave them readymade answers…I created an environment in such a way that my students have questions…questions gave them the power of analyzing the subject matter".*

What we can infer from here is that the pedagogical intent behind this is to groom students into thinkers, developing a sense in them that education cannot be reduced to finding readymade answers or doing only a set homework, nor cramming the content for the exam. By using concurrent questions, he wanted to enhance their engagement with

Pawan: "*I invite my students to ask questions"; "I never give them readymade answers*|".

#Writing prompt: What do these statements reveal in terms of students' thinking for questions and answers? What does it reveal when a teacher, instead of asking questions—that's what traditional teachers do—invites students themselves to frame questions for their learning? This quote can be taken as a flashlight to witness the phenomena of students' thinking which tend to seek and value students as the drivers of their own thinking and learning. Therefore, it must have emerged from a lived experience in the classroom where there is a role reversal: in direct opposition to traditional teacher-centered teaching, it is students who are asking questions and are led to find answers to them. Such an experience clearly recognizes students as potential thinkers, not as passive and lazy consumers.

the text under discussion. This also reflects his epistemic attitude of questioning which is designed to elicit information and required justifications (Ikuenbe, 2001). Based on my experience, I also believe that such questions give life to students thinking and have greater impact on their thinking ability. In his protocol as well, he wrote about his extensive use of questioning.

> *Sometimes my classroom looks messy and sounds noisy. However, I know when to speak and intervene in my students' discussion (group or pair) and when not to. While they are discussing with me on a topic, I keep asking them as many questions as possible related to the context and the content of the text/s. I believe my questions help my students find their way to understand and analyze the text.*

This account shows that questions are at the center of Pawan's pedagogy. Similarly, Sagun's experience with questioning pedagogy was focused on initiating students' arguments or logic. She said,

> *When I ask questions to my students, I use the connection between questioning and their logic. For me, to ask them questions is to initiate arguments and debate. I often do that; I ask my students to explore nature versus humans, for example. I mean 'Nature is kind versus Nature is cruel' and lead them to think about our action, and activities against nature.*

In her experience, questions were part of the formation of logic. She would elicit information through questions and require students to produce adequate justifications for that. This was meaningful because good questions drive students' potential for thinking. According to Paul and Elder (2007), meaningful questions form a path to knowledge and knowledge enriches understanding. Her statement 'I use the connection between questioning and their logic' as connecting thread in language learning triggered my thinking and I wrote a key quotation memo (Mihas, 2021) on it.

Thus, the experiences shared by the participants revealed that questions are enrooted in their practice as everyday tools for promoting thinking skills. All the participants used questioning to help students process the content through their students' thinking. They did not use questioning as 'give and take' between teachers and students. Instead, they used it as a sort of transaction between teachers and students. Therefore, it was a process and creation of knowledge between teacher and students. Their experience and orientation align with many scholars who seek and value questions as the key to developing critical thinking skills (Conklin 2011; Li, 2011; Mok, 2009; Nappi, 2017) as they are the most powerful teaching tools for increasing the quality of instruction. Recent studies in critical thinking instruction brought to light that questioning

Key quotation: '*I use the connection between questioning and their logic'.*

#Writing prompt: What does this quotation reveal about a participant's life world?

As a teacher myself, this quote gave me a feeling of commonness which activated my usual teaching theme that places questions at the center of teaching and uses them as a tool for finding logic in the answers. When Sagun said this, I felt like I am not at all a different person as a teacher; I am rather immersed in my participant's life world.

Sagun shared this as a part of her classroom experience where questions and logic are embedded. As she leads her students to prepare for the inquiry on their own, this was not an instantaneous response about the use of questions in the English language classroom. Through it, she revealed the norm of her classroom that is built on the inherent logic of using questions. Here, what I found insightful is that questions are not just give and take between students and their teachers, they are actually part of knowledge production on a daily basis. As a language teacher, I believe that by using questions that emerge from the text that we teach, we help our students process the thinking of the writer. From Sagun's experience, it can be inferred that we cannot imagine a text produced without any logic of its own and that we cannot leave the logic of the writer unexplored. In my experience as well, no text is ripped of the thinking of the writer. That's an important phenomenon in English language teaching.

techniques enhanced thinking skills (Collins, 2016**;** Sare, Luik & Fisher, 2016; Sare, Tulviste & Luik, 2019). In social constructivist learning theory as well, questioning and probing are considered important as they encourage a shift from information transmission to knowledge generation by challenging students' ideas, thinking and assumptions (Cohen, et. al., 2004). The experiences shared by the teachers showed that teachers used questions to channel and process students' critical thinking, meaning that they regarded English language learning as an active process, not inert and fixed in the delivery of a teacher.

Sociality of Critical Thinking

The second theme 'sociality of critical thinking' relates to a social dimension of critical thinking (Moon, 2008) which views critical thinking as a social endeavor, as opposed to an isolated activity. This theme emerged as a result of the exploration into the participants' accounts of English language teaching and learning as a shared space for active learning and thinking. According to Moon (2008) critical thinking is an ongoing social activity because the way knowledge is accepted is both a social process and practice. Brookfield (2011) also views critical thinking as a social learning process by highlighting students' inherent interest in participating in small group activities where they can learn to think critically. Littleton and Mercer (2013) argue that both individual and collective thinking are situated in a socio-cultural context in which language has a vital role in connecting human minds. In this context, classroom environments resemble social settings where students get potential opportunities for discussions, debates, arguments, talks, chats, and nonverbal interactions (van Manen, 2005). Therefore, the communication and thinking opportunities available in the classroom are social in nature and can serve as potential sites for fostering their critical thinking ability. In fact, every group to which the teacher assigns a task in the classroom has some social elements in it. To draw on Vygotsky (1962, 1978), social interaction develops critical thinking by creating spaces for collaboration and cooperation which has a positive impact on individual and collective thinking.

Under this theme, the undercurrent of the participants' experience situated students' thinking and learning in a social context; some of them were explicit and some implicit. Based on those observations, the theme of the sociality of critical thinking

encompassed the diverse nature of the pedagogy of critical thinking that was embodied in students' voices and ownership, relevance to real life, and discussions and debates. Accordingly, it was broken down into three sub-themes: encountering the language of noise, thinking through real-life context, and drawing into discussion and debates. While the lived experiences shared by the participants helped build on those subthemes in multiple ways, the key theme of the sociality of critical thinking was embodied in each one of those sub-themes. Their accounts and the analysis built on them revealed how the phenomena of integrating critical thinking were social in nature.

Encountering the Language of Noise

The first sub-theme, encountering the language of noise, relates to the participants' experiences of how they defended their noisy classroom in order to acknowledge students' dialogue in the process of language learning and thinking. As part of the sociality of the critical thinking theme, this sub-theme reflects participant's lived experiences built on their continuous effort for creating a culture of thinking in their classroom. The noise phenomenon captured in this theme demonstrated how English language teachers encouraged their students to express their thoughts and experiences, as opposed to the direct expectation for quieter and more disciplined classrooms by the authority or administration. Though this phenomenon might appear to be remote to the phenomena of critical thinking on the surface, the participants found it integral to their efforts for promoting the culture of thinking in their classroom. As opposed to the culture of silence and mutism that discourages critical thinking by pushing students to avoid dialogue (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012), they experienced their classroom as an engaged site for learning and thinking. That is, it was natural for their students to nestle into the noise.

Their experiences explored below revealed that the quietness that rewards passivity may be acceptable only within the banking system of education (Freire, 1996), not within the classroom that recognizes and values students' freedom to share their experiences and knowledge. Therefore, the freedom to 'make noise', as direct opposition to the students as silent consumer of knowledge and information (Deway,1933), was embodied in the phenomena of critical thinking quite naturally. This freedom aligns with the principle of social constructivism in which teachers are expected to seek and value students' points of view (Brooks & Brooks, 1999) and "the classroom belongs to

everyone and is a place where people want to be" (Oldfather et al., 1999, p.91). There was even a methodological support available for the inclusion of such a commonplace experience to realize the whole phenomena of critical thinking more fully and holistically. According to Henriksson (2012), hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to capture the nitty-gritty of pedagogy and classroom interaction which recognizes the embodied, ethical knowledge possessed by teachers. He claims that since a classroom is a composite of intuitions, feelings, and actions, being with students cannot be reduced to technical rationality. However, he stressed that such a reality rarely becomes the subject of research. In this context, the accounts below recognize and value the phenomenon of noise as one of the crucial elements within their scope of integrating critical thinking in English language teaching and learning. These accounts demonstrate why it is undesirable to push the students to be quiet and why a good classroom that builds learning around students' thinking cannot be dictated to be silent. The experience shared by the participants demonstrates how pervasive the culture of quietness is in the Nepali classroom. To begin with Pawan, his accounts revealed why he had to face the complaint for not keeping his class 'quieter' and for not 'controlling' his students. He shared,

> *My class looked messy and sounded noisy because of my own design. I always built my classroom around questions and pair sharing and group discussions. So, I faced the complaint for not handling the class smoothly, not keeping my class quieter like other teachers, and not controlling my students... It was frustrating and annoyed me that I had to talk to my administration a couple of times just to justify why my classes were usually noisy. They were not quieter because I always wanted my students to actively engage with the content…and that usually happened through peer talk, group discussion, debates, and presentations.*

In this account, Pawan had a sense of disappointment for not being able to keep the classroom quiet as expected by the institution, and offered some hints at why that was so. He seemed to be deliberate in his articulation of the experience surrounding the noisy classroom. He asserted that his classrooms were not silent because of his own pedagogical choices which placed students at the center of language learning activities. The involvement of students in different activities such as questioning, peer talk, group discussion, debates and presentation hinted at the reason why his classes entertained the language of noise. So, the activities chosen for the exposure to language learning and thinking seemed to be deliberate and purposeful. This aligns with Moon's (2008) observation that critical thinking is "the deliberately encouraged interaction between students" (p 132). However, as Pawan said, he had to face *'the complaint'* and justify why his classes were usually noisy. In this regard, Pupovci & Taylor (2003) stressed that in order to promote critical thinking, it is natural for teachers to have a noisy classroom for which they would have been punished traditionally. Therefore, the complaint Pawan had to face and the justifications he had to present clearly reflect the traditional mindset of the institutions.

'Classroom noise and puppy noise together today, what a coincidence!'

Writing prompt: What does this statement, which emerges out of an insignificant reference during the interview, reveal about the phenomenon under investigation?

While Pawan was talking about how he defended his noisy classroom which was often misunderstood by the administration, Pawan's puppy was making noise in the background. Then he had the above remark. Here, barking is natural for a dog, meaning that barking is what makes a dog a dog. To prohibit the dog from barking is to steal its essence of being. Similar is the case with Pawan's students who, like any other students, must have enjoyed speaking, thinking, and learning, so the noise emerged naturally. By making noise they were experiencing what was natural for an active thinker. Noise is therefore a critical engagement on its own. Why are institutions afraid of understanding the language of 'noise'?

The legacy coming from the traditional practice seems to have ignored the importance of productive noise and freedom, and missed the opportunities to see how students could produce and ride on their own thoughts and experiences. Even in his protocol, Pawan reiterated the noisy classroom. Here is an excerpt from his protocol:

…I divided my 32 students into 16 pairs and let them discuss. When they started their pair discussion, it looked as if they were arguing with each other. I just observed them with my keen ears for about five minutes. I enjoyed them putting their efforts into talking in English and participating in the activity though the classroom sounded a bit noisy with their voices. But that was a good noise!...

The description above brought a natural scene from the classroom where students in pairs seemed to be having a discussion on a certain topic and their teacher seemed to be happy with that, saying *'but that was a good noise'*. It indicated that the discussion in pairs provoked students' thinking, and they were able to think of more and more different ideas. Thus, students' active participation in pairs, the ongoing discussion, and their efforts for using more L2 were all part of his 'noisy' classroom. He added,

> *"I always let my students take responsibility for what they discuss and share, so I do not interfere with them. I just observe how they share their thoughts and experiences. I do not interfere with their participation… I have been flexible in terms of the medium they choose too. Their ideas are more important to me than the medium. …that has shaped the way I design my 'not controlled' classroom. I am doing this and I'm hopeful."*

Here is an experience that speaks of the critically oriented classroom where students are led to take charge of their learning and thinking without any intervention in their efforts and the medium. This echoes a mutual thrust of the classroom envisaged by critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Dalgleish et al. (2017) stressed that the pedagogy of critical thinking should draw on critical pedagogy as practiced and advocated by Freire (1996) and Hooks (1994). In that sharing, critical thinking and critical pedagogy mutually reinforce each other in terms of the need for more critically oriented classrooms where students have the right to speak in their own voices (Cowden & Singh, 2015). By allowing students to take charge of what they discuss and share, Pawan seemed to nestle his students into idea producers, not into the silent consumers.

The realization of allowing students to entertain more engaged space for thinking was embedded in Urwashi's experience as well. Like Pawan, her experiences also referenced how the so-called noisy classroom was an important part of her accounts too. Urwashi reminisced her experience thus,

> *It was a bizarre yet enduring experience. The principal came and stood in front of my classroom. But as he went past the window, there was a noise again. I was a little bit anxious, because I had faced his allegation that my classroom was noisy and that I was not bold enough to control students. But the worry did not last long because the class did never sound as 'noisy' to me…I was interested in how they would justify having a grandmother as a great experience. Their justification evoked a lot of thoughts for further exploration and interpretation. They brought their perspectives, their experiences and thoughts… the joy, the satisfaction, the fun they created during the sharing was an incredible experience for everyone in the classroom! Whatever emerged out of that, that was a group learning; that was a group logic… I am still thinking about it…Can you expect any thinking by keeping students silent? Ma mahila sichhak bhayekole bidhyartisanga kadarupma prastut huna sakina re! (*As I was a female teacher, I was not bold enough to control my students*). My principal did not show any interest in understanding the reality behind the purpose of 'not being bold enough to control the noise'.*

As in Pawan's accounts, what Urwashi's account attests is deeply connected to the traditional mindset of the institution in which teachers are expected to be bold and strict and their classrooms as controlled and silent. Here, as students were engaged in bringing *'their perspectives, their experiences, and thoughts'* and in creating *'the joy, the satisfaction, the fun'*, it was natural for her classroom to be noisy for a purpose. The expression *'their justification evoked a lot of thoughts for further exploration and interpretation'* indicated that such engagements were regular features of the classroom that seeks and values students' thinking. Therefore, as opposed to the expectation of the institution, she was unable to operate as 'bold' (*kada*) i.e., as a means of structuring and controlling the classroom. The question that she threw at me '*Can you expect any thinking by keeping students silent?'* clearly reflects her awareness that we cannot groom

our students into young communicators and thinkers unless we provide them opportunities for thinking and communicating daily. Her experience clearly indicated that she does not view her students as passive containers where knowledge is filled (Freire, 1996) nor does she view them as quiet customers destined to merely memorize the given content. In this account, Urwashi not only uncovers the mindset of the school authority but also reveals the noisy classroom as a lived location and as a lived phenomenon in which students had a fair chance to invoke their thoughts and experiences.

Urwashi's account also revealed a gender-related dimension in relation to the expectation of a quieter classroom by the institution. Reflecting on her reality of being a female teacher at the secondary level, she said, *'ajhai pani mahila le chai 9/10 class ka bidhyarthilai control garna skadainana bhanne xa ke, hernus ta! (There is still an assumption that female teachers cannot control* class 9-10 students, you see). (While she was sharing this experience, I could see both frustration and resilience on her face). This gender element further substantiates how pervasive is the concept of a controlled and quitter classroom. In fact, this statement indicated even more serious institutional detriment to thinking opportunities in the classroom. But she did not retreat from it. Even in her written protocol, she asserted it: *'when my students were actively participating in the project (I can't deny the fact that the class was noisiest ever!) I was roaming around the class and listening to how they were progressing'.* This micro-level intervention can be taken as a mild resistance to the traditional roles expected of a teacher. She seems to have done this intervention for a reason: to propel her "students to be good at thinking through the language" (Wilson, 2019, p.2). It seemed to be obvious to her that "For learners to be taught to be critical thinkers, teachers should help them to voice their words; that is, letting them talk from their vantage points" (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012, p.1373). By allowing students to participate actively in using the language, the noise seems to have served as a sort of scaffolding to push the students to think and learn critically.

Noise in the classroom does not seem to have bothered any participant, instead it seems to have been realized as a pedagogical tool to resist the expectation of traditional silent classrooms. Below is an extract where, like Pawan and Urwashi, Chandan devoted a similar intervention:

> *In my context, students are cultured in a way that being silent is being obedient. Students tend to speak less, maybe because silent students are considered as cultured and disciplined. Maybe because of that many students do not prefer to speak, so I encourage them to speak. I mean using the language to stimulate their ideas…they learn a language by using it; They express their points of view about the text by using it. I always focus on communication, as I see every content from a communication perspective. I feel very satisfied when they communicate, discuss, and share their experiences and understanding.*

Chandan's accounts also attest to the culture Pawan and Urwashi had to confront with: *being silent is being obedient.* That means students must be silent to listen to every detail presented by their teacher, meaning they are not expected to raise questions, or they should have absolute reliance on their teacher for anything presented to them. He shared his pressing concern that emerged out of his experience: *I encourage them to speak... they learn a language by using it; They express their point of views about the text by using it.* That means exposure to language is exposure to ideas. By focusing on the 'use' of language, he puts language learning at students' disposal in which they are users, communicators, and thinkers in their own capacity.

Perhaps not knowing what the noise entails in the language classroom, institutions are still attracted to silent and obedient classrooms. The experience shared by Girish revealed how it was natural for the English language classroom to be noisy. He reflected,

> *It took a long time for me to reduce lecturing. With time and experience, with participation and practice in professional development seminars and workshops, I learned to increase students' talk time… I made role play, simulation, and dialogue as handy tools for encouraging students to think and understand, so it was natural that my classes were not quiet for a good cause.*

This reflection by Girish revealed his experiential shift from lecturing the content to productively engaging his students in thinking, acting, imitating, explaining, and debating to support their cognitive engagement. His experience and realizations also showed that he was also not in favor of the consumer view of students. He added a poignant remark when asked about 'students' talk time: "*bolna nai thunera ke bhasha sikai hunxa; uniharuko bichar ra tarka nai marxa ni" (Students fail to learn anything if they are*

discouraged to speak; that will rather kill their ideas and logic). He expressed explicitly that keeping students quiet was detrimental to students' learning and reasoning, meaning that in order to help students develop their critical insights, we need to encourage them to produce their ideas (Cowden & Singh, 2015). Keeping student silent or mute for whatever reason was, therefore, not only a form of oppression and dehumanization in classrooms but also a replication of a banking system of education that projects teachers as all-knowing and students as obedient listeners (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012). Based on my experience, I also believe that students can develop their understanding and knowledge if their teacher is conductive to creating the culture of communicating and thinking in the classroom.

Unlike other participants, Sagun did not make mention of the word 'noise', but she shared the culture of her classroom where students have the right to argue and to speak in their voice to reason together. Sagun shared her experience thus:

> *I encourage my students to speak their mind and heart. The objective is always to make them part of discussions. Unlike in the beginning years, I do not end my teaching just by explaining the content. Instead, I keep the lesson open with doubts and questions that students may have in their minds…They have right to argue so they speak a lot; that's natural, isn't it?...In my classroom, there is a group culture, so they read, share, argue and try to come to an agreement.*

Slightly differently, Sagun's account also showed that students' voices are part of the fullness of learning and thinking in the classroom. The expressions '*The objective is always to make them part of discussions… They have right to argue so they speak a lot; that's natural, isn't it?'* reiterated that she nestles her classroom into sharing, arguing and agreeing as she believes that students have the right to exchange their ideas critically. That means she focuses on meaning-making, so her students engage in discussions as critical consumers of the content.

My participants' accounts related to the noise phenomenon reminded me of a sour feedback that I received myself: *' anubhabi teacher kei class ma halla dher hunchha; kina ho?'* (There is more noise in the classroom of experienced teachers; why is that?). Their idea was that experienced teachers' classrooms must be quiet and orderly and that they must focus on exams and the completion of the textbook. So, I have also had to

defend the language of noise explaining to them that I 'use' an English language lesson as a site of contest and dialogue for students. I try to convince them that the classroom is a lived space where, if scaffolded delicately (Wilson, 2016), students' feelings, emotions, experiences and thoughts begin to flow naturally. Arguably then, if classrooms are relegated to be quiet, they become detrimental to students' active learning and thinking. In this regard, Thayer-Bacon (2000) rightly views critical thinking as constructive thinking which incorporates intuition, imagination, and emotion, not just trust in reason. However, when I hear similar concerns related to the phenomenon of noise in the ELT training and workshop sessions as well, I assume that this might be a deeply pervasive culture of silence experienced by many teachers in the Nepali context. This calls for a cultural perspective for further exploration.

The grassroots experiences explored above expose the Nepali ELT context which still values silent classrooms and the teachers that are strict in maintaining silence in the classrooms are admired for their controlling power. This culture of stillness seems to have influenced Nepali classrooms where neither teachers nor students are expected to be critical of the texts written by an authority in the field. This leads students to simply listen to their teacher without allowing their minds to question or challenge the text. It follows that encouraging students to question and challenge the text in their courses (Crawford, 2005) becomes a rare phenomenon in eastern cultures such as Nepal, because texts in a book are prescribed or written by an authority in the field, and therefore, 'questioning' or 'challenging' the authority is considered undesirable and impolite. The idea of keeping students silent or muted is, therefore, cultural as it tends to remind us of the age-old Sanskrit maxim *"maunam swikriti lakshanam',* meaning that silence is an acceptance that is still referenced as a virtue. In the Chinese context as well, teachers are expected to have control over students' talk (Yang, 2016), meaning that noises are judged from a reductive end, and that seems to be laden with cultural overtones. A recent study in a Chinese context by Tan (2020) revealed that the phenomena of critical thinking are influenced by the social and historical context where the emphasis was laid on exams, sermonic teaching, the primacy of textbooks and a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students. In that system, a good teacher was viewed as a content expert who fills his/her students with the prescribed knowledge and maintains an orderly and quiet

classroom. The ELT context in Nepal seems to be identical to such a system that still pushes teachers to be an authority and a controlling mechanism in the classroom.

As the phenomenon of noise was desirable for active learning and thinking, my participants resisted this controlling mechanism and tried to foster critical thinking in students by discouraging them from believing, repeating and memorizing information passively (Mok & Yuen, 2016). Thus, the language of noise provided valuable insights into the lived experience of teachers who provided engaging opportunities for thinking to their students. Judging from their lived experience, the noise owned by the participants was pedagogically meaningful to them and their students. Their accounts evidenced that the phenomenon of noise was a form of engagement, a warrant of active participation and an access to students' reasoning skills. As a language teacher, I also believe that such noises realized in reading, sharing, arguing, and agreeing have the potential to lead students to think critically and speak more amount of the target language. In my experience, when students feel safe enough to make noise, or to have interactions openly and freely, they will open their thoughts and perspectives in their own way. The comfort of silence dictated by the teacher presses the young communicators to turn mute too early. I have felt that the noises in the classrooms are initial breaths for students to come out organically from the culture of silence. They provide safe spaces for generating ideas and perspectives, and in the control-free environment, the airing of students' critical thinking flows organically.

Thus, the language of noise seemed to be an enrooted experience that not only gave voices to the participants' experiences about integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom but also made their unwillingness and resistance to silent classrooms more visible and audible. However, the lived experiences of encountering the noises might not seem to have explicit reasoning which could lend directly to the phenomena of critical thinking. Therefore, the look at the noise was meaningful under the umbrella of hermeneutic phenomenology which encourages us to have full knowledge about any lived experiences by keeping an open mind to everyday pedagogical practice (Henriksson, 2012). All the participants in this study conveyed a heartfelt recognition, an awareness of productive noise, and an engaging moment that was part of student-centered thinking and learning in their everyday classroom practice. This phenomenon of noise

seems to have drawn on critical pedagogy in its natural thirst for freedom of speaking. Critical pedagogy is identified within the broader threads of critical thinking which allows room for students' voices and empowers them through different pedagogical activities (Davies & Barnett, 2015). From this perspective, my participants' intervention in quieter classrooms and their resistance to institutional constraints clearly indicates the power and freedom given to students. This intervention echoes the areas of knowledge underpinned by social constructivists who maintain that knowledge is produced through social interaction and language usage and that knowledge construction is a shared experience (Prawatt & Floden, 1994). Accordingly, by the basic principle of constructivism, teachers are expected to present problems, questions, and diverse situations holistically (Brooks & Brooks, 1999), opening spaces for cognitive engagement and critical thinking. Therefore, noisy classrooms as sites for students' voices stood in sharp contrast to the atmosphere where the teacher talks and students passively consume the information and knowledge delivered by their teacher. As evidenced by the participants' lived experiences illustrated above, the language of noise was an antithesis of passive learning. Therefore, encountering the noisy classroom was part of the fullness of their experience in integrating critical thinking into an English language lesson.

Thinking Through Real-Life Context

The second sub-theme, thinking through real-life context, explores the participants' experiences of how they situated students' thinking in the real-life context. As part of the sociality of the critical thinking theme, this sub-theme deals with the participants' lived experiences built on the contextualization of thinking in which students were encouraged to think and learn through real-life issues. This theme emerged from participants' experiences in leading students to explore their knowledge and experiences in their context. It drew on the pedagogy of critical thinking which demands a "shift from an absolutist conception of knowledge towards contextual knowing" (in Baxter Magolda's terminology,1992, cited in Moon 2008, p. 30). Knowledge from social constructivism also supports the idea that authentic and real-world experiences enhance meaningful learning (Prawatt & Floden, 1994). One of the pedagogical goals in constructivism is to embed learning in real life contexts and encourage learners'

ownership and voice in the learning process (Dagar &Yadav 2016). In this regard, Paul (2000) postulated that though students have experienced several situations that embody abstract truths and principles, they are rarely asked to look observe their own experiences. He was of the view that not encouraging students to dig into their experiences is to prohibit students to have a synthesis between what they are delivered as true and what happens in the real-life context. Therefore, Moon (2008) stressed that as critical thinking is an everyday phenomenon, real-life experiences serve to enhance critical thinking in students by enabling them to feel more familiar with them. The participants' accounts revealed that students were encouraged to think critically by situating the teaching content into personal, social, and global contexts.

Real-life issues are related to everyday situations in students' lives, so they can be explored by using students' personal experiences. The objective is to help students capitalize on their own experiences and thoughts available within their own context. To begin with Chandan,

> *I connect the reading text with real-life…In Grade X, there is a text on world culture…when teaching about culture, I do not begin the lesson by telling them what culture is. Rather, I invite them to think about the differences in their society in terms of ethnic groups, festivals, languages, lifestyle and so on…So I begin with what my students are already familiar with, something that comes from their own family and neighborhood. Next, I divide them into groups to discuss and write a paragraph on what they know about their culture. Finally, I have them share what they have written about their culture. In my attempt to connect the subject matter with students' real-life experiences, I discovered that those simple sets of discuss-write-share that I usually use make the difference… If you don't know your own cultural differences within your context, you don't really know world culture.*

Chandan's sharing shows the shifting focus of the teachers—teaching is not about 'telling' what something is, rather it is about guiding students to think through what they are already familiar with and to help them explore the given content with more critical insights. Here, it is recognizable that Chandan connected a reading text on world culture by stimulating the cultural knowledge of his students. Instead of telling his students what

culture is, he divided his students into groups and led them '*to think about the differences in their society in terms of ethnic groups, festivals, languages, lifestyle and so on'.* He framed students' thinking and learning around the cultural differences within their own context so as to enable them to explore the world culture. As he reported, the engagement of students in his usual pattern 'discuss-write-share' worked effectively in which his students were involved in discussing, writing and sharing around the theme of culture. Wilson (2019) also maintained that the topics that are close to students' life and interest motivate and engage them in critical thinking. This is because "thinking will be critical if the students provide a link between what is in their background and what is in the text" (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012, P.1374). To draw on social constructivism, the background knowledge and culture of the learners shape the knowledge and truth that they create and explore together (Amineh & Asl, 2015). My experience also aligns with these scholarly observations that learning through real-world context and in a group is instrumental in grooming students into critical thinkers.

Like Chandan, Girish also shared his experience related to the use of real-life situations in which students' background knowledge and his own experiences helped students explore their own thinking. This is in congruence with Wilson's (2019) observation that English language teachers need to help their students examine the writer's meaning critically and that they can do it by linking the author's ideas to students existing knowledge. Let's look at how Girish shared the situatedness of students' thinking,

> *I usually relate lessons to something familiar to students' daily life. I use their prior knowledge mostly by guiding them through real-life situations and sometimes by linking my own experiences with the subject matter. Through such linkages my students find intimate spaces for thinking. Their emotions, feelings, beliefs, and point of view flow naturally... The purpose is always to help students create new ideas and knowledge from the curricular contents that are not isolated from their life and society.*

What I found striking in his sharing is his experience with '*intimate spaces for thinking',* and his idea of connecting curricular contents to real-world experiences as they *'are not isolated from their life and society.'* Here, these expressions indicate two complementary

realities: first, critical thinking nestles into intimate spaces for younger thinkers, and second, curricular contents are not devoid of the thinking through real-world scenarios. Such a closeness can increase the willingness to inquire which is the central critical thinking virtue (Hamby, 2014). Additionally, if thinking involves authentic tasks with their connections to the real world, it can enhance students' learning and critical thinking (Kim et al., 2013). As my experiences have informed me, I also believe that we can inculcate thinking culture in young thinkers if we guide them through the information that is closely connected to their real-world experience.

Urwashi uncovered a similar focus on real-life connections to encourage multiple perspectives among her students. She reflected,

> *When I think back on my teaching experience, students' reasoning ability has always impressed me. So, I enjoy asking them to give reasons whatever that is, maybe a famous person or an event …or an issue taken from their textbook that they are familiar with… I have found them more engaged when the topic connects them to the real-world experience…and they bring in multiple perspectives in the classroom and that is always the purpose... The recent one was about what is more important for girls in our society: education or family inheritance…That I developed based on Malala's story of struggle. Some said education, some sided with equal distribution of parental property between sons and daughters…They had their own justifications.*

This sharing by Urwashi shows her sustained interest in guiding students to produce reasoning which she cues through anything familiar to her students. Her objective, as she asserted, was to help her students generate multiple perspectives which is one of the capacities of critical thinking (Brookfield, 1997).

Her experience reminded me of teaching a poem entitled *Corona Says* by Vishnu Singh Rai (Grade XI), where I adapted and extended the Corona image in order to foster critical thinking skills in my students. I had my students design different images of Corona, and I guided them to reason around the ways they designed the images. Next, I guided them to critically examine the ideas offered by the poet who puts man at the center of all the loss caused by Corona pandemic. I employed journalistic questions such as who, what why and how to trigger their thinking. Those questions helped my

students critically examine the ideas offered by the poet. Thereafter, they wrote their reflection on their Corona experience during the lockdown, which was a real-world experience for them, as Lipman (2003) also argues that students can exercise their thinking ability well when they are encouraged to apply their thinking to the world in which they live. In this process, they not only got opportunities to use English in more meaningful ways but also to foster their critical thinking skills in many ways, such as predicting, analyzing, evaluating and creating.

Like Chandan and Urwashi, Pawan also had a similar experience regarding the use of real-life experience. He noted,

> *Using what students are familiar with is an everyday experience for me. You may call it using students' background knowledge which comes from their real-life experience and understanding. …I mean I always start off my class by connecting the subject matter with my students' experience and existing knowledge level. When they think back, it's like opening the door to thinking through what they have already seen, heard, or experienced themselves.*

The experiential statement *'When they think back, it's like opening the door of thinking through what they have already seen or heard or experienced themselves'* seems to be a key statement in his experience. Here the clause 'when they think back' seems to relate to students' prior knowledge and real-life experiences. Students are, therefore, drawn into exploring their own experiences. This is in congruence with the concept of critical thinking as "an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experience" (Glaser, 1941). I also believe that leading students to think through what they know and are already familiar with is significant in stimulating thinking in them. This might appear to be simple but very significant in nestling students into thinking. A study by Yang & Gamble (2013) also found that real-life issues are conductive to fostering critical thinking, since students already have a certain perspective to offer.

Unlike other participants, Sagun shared her experience with real-life issues in a different way. In order to understand her experience more explicitly, Maley & Peachy's (2017) perspectives in relation to the essence of English language teaching can be relevant here. In the preface of their book, they presented an interesting conversation with

a teacher in which the teacher tells them that his/her teaching in English is not limited to patterns of language and grammar rules alone. In addition, teaching English also involves, perhaps more importantly, how to think and feel about issues such as globalization, exploitation, discrimination, inequality and so on. This conversation is relevant to what Sagun had to offer in her attempt to integrate critical thinking into an English language lesson. In her lived experience protocol, Sagun uncovered how she used environmental issues from the text to lead her students to 'do' thinking:

> *While teaching ecology and ecosystem themes in The Heritage of English Grade 12, my students were assigned a project in which they had to make some contribution to the environment. The project had two basic sections. The first section asked them to be in the community and the second section asked them to do something as a change agent. So, my students visited their community and collected some waste such as plastics, coke, Fanta, and shampoo bottles. They converted some of them into beautiful pen holders, and flower vases and returned them to the people they collected from, and some bottles were used to create a beautiful swan garden. They made a model of a swan and planted the flowers. After this they wrote a report on their project. This helped them realize that the environment is our responsibility.*

There is much to attend to in this written protocol by her. What is striking here is the real-world application of knowledge by the students. This echoes the observation by Brookfield (2012) who shows his deeper concerns in creating critical thinking assignments that demand the real-world applications of the knowledge or skill students have gained. He stressed that students need to be enabled to tackle specific situations and problems they encounter outside the classroom. In this regard, Sagun's focus seems to be placed on 'doing' critical thinking because she led her students to materialize their thinking. In her experience, using issues-based and relevant topics such as this was vital for developing critical thinking ability in her students. The teaching topic such as waste management was typically both a social and global phenomenon, which was largely linked to a specific context of the city where her students lived. Quite interestingly, it was also linked to the students' everyday civic life requiring them to minimize waste and clean their surroundings. In this project work, she introduced a wider perspective on

learning and thinking about waste disposal. She pushed students to experience the creative production of knowledge, a meaningful manifestation of critical thinking for the students involved. By doing so, she seems to have aimed to transform students from depending on her for knowledge to taking responsibility for knowledge production. She gave her students greater control over what needs to be done.

Solving environmental issues involving analysis, evaluation, and creativity are all central to critical thinking skills (Davies & Barnett, 2015). Sagun has treated her students as change agents, as individuals and in groups, who have the potential to make a constructive difference. In materializing the difference, students learned to think critically about environmental problems and worked together to solve them creatively. To draw on her further, she said:

> *I always put the lesson or information in them in context. I enjoy doing that. I have experience of using old newspapers to develop students' critical thinking. Newspapers are a great source of information but who cares about old newspapers?... But I do. I often bring old newspapers and divide students to process information in the newspaper. Then I ask them which information they liked and why. This increases their critical reading skills. I set activities to decide what they can do with the newspapers. They search, compare, and analyze the information.*

When I heard her share this, I was particularly struck by her awareness in choosing the authentic material and in leading her students to deal with that with critical insights, as she said above: *I often bring old newspapers and divide students to process information in the newspaper. Then I ask them which information they liked and why… They search, compare, and analyze the information* in context. It is recognizable that these newspapers are the products of the real world that put each piece of information in context. By leading her students to justify *'which information they liked and why'* and to '*search, compare and analyze the information'* available in old newspapers, Sagun pushed them forward in different kinds of thinking: searching, comparing, and analyzing the information. She consciously directed their thoughts to a certain goal, allowing them to think about their own thoughts and the reasons behind their point of view (Crawford et al., 2005). She did not simply request a repetition of information devoid of thinking for

students. In addition, as a language teacher, she was able to use meaningful, authentic learning material that was aimed at helping students think critically (Wilson, 2019). In that sense, she seems to have recognized context as part of developing a critical mindset (Hughes, 2014) and her students as the doers of their thinking. As her experience attested, she simply arranged the material, but she did not interfere with them, neither did she dictate to them, nor directly give them any new information. Like her, I also use newspapers to drive my students to process the information critically. I do not have to go away from the curriculum to do that. The information is something happening in the real world, or in someone's life. My experience is that such an experience not only drives students but also gives them a purpose for thinking.

From my participants' experiences and my own, it can be said that real life connection facilitates critical thinking in students. Guiding students to learn through real-world experience is to link their thinking and learning meaningfully, developing a sense that they can build on new knowledge based on their prior knowledge and experience in context. This facilitation of critical thinking aligns with the basic premise of constructivism that knowledge is assumed to be constructed rather than transmitted and recorded (Dagar &Yadav, 2016) by the teachers alone. According to Doolittle and Camp (1999), constructivism recognizes the learner's active role in production of knowledge where both individual and social experiences are important. Cohen et al. (2004) also stressed that one of the key implications of constructivism in teaching is to help students experience learning by making connections between information and context. Therefore, this contextual linkage with everyday experience and knowledge has a plausible space for critical thinking where students can be typically excited about their learning.

Drawing into Discussion and Debates

This third sub-theme relates to those lived experiences that account for thinking and learning around discussions and debates. Deriving this sub-theme was a challenge to me as other themes above seem to cover most of the content to be built on. Still, when I looked at the experiential statements more closely, I realized that discussions and debates initiated by the teachers form distinct structures of their experience that demand separate treatment and focus. In this regard, van Manen' (2005) understanding is worth mentioning. He stated that though classrooms are rich communicative environments for

talks, chats, discussions, debates, and arguments, their pedagogical value has little space in the literature. I noticed that my participants were deliberate in seeking and allowing students to work together and talk to each other so that they learn actively and think critically. In so doing, their classrooms seemed to acknowledge conversations, discussions, and debates as constant happenings in their instruction. While teachers guided discussions usually focus on a certain topic, conversations are rooted in and shaped by personal meanings, emotions, feelings, or any other shared atmosphere students naturally fall into (van Mnaen, 2005). According to Oakeshott (1959), the conversation is an "unrehearsed intellectual adventure" (cited in Richhart, 2015, p 223). Similarly, debate refers to a process in which an individual or group tries to convince others to agree (Freeley & Steinberg, 2005). As the participants' experiences demonstrate below, they are all used to create a social condition for debating the ideas actively and critically.

Language is considered a social tool for thinking (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). In the context of English language instruction, the classroom can serve as a social condition and a potential site for encouraging students to reveal themselves and to learn to reason around the subject matter. To begin with Urwashi, she reflected,

> *As a language teacher, I always enjoy my students expressing themselves and speaking their thoughts. When my students share their sentiments, opinions, doubts, feelings, and emotions, I mean when the subject matter requires them and I invite them to speak up, to join the discussion, I feel a sense of satisfaction keeping my students' ideas there… I remember teaching a poem entitled 'Grandmother'. I can tell you how I brought my students immediately into it...Well, my objective was to connect my students with a very kind and inspiring grandmother as featured in the poem, so I began: Do you have grandmother? How is your grandmother? How do you feel about having a grandmother: lucky or unlucky? Why? Then I asked them to use these questions to talk to their friend next to them, but they went way beyond those questions… that was more informal, more interactive…Within no time the whole class was wrapped in conversations.*

Here, Urwashi's sharing seems to have emerged from her constant focus on students' thoughts and experiences, developing a culture in the classroom that does not leave

students passive or as just an audience in the classroom. She explains how it is natural for students to learn to get connected with the subject matter if we wish to stimulate their thinking: *when the subject matter requires them and I invite them to speak up, to join the discussion, I feel a sense of satisfaction keeping my students' ideas there.* As this account shows, conversations seem to be creating a relational atmosphere for students to build on their own experiences and reasoning. What is relevant here is that conversation is a potential site for reasoning skills in which each participant gets an opportunity for convergent and divergent thinking (Lipman, 2003). Conversations have the potential to bring in students' "personal histories, feelings, interests, and preoccupations to the classroom" (van Manen, 2005, p.91). Urwashi's account indicated that her students had enough freedom to bring their experience subjectively. In my request to explain more about her students' critical response, she added further, *"why they felt lucky or unlucky, they had to produce personal reasons, I mean logically, from their own life...that came to be a sort of reflection for them (ek kisimko reflection jasto ni hudoraixa ke uniharuko lagi).* So here, Urwashi let her students bring in their own personal observations to reason around the presence or absence of grandmother in their life. Drawing on insights from Freire (1996), this probing into their own life seems to signal a resistance to traditional banking education in which students were conditioned to be silent and learning for them was devoid of their consciousness and subjectivity. Based on my experience, I also believe that students' thinking should not be reduced to just technical or objective rationalities; their subjectivity and consciousness should be provided with a supportive climate to encourage their engagement in thinking.

Classroom conversation offers diverse possibilities for student thinking and learning. In his sharing, Girish highlighted how he experiences his classroom as an embodiment of society. Girish observes,

I view my classroom as a miniature society where students share their opinions, values and views, perspectives…For me, it has always been a place for constant interactions… I have observed that neither curiosity nor questions come from students if the classroom environment is not conversation friendly.

This experience echoes Wilson' (2019) observation that a classroom that is built around interactions increases students' confidence to ask questions, share their ideas and

involve in dialogue. Findings by O'Reilly et al. (2022) also revealed that classroom interactions are effective motivators in inculcating critical thinking skills. Such interactions are social in nature and serve as a basis for knowledge construction (Prawatt & Floden, 1994). They can encourage students not only to listen but also to ask questions which forms a culture of thinking (Richhart, 2015). This aligns with the principle of constructivism in which teachers are expected to have awareness of students' points of view (Brooks & Brooks, 1999) through which they can have access to students' reasoning skills. In so doing, they recognize them as active builders and transformers of knowledge, as direct opposition to crammers and replicators (Dagar &Yadav, 2016). van Manen (2005) also stressed that though conversations may sound less informative in terms of the exchange of information, they are capable of channeling understanding at a deeper level. In my experience as well, I see all my students as young communicators and emerging thinkers. So, I always have a feeling that not letting students communicate in a language classroom is to snatch their reasoning rights. I take such communication as part of an exchange of students' experience and knowledge.

Girish also shared how he encourages his students for meaningful discussions to debate ideas:

> *Every year I get students from different socio-cultural backgrounds. I use the diversity of the classroom as a resource for meaningful discussions… I recall teaching a debate section to class ten students. The debate was entitled 'Using multiple languages is better than using single language'…I formed two groups for advocating for the motion and against the motion. First, I had them read for comprehension. Second, I divided them into groups where they discussed in depth and prepared key points to back up their part. Finally, two leaders representing the two sides of a debate spoke for and against the motion… But I did not stop there, I drew closer to some students and asked a couple of questions to develop their best depth of knowledge about language: Can you speak Gurung's language, your mother tongue? Can you speak the Magar language? What do you lose when lose your mother's language? They had some predictions related to the loss of old knowledge, their cultural identity…More important to me was my students were involved in predicting, reflecting, and thinking… I was struck by*

> *some experiences shared by my students: "I'm Gurung but I cannot speak Gurung"; "I'm Magar but I cannot speak Magar".*

Here, Girish began his sharing by highlighting the fact that classroom diversity has a potential for meaningful learning and thinking: *"Every year I get students from different socio-cultural backgrounds. I use the diversity of the classroom as a resource for meaningful discussions.* He shared an instance of engagement by bringing his experience of how he led his students to debate the topic critically. The whole experience was important for his students: they read as a group for comprehension, wrote key points to defend their part, and had experience of making predictions about language loss and identity. This experience echoes a dialogic quality of teaching and learning which invites students to think, question and co-construct their knowledge by encouraging them in classroom discussions and tasks (Wegerifs, 2005). It clearly indicates that students experienced a lot of critical thinking opportunities in the whole process of debating that involved group exploration and group defense followed by teachers' questioning. A review study by Zare & Othman (2013) found debates effective in promoting critical thinking skills along with the enhancement in speaking skills and content knowledge. The findings by Llano (2015) also showed that debate is a useful social interaction practice to promote critical thinking skill in students.

In Girish's accounts above, when he said, *I was struck by some experiences shared by my students: "I'm Gurung but I cannot speak Gurung"; "I'm Magar but I cannot speak Magar",* his students seem to be enabled to predict the loss of knowledge and culture of the Magar community which indicates deeper engagement of them in the issue under discussion. Such a realization seems to have emerged out of their experience of learning to debate ideas critically. In that sense, their realization sounds both moral and logical which resonates with critical thinking in the social perspective that focuses on the development of critical consciousness which can be used to contribute to the community or issues therein (Cowden & Singh, 2015).

Like Girish, encouraging students to debate the ideas critically seemed to be a common phenomenon in Chandan's experience as well. He shared,

> *I love giving my students debatable issues. Debates are amazingly engaging… let me tell you how I did one recently. First, I asked them to choose one of the sides*

> *of a debatable issue: education or financial support for girls, ban or no ban on plastic bags, bottled water, or no bottled water… Through a group discussion, they listed some important points, evidence, to make their argument strong. Next, I encouraged them to think about different aspects and perspectives related to the part they chose. Finally, I observed how they listened to each other and defended their side…the benefit was that they had to use more language to present their logic.*

As Chandan revealed above, the benefit of using debates in language learning was twofold: his students had to use a good amount of language in their group discussion, and they had to produce evidence to support their arguments. This experience resonates with Kriegar's (2005) observation that debates are effective tools in language learning as they engage students both linguistically and cognitively. The findings by Llano (2015) also showed that debate is a useful social interaction practice to develop critical thinking skills. There are several empirical evidence confirming the role of debates in promoting critical thinking ability in students (Brown, 2015; El Majidi et al. 2021; Kennedy, 2007). In my experience as a language teacher, I also believe that debates are the most common phenomena for promoting critical thinking in the English language classroom. They not only push students to use more amount of the target language but also situate them in a social condition in which they have to process information and logic collectively. So, debates have the potential for promoting active learning and thinking.

It is quite natural for language teachers to initiate an atmosphere where students could wrestle with ideas and produce their own views out of that. According to Littleton and Howe (2010), teachers can initiate productive interaction in the classroom which could help learners develop as thinkers, problem-solvers and engaged members of collective effort. Brookfield (2012) claimed that "if critical thinking is understood as a social learning process, then it is not surprising to find that many teachers use group work, and particularly discussion, to teach it" (p. 179). He stressed that group discussions provoke its members to describe the issue under discussion, offer evidence, and produce multiple viewpoints. These scholarly observations seem to be echoed in the experiences shared by Sagun below:

> *Most often I seek arguments from students. For that purpose, I use social issues whenever applicable. Umm…I can share with you how my students dealt with common social issues such as dowry system. As I wanted my students to generate their arguments, I did not just want them to call 'Dowry system is bad', as many others do. Instead, I wanted them to discuss and understand the issue from multiple angles…So they had to collect support…As the discussion unfolded, they viewed it as a parental love for their daughter, and as a cultural gift in the form of 'daijo'. Some of them said, "There is nothing wrong if parents are happy to give it to their daughter", while some others said, "Dowry system is no longer cultural, it has been a pressure on daughters' family"… Their opinions, observations, reasons were all revealed through the discussion on just one social issue.*

Here, Sagun begins her experience by acknowledging her focus on seeking arguments and the accounts she shared to demonstrate how a social issue can be used to lead students to produce their own views such as the following: *"There is nothing wrong if parents are happy to give it to their daughter…Dowry system is no longer cultural, it has been a pressure on daughters' family".* These views by students recognize their independent thoughts and observations that seem to have emerged out of engaged efforts for collecting details of support. That means that in classroom discussions, students get potential opportunities not only for meaning making and constructing differences but also for developing their intellectual freedom (Wegerif, 2007). Lipman (2003) argues that classroom discussions encourage students to exercise and strengthen their thinking skills. But this all depends on a teacher's motive and direction in instruction. A study by Fung et al. (2016) revealed that the teachers' role is vital in facilitating group discussions that enhance students' development of critical thinking. The expressions *"I did not just want them to call 'Dowry system is bad'…I wanted them to discuss and understand the issue from multiple angles", So they had to collect support"* are explicit in revealing her role as a facilitator who seems to be deliberate in guiding her students to reason around the issue presented to them.

Like Sagun, Parshu's experience also revealed a typical social evil being used as a social condition for guiding students to think critically. That might be the coincidence,

but they reasoned the use of them well, and such an experience is also acknowledge in the literature as there are several scholars highlighting the intricate relationship between language, culture, and thinking (e.g., Li, 2016; Luk & Lin, 2015; Yuan et. al., 2021). Pawan shared,

For years I have been using group discussion as a group presentation where I use some students as the judge who evaluates the presentation on the basis of information, examples and logic… I recall we were talking about gender discrimination and my students had watched a video about experiencing Chhaupadi. First, students discussed in groups and prepared their part for the presentation. Next, they chose a group leader to present. After both groups have presented, I opened the floor for any student from any group to add further to strengthen their part…they all assessed it as a 'bad tradition'… they also realized the need for 'educating the parents', 'raising awareness', 'girls' education'…In the process, I encouraged and supported them to ask additional questions, as I usually do.

Here, Pawan's experience evidences the use of group discussion and group presentation as a site for nurturing critical insights in students. This experience is congruent with the findings by Lin et al. (2018) that revealed that group discussion stimulates students' thinking. As its name suggests, group discussion offers its members an opportunity to exchange their thoughts and experience. It ensures the exchange of ideas through active learning and engagement discussion (Orlich et al., 2012). Accordingly, like other participants, Parshu seems to have used the discussion as a means of grooming students into the practice of critical thinking daily, as he said, "*For years I have been using group discussion as a group presentation*". The constant use of discussion seems to have featured students' freedom for exploring the subject matter which has the potential for preparing a foundation for students' deeper learning and thinking. According to Slavin (2011), active group interaction allows students to explore their ideas, take responsibility as decided, and become critical thinkers. When Pawan said, *they all assessed it as a 'bad tradition'… they also realized the need for 'educating the parents', 'raising awareness', and 'girls' education',* he was referring to students' expanded experiences and knowledge emerged out of their exploration into *chhaupadi*, a form of superstition related to menstrual taboo which causes women to be temporarily impure and prohibits them

from participation in normal family activities. Overall, his experience revealed that group discussion can create a culture of inquiry and develop a deeper understanding in students in a variety of ways. According to Dallimore et al. (2008), group discussion promotes deep learning and critical thinking ability by leading students to think through their knowledge and experience, and by engaging them in the multiple perspectives and insights of others. In a similar vein, Yang et al. (2008) stressed that collaboration and interaction foster students' critical thinking ability by motivating them to construct their knowledge. These scholarly insights seemed to be reflected in Parshu's experience with his students. Group discussion followed by presentation and questioning engaged his students in collecting supporting details, posing questions, seeking alternatives, and offering some insights into the resolution of a familiar social problem. Therefore, his experiences clearly revealed what it meant for his students to be involved in the group discussion.

As the participants' accounts above demonstrate, the intent of encouraging conversations, discussions, and debates in a variety of ways was to invite students to explore the information, experience, and knowledge collectively and critically. By creating opportunities for participation and interaction, teachers seem to have disowned the traditional role of the teacher as 'the sage on the stage' and students as the audience to listen to all the details by their teachers. However, the participating teachers did not seem to have structured classroom discussions and debates in an organized set of steps. Rather they seemed to be focused on placing students' experiences, ideas, observations, and questions at the center of their instruction featuring discussions and debates frequently. In so doing, they used English language teaching and learning as a site for contests and dialogue where students were pushed to process information and knowledge through active learning and thinking. Their experience resonates with Bakhtin's (1984) postulation that "truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 110). Vygotsky (1978) also views knowledge construction as a dynamic process of interactions that call for sharing, comparing, and debating. He claimed that no knowledge can be isolated from its social and cultural milieu, meaning that knowledge construction is rooted in and shaped by social interactions. Therefore, teachers'

experiences directed to support students' learning by being a facilitator subsumes one of the key implications of constructivism (Cohen et al., 2004).

Overall, as reflected in the experiences above, the teachers of this study did not show interest in traditional lecture methods, nor did they occupy the entire spectrum of knowledge and information. Instead, they provided opportunities for discussions and debates that were engaging in nature and student-centered in their execution. That focus on engaged learning was a shift from the more traditional view of language as a means of narrating the details to language as a means of discussing and debating ideas critically.

Thinking Through Content

The third theme 'thinking through content' was determined through the analysis of the experiential data in this study that evidenced the use of curricular content as the key means for facilitating critical thinking in students. Therefore, this theme gave voice to the participants' experiences oriented to guiding students to dig deeper into the content. The experiences shared by them referenced the development of students' thinking through the content as a common phenomenon in their English language instruction. There are several scholarly references that support the ingrained relationship between content and thinking. To begin with Ritchhart and Perkins (2008), "thinking is intricately connected to content" (p.8). Therefore, the content that is absorbed superficially leads students to believe that there is only one truth or perspective (Paul (2000). From a social constructivist point of view as well, the content should be relevant to the learners' current situation, understanding and purpose which enhances the adaptation and functioning of their knowledge (Prawatt & Floden, 1994). They maintain that learners' previous knowledge and experience serve as key to approaching the content. Based on scholarly observations such as these, this theme tried to capture participants' experiences that sought and valued students' thinking through the content as opposed to the passive and uncritical absorption of the subject matter.

Effective teachers can see curricular content as a site of inquiry for the extension of thinking. They can "challenge their students not just to memorize, but to question, examine, create, solve, interpret, and debate the material in their courses" (Crawford et al., 2005, p.1). The participating teachers in this study, with their long-time experience of teaching English at the secondary level (Grades 11 and 12), seemed to be aware of the

wide range of language and literature contents that demand critical thinking in their instruction. The enrooted experiences shared by them revealed how they were facilitating critical thinking through the curricular contents. To begin with Sagun, she said:

> *I was teaching a poem entitled 'Grandmother'. I began the class, "Let's just recall good things about a person whom you like the most". I just wanted to trigger their thinking around their emotional attachment to someone else--mother, brother, sister, grandfather, or anyone from their life. Next, I made them recite the poem to help them understand who the speaker is and who the speaker deeply remembers. Then I involved them in meaning making which involved a discussion on what sense organs are used to recall the speaker's grandmother, and how they create an image and identity of a loving and inspiring grandmother. Finally, I gave them a choice of forms to present their image of someone whom they love and get inspired by the most. They chose poems, stories, and essays and I gave them a day for it. The next day, they shared their own perception of the most influential person in their life.*

Here, she shared a poem entitled 'Grandmother' as an example. First thing first, how did she start approaching the text? She began it by stimulating her students' emotional attachment to someone whom they love the most. Second, how did she broaden it? She broadened it by making them recite the poem, identifying the speaker, recognizing the use of sense organs and helping them generate the meaning of the poem through discussion. Finally, how did she deepen it? She deepened it by building on their understanding and knowledge through different forms of writing such as poems, stories, and essays. Thus, Sagun seems to have led her students to the production or creation level through writing which is considered a higher form of critical thinking (Anderson, 2001). She pushed her students to develop a new product, i.e., a new piece of writing which allowed them to use their own points of view as an extension of thinking that emerged out of the given content. In order to create a culture of reasoning, teachers can give students the opportunity to express their views on the content being delivered (Richhart, 2015). Lunenberg (2010) also claimed that when students are led to study a subject critically, they can use their thinking as an instrument for internalizing the

content, and developing new thoughts, insights, and points of view. In my experience as well, I believe that no curricular contents are meant to be treated superficially.

In addition, Sagun's experience also showed that content can be stretched to serve students as a catalyst for their thinking. She shared further another piece of experience to illustrate how she prepared her students to explore the given text entitled 'Malini' by Rabindranath Tagore.

> *I can give you another example. I remember teaching Malini by Rabindranath Tagore. As usual, I was prepared to take my students beyond the text. Malini talks about two religions Hinduism vs Buddhism, but I wanted to give my students a fuller picture. So, I took four religions as examples: Hinduism, Buddhism, Muslim, and Christianity. Then it was easier for me to activate my students' thinking. So, I gave them a one-page reading material which described all four religions in a paragraph each. Then I built on their understanding by guiding them through different opposites such as Gods exist vs Gods do not exist, God vs Humans, and Similarities vs Differences between religions. They wrote and shared their understanding. Such an experience was essential before taking them into the world of Malini.*

Sagun experience shows it explicitly that she does not use the given content as fixed or as having no scope for expanding it, as she said, "I *wanted to give my students a fuller picture".* She said it with reference to her efforts for guiding her students through the doctrines of different religions. Unlike Al Mekhlafi (2022) who stressed that it is necessary to explore critical thinking skills in the task and activities suggested in the textbooks, she took her students beyond the boundaries of the given content to give them a fuller picture with their expanded understanding on the similarities and differences between religions that are not included in the prescribed text.

Here, her students not only read the supporting materials provided by her but also wrote and shared their own viewpoints. The students did this all to prepare them to discuss and debate the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism in the textual world of Malini. Thus, Sagun stretched the content to stress the mind of her students. Students' thinking was stimulated in advance by supplying additional reading material that was meant to expand their horizon of information related to the content.

When we use the content for thinking or build on students' thinking around content, we fill students with a purpose for learning. Paul & Elder (2008) remind us that the design of most high school courses lets students pass the exam without encouraging them to stress their minds. Therefore, it is the responsibility of English language teachers to push students to involve in active dialogue with the text where they can learn to ask questions from the text, make links, and have an exploration into the writer's reasoning and viewpoint (Wilson, 2019). As Sagun mentioned above, Urwashi also seemed to be determined to push students to think critically through the content delivered to them. She recalled her experience thus,

> *I was content-oriented in the early years of my teaching, so I focused on core messages and summaries of the texts. These days summary and core messages are still important…* (but) *I use* the *content as a hoping ball, not as a stone. When presenting it to my students, I think about its potential for deeper relationships and meanings. So, I never treated it as a straightaway kind of stuff… when dealing with the content, I invite my students to make a judgement whether it* (what is being taught) *makes sense in their life, whether it happens in their locality, whether they have read or heard about it, whether the writer's ideas are justifiable, whether they can apply them and so on.*

In this experience, she shares her realization of the potential of the content for driving students into a deeper exploration. As her experience reveals, she always used the content of the course as a hoping ball, not as a stone which implies that the content of the texts in the syllabus are meant to be used as means for promoting active learning and thinking, not as fixed entities for uncritical cramming. Support for this practice comes from Paul (2000) who stressed that uncritical consumption of the content leads students to lose a fair chance for thinking through multiple perspectives and deprives them of learning multiple truths in and around the content delivered to them. I found it true in my experience as well and I felt myself reflected in her sharing. She reminded me of my experience when I would also get satisfaction in lecturing the content, in delivering it with fuller details and explanations as if students were a fixed and always-ready container to be filled. With time and experience, I realized that I was wrong. I was wrong to treat the prescribed content as sovereign and unquestionable.

There are scholars who argue that using the content to manipulate the logic of students is instrumental in developing students' thinking. Numrich (2010), for example, argues that when learners grasp the logic of the content, they learn to assess it critically. Likewise, Paul (2015) claims that by introducing the logic of the content into students' reasoning we can encourage them to use their own thinking or logic way through the content of the course. Girish's experience also revealed that the content is the product of the writer's argument and/or ideology. He said,

> *For me, a text is the writer's argument. It is the writer's ideology. How to mediate between the prescribed text and the students remains a challenge… My role has always been facilitative in this challenge. I encourage my students to read the text prior to the classroom discussion… I always have questions over what they read which encourages them to develop their critical perspective. I guide them to co-create knowledge when they encounter texts from different socio-cultural contexts. I really enjoy it when they put their own thoughts over the contents presented to them, sometimes orally and sometimes in paragraphs.*

In the experiential statements shared here, Girish places the teacher in between the text and the readers (students), meaning that his role as a teacher is oriented to facilitating students' thinking in and around the text/content at hand: *"How to mediate between the prescribed text and the students remains a challenge. My role has always been facilitative in this challenge.* This realization is crucial because the texts as embodiments of the writers' thinking, or logic are meant to stress and boost the mind of the students. That is, the content of the course cannot be treated as uncritical transmission from the teacher to their students. Additionally, as Girish adds, such an engagement not only helps students find meaning but also encourages them to express themselves orally and in a written form in which students can present their outcomes or the products of their mind.

Based on my experience, if a teaching fails to build on thinking through the content, it produces parrot learners, not active thinkers. This is because content does not exist in vacuum; it is critical thinking that brings content to life, gives it depth and dimension, and draws students in. As a language teacher, I am always aware of encouraging students to process the content delivered to them. I believe that teaching content without students' engagement with it is not only to force students to rote learning

but also to miss out on potential thinking opportunities naturally available to them. Lunenburg (2011) rightly claimed that content loses its life if it is approached mechanically. He maintains that students can generate new knowledge and understanding when they get opportunities to take ownership of their thinking. Therefore, content is a potent tool for developing critical thinking in students.

However, though the content is recognized as site of thinking, the integration of critical thinking into it is sometimes taken as an issue owing to the time constraint. Bataineh & Alazzi (2009), for example, studied the perceptions of Jordanian secondary school teachers towards critical thinking which revealed their opinion that they had to consume much of their time covering the contents in the textbook which left little time for critical thinking skills. They seem to forget that the content they deal with is already a site of thinking and we cannot overlook the fundamental purpose of education i.e., helping students how to think (Deway, 1933) through the content delivered to them. In this regard, Pawan said,

Key quotations: "*I use the content as a hoping ball, not as a stone". "For me, a text is the writer's argument".*

Writing prompt: What do these two statements reveal together about the exploration into the curricular contents?

Here, the first key quotation comes from Urwashi and the second is from Girish. The first treats content as moving material and the second recognizes it (content/text) as the writer's logic. They mutually reinforce the idea that each piece of content, as a product of the writer's mind, demands critical examination by the readers. That is, the content cannot be taken as static; rather it should be assessed as a site of contest and dialogue with the writer. Such a move leads students to think deeply using the content as a channel for processing the logic inherent in the text or the content delivered to them. In that process, they are not only forced to look for the evidence and reasons but also learn to challenge the author. Such an engagement pushes students into the deeper level of the content, activating the thinking agency in them. So, I think content cannot be reduced to a packet to be opened only by a teacher in a manner of *'Khul Ja Sim Sim'* where the teacher trades and wins, living no share for students.

> *I cannot deny that content coverage or course completion used to be my main concern in the early years of my teaching… All these years, I have approached them not just as something to be finished from the syllabus, but as a source for developing students' deeper understanding of the prescribed contents. So, when I ask questions or when my students ask questions, it's always the content to influence and shape their thinking…so contents and questions are related, as I said earlier.*

For Pawan, contents and questions mutually reinforce each other since content has been *"a source for developing students' deeper understanding of the prescribed contents" and "*it's *always the content to influence and shape their thinking".* Therefore, he does not take contents as something *'to be finished'* and put away, but an engaging material for stimulating and enhancing students' thinking. Here, it is meaningful to draw on Lunenberg (2011) who explored the relationship between critical thinking and constructivism and stressed that each content should be rooted in and shaped by students' thinking and that it should transform the way they think.

Like Pawan, Chandan also recalled his orientation to the completion of the content in the early days of career. As a teacher with increased experience and exposure, Chandan evidenced that he did not treat the prescribed content as static and complete. This treatment of the content as a pool of students' reasoning (Paul, 2015) was in direct opposition to uncritical or mechanical transmission of it. Social constructivist philosophy also values students' thinking and stresses on the need to promote those skills by embedding them in the exploration of the content (Dagar &Yadav 2016). In this regard, below are Chandan's experiential words:

> *In the past, I used to focus more on explaining the subject matter in detail. Like other teachers, the timely completion of the course, I mean syllabus, used to be my goal… Over time, with training and my own exposure in different professional organizations, I came to realize that lecturing the content is not the end goal of teaching… Text is a raw material, isn't it?... It may be any reading text—poem, story, essay, or autobiography. They all carry the writer's message or perspective. So, my usual questions to the students become: Do you agree with the writer? Why? If you disagree with the writer, why? What do you find common?*

> *What surprised you? why? …When my students pick a particular reference for a question or out of curiosity, it gives me a feeling that they could think through the writer's information and perspective…but yes, I support and motivate them.*

The quote above clearly shows a lived experience, a learning experience of leading students to think through the content. What is evident here is, as Ritchhart (2015) tells us, "the chief goal of instruction, right alongside the development of content understanding, is the advancement of thinking" (p. 33). The questions that feature his everyday instruction, "*Do you agree with the writer? Why? If you disagree with the writer, why? What did you find common? What surprised you? Why?"* have the potential to situate the prescribed content into critical exploration, with constant support and motivation from the teacher. The expression quoted here might sound the commonplace, but it seems to value a sort of autonomy in students, as he said, "*When my students pick a particular reference for a question or out of curiosity, it gives me a feeling that they could think through the writer's information and perspective"*. This satisfaction echoes Lipman' (2003) observation that autonomous thinkers do not parrot the content, nor do they passively consume the material. Here, Chandan's students seem to begin thinking for themselves by bringing their own questions and curiosity for more knowledge and judgement. In my experience as well, curricular contents and the phenomenon of critical thinking mutually reinforce each other by allowing critical questions in and around the content.

Thus, the participants' accounts provide insights into how curricular contents are used not as ends in themselves but as a fertile means for promoting critical insights in students. They show that the participants did not stick to content as content, nor did they take it as a static prerequisite for their examinations. Support for such experience-driven insights comes from Paul and Elder (2014) who view thinking as the key to all content and goals of education. They argue that all meanings are the outcomes of thinking as they are all explained, applied, evaluated, and transformed by thinking. So, they view the content as a resource for developing students' thinking unlike the banking system where students mechanically memorize the content (Freire, 1996). There are scholars (e.g., Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Mason, 2010; Willingham, 2008) who insisted that the development of critical thinking skills relies on the content domain or the subject area.

They stressed that critical thinking skills embedded with the content instruction yield more effective results than teaching those skills independently of the given content. Against the backdrop of such scholarly observations, the lived experiences illustrated above go to the heart of active learning and thinking where curricular contents are employed and valued as opportunities for critical thinking.

Curating the Curricular Content

This sub-theme, curating the curricular content, relates to the lived experiences of teachers who were asked to provide a written description of a particular teaching situation from their daily pedagogy that incorporated the elements of critical thinking in facilitating the curricular content. These written protocols produced by the participants referenced how the phenomenon of critical thinking was embodied, equipped, goal-directed, and situated in the daily pedagogies of the participants. The attempt was to explore the elements of critical thinking embedded in the facilitation of any English language text selected and reported by the participants. The rationale behind this was guided by the notion that "critical thinking skills are not just a box of tools to be used when needed and then put away but derive from a mindset that involves seeking knowledge in a particular way" (Dummet & Hughes, 2019, p. 4). Accordingly, the written protocols were rooted in their chosen practice that featured their typical classroom pedagogy. Informed by the immersion approach in which the development of critical thinking remains an implicit goal within the subject matter or the given content (Lombardi et al.,2021), these protocols brought to this study an added access to the participants' real-world in the classroom.

The use of those protocols was congruent with the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology in which well-written descriptions are recognized as experiential accounts that appeal to integrity, develop a feeling of recognition, and involve the liveliness of the mind (Henriksson, 2012). This seemed to be true as the written protocols pushed the teachers to recall, sequence and make sense of their experience of integrating the elements of critical thinking in the English language classroom. In this sense, the written protocols were a window into their classroom where they deal with the English language curricular contents every day.

While their written accounts do not seem to offer any specific recipe for developing critical thinking, they mirror a kind of shift from traditional classrooms to modern classrooms in terms of the focus and goals of the language classroom. This aligns with the basic principle within the domain of hermeneutic phenomenology in which written descriptions "do not prove anything…but they point to something" (Henriksson, 2012, p.135). Accordingly, the focus in using these protocols was not placed on finding the 'to-do' list to prove any greater significance of critical thinking. Instead, the exploration centered mainly on what students did to learn the given content and what teachers did to support that learning considering the seamless phenomenon of critical thinking in the context of the English language classroom. The exploration into their written protocol followed the three modes of critical reading 'what the text says, what the text does, and what the text means' (Kurland, 2000), which are presented below.

Exploration into Sagun's Protocol

Sagun's students are directed to articulating a reasonable solution to an environmental problem and putting that solution into creative manifestation. This experience had a lot to offer to students' thinking. Below is an exploration into her protocol.

What the text says

Her text provides access to the Grade 12 classroom where she is teaching the theme of ecology and ecosystem from the prescribed English textbook. For this, she assigns a project which aims to make students contribute to minimizing waste. She divides the project into two basic sections: the first part requires her students to be in the community and second asks them to do something as a change agent. Accordingly, her students visit their community and collect some wastes such as plastics, coke, Fanta, and shampoo bottles. Then they make creative use of the waste, converting them into pen-holders, flower vase and return to the people they collected from and use some of the bottles to make a beautiful swan garden. After that, they make the model of swan and plant the flowers. Finally, they write a report on their project.

What the text does

The text demonstrates how students address the problem of their community creatively. The text situates learning in the actual site where students learn to work

together in a project and come up with a creative solution to the problem. This is a learning in a natural lab that seems to make an appeal for ecological freshness. It offers a small but beautiful example to resolve the problem of waste created by people.

What the text means

There is a lot of thinking and learning implied in the text. It has used the project as both a form of thinking and doing. By locating students in the community, and by modeling them to make creative use of the waste, it seems to have allowed students to exercise all the critical thinking a hierarchical classification of the different levels of thinking: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). From understanding the issue of waste to creating a productive solution and to report the whole process incorporates all the levels of critical thinking as postulated in the revised taxonomy. It can be inferred that this experience has provided students with ample opportunities for thinking skills such as identifying, explaining, implementing, organizing, and producing. The physical movement of students from classroom to the community is indicative of a shift from lecturing the content to think through the content to materialize its logic embedded in it. In this context, the text is a clear indicator of the practice that students can create new ideas based on the acquired knowledge which may have come from their home, community and peers, and the teacher they are learning with. The description emphasizes the students' responsibility to independently identify a problem, develop a working yet creative model for them, and justify their proposed solutions. This is in harmony with constructivist philosophy in which learning is perceived as a socially situated phenomenon that is enhanced using authentic and meaningful contexts (Chu, 2000) and students' autonomy and initiatives are encouraged and accepted by the teacher (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Therefore, the text can be taken as a substantial example that sought and valued students' critical thinking ability by building on the content at hand.

Exploration into Chandan's Protocol

Chandan's protocol demonstrates how his students developed cultural awareness through the textbook content. This experience referenced his access to explore students' thinking. Below is an exploration into his protocol.

What the text says

The text centers on developing cultural awareness in students in which students are led to learn good manners that are different from culture to culture. The topic taken to share the experience is entitled "A world guide to good manners: How not to behave badly abroad", which is taken from the Grade 10 English textbook. As the text illustrates, the teacher begins the class by brainstorming with students in and around the topic that invites students to think and respond to whether they enjoy traveling, what they know about culture and if they know anything about multicultural things. In the engagement in thinking and learning about culture, he tells his students, "Let your mind roam and don't expect every idea to be a winner about cultural issues." He then creates a hypothetical situation to let students think about cross-cultural engagements, the possibility of conflict and potential solutions. This allows students to come across new avenues of thinking. He tries to generate feelings in students. He thinks that students can generate amazing ideas if we keep "their eyes, ears, and mind open". He connects them with their own context and experience and guides them through open-ended questions and assumptions. He offers real life examples of different lifestyles of different religious and ethnic groups. He divides the class into 4 groups representing four different cultures and makes them role-play representing four different cultures. This not only creates great fun but also engages them in productive learning.

What the text does

The text centers on developing cultural awareness in students. It invites students to learn cultural differences actively by letting them think through the diversity they are a part of and by leading them to act out such differences. It uses brainstorming, links the students with their own cultural context, offers examples from the diverse community they come from, gets students to work in groups and leads them to actualize the cultural differences. Above all, it facilitates engaged learning and thinking by inviting students to connect to and build on previous knowledge and experiences and by exploring the topic through multiple perspectives and possibilities.

What the text means

Diversity in the classroom can be used as an opportunity to lead students to learn the cultural content actively and critically. Students have eyes, ears, heart, and mind. But unable to see, speak, hear, feel, and think, their verve and voice lose purpose for

meaningful learning. Thayer-Bacon (2000) recognizes the pedagogy of critical thinking as constructive thinking which is realized as a social activity that values not only reason but also imagination, intuition, and emotion. So, if we wish to encourage active learning and thinking in the classroom, we should capitalize on what students bring to the given material through their ideas, feelings, and emotions. That is how we can allow our students the freedom to enter this more thoughtful and potentially creative space of language learning.

Exploration into Girish's protocol

In his protocol, Girish narrated how he led his students to explore a reading text (story). His experience offers different layers of students' engagement, resulting in opportunities for active learning and thinking. Below is an exploration of his protocol.

What the text says

The students do not understand the story, so they are unable to answer the text questions. Then the teacher brainstorms his students by asking practical questions drawn on their life. Next, he guides them to discuss the meaning of some select words from the story. He divides students into groups and provides them with a list of questions to find the answer after reading. He asks some questions to the whole class orally and the class reasons well to respond to them. He then leads them to discuss the message of the story and the use of that in their real life. He realizes three things from this: first, the teacher needs to let the students discuss, interact and work independently rather than telling (narrating) the story to them. Second, the teacher needs to connect the message of the text to the real life of students. Finally, in doing so the teacher can help students develop their thinking and argumentative skills. Nowadays, he lets the students argue with each other, relate the ideas to their life, and (help them) make multiple interpretations. Above all, he encourages the students to critically reflect on what they understand after reading the text.

What the text does

The text shares an experience of teaching a story in the English language classroom. As the text references above, it focuses on enhancing students' critical thinking potential through guided instruction including brainstorming, discussion based on guided questions, and group exploration into the main message of the story and its

relevance in their life. It offers teachers the realization that students deserve to experience different ways of learning to think critically.

What the text means

It seems to shun the lecturing approach in which students are told about the details of the content but are given little or no experience in arguing or debating the material. The apparent strength of this description is its emphasis on the students' engagement in learning and thinking in and around the text presented to them by their teacher. The fundamental thrust of this description is to invite the students "to critically reflect what they understand after reading the text", developing a sense in them that they are not repeaters but thinkers.

Exploration into Pawan's protocol

In his protocol, Pawan shared how he facilitated his students to approach a poem.

What the text says

Pawan prefers to be called a facilitator, not a teacher. His class looks messy and sounds noisy. In order to activate their thinking, Pawan uses questions throughout the instruction. For almost the entire period, his students spend their time actively exploring the poem. The first part prepares the ground for students' thinking around a topic. The text presents a poem entitled 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" prescribed for a Grade 11 English textbook. It starts with an introduction to the poet. It then leads students to explore the title of the poem. Students deal with a lot of questions related to the meaning of the heart and emotions. Then students read the poem drawing on the support from the teacher. After that they discuss in pairs to explore the main idea of the poem. They discuss in pairs and draw on support from their teacher. Next, students are led to explore a paradox in the poem. Finally, they write a summary.

What the text does

The text approaches the content (here, a poem) by stimulating students' thinking. It places students at the center of approaching the poem, by guiding them to explore the poem and leading them to summarize the poem in their own words. It demonstrates how the students become familiar with the poet, explore the words related to the heart and emotions, comprehend the title of the poem, read the poem for comprehension, understand a paradox in the poem and write a summary. In all this, contextual questions

and discussions monitored by the teacher are at the center of students' learning. This focus seems to be meaningful in the context of the poem delivered to the students since good questions get students to look deeper and more broadly (Paul & Elder, 2008). Questioning seems to have been used to spark curiosity, stimulate interest and intrinsic motivation for students to look for new information (Caram & Davis, 2005) in the poem. Overall, the text evidence that students are allowed to explore the poem actively and critically.

What the text means

The underlying meaning of the text is that approaching the content critically calls upon students' thinking as opposed to lecturing the content by their teacher. As referenced above, active learning and thinking can be situated in contextual questions and discussions scaffolded by the teacher. In this regard, the English language text can be a potential site for placing students at the center of whole learning, such as this. Here, students get to know the author and his time, exchange contextual questions, discuss in pairs, read for comprehension and meaning, explore the paradox in there, and produce a summary. Throughout this engagement, the teacher provides scaffolding to his students. This diverse way of exploring a poem is a result of deeper engagement with the content of the poem. The text can be seen as having a focus on engaged learning and thinking which resulted in producing a summary by the students, as opposed to lecturing, rote learning, and memorization. Such a focus is on congruence with Wilson's (2019) observation that critical thinking and language learning are integrated, and they can be facilitated well in a variety of content-rich contexts.

Exploration into Urwashi's protocol

In her protocol, Urwashi shared her experience of using a writing project to encourage her students to facilitate their thinking in and around the given content delivered to them. The sections below present how her writing project led students to learn and think critically.

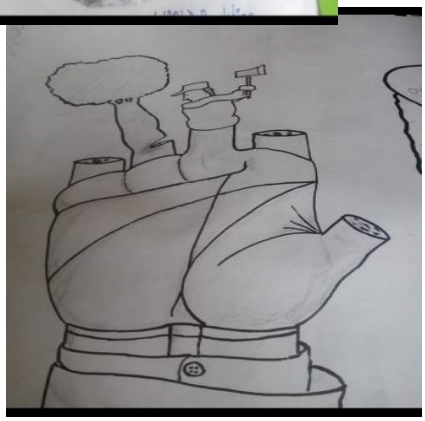
What the text says

She was rejected for allowing students to make noise inside the classroom, so she was skeptical to try out something new. Yet she was determined to do away with ritualized "*guru chela"* mode of teaching. First, she brainstormed students' ideas on the

potential issue with the help of chart papers and divided them into groups. Then she gave them an environmental issue to present in a chart paper the next day. Next, she observed them doing the project. She was happy to observe how her students were able to convey the reciprocal relationship between the trees and human beings.

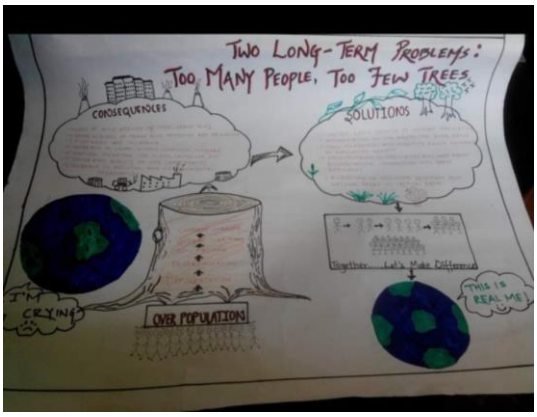
Here is an excerpt from Urwashi's protocol which demonstrates how a classroom can turn into a place for deeper forms of understanding and thinking.

When my students were actively participating in the project (I can't deny the fact that the class was noisiest ever!) I was roaming around the class and listening to how they were progressing. One of the groups somewhere in the middle of the classroom was draft sketching the paw of a hand with only two fingers remaining. One of the fingers was a man with an axe and another finger was a tree. They were justifying how the trees and human beings have reciprocal relationship with each other and how human beings are ending their own future with their own hand.



Their discussion made me realize how explicit understanding they had about the current environmental problem the Earth is facing.

The next group discussed splitting the Earth into half and showed how it used to be and how it is now. They were saying that they wanted to protect the injured earth due to human acts.



What the text does

Her text deconstructs the concept of 'noise' traditionally understood by the

administration. It demonstrates that teachers never stop trying something new even if that is undesirable for the administration, and what they do is always directed to bringing a productive outcome. The chart papers produced by them are good examples. The text provides practical examples on how students can be grouped together and led to do a project on real-life issues including environmental issues. It also exemplifies that the group work helps students generate a lot of ideas and enhance their critical thinking. It further evidence that when encouraged and supported well by their teachers, students can perform well.

What the text means

The text is instrumental in making the thinking visible, developing a sense that there can be abundant critical thinking opportunities in the writing projects. As teachers, therefore, we should put our effort into making students' thinking visible and in so doing, we will be able to understand what and how students are learning (Richhart, 2015). Students can enhance their higher level of thinking by doing or creating, not by listening to long lectures on the content at hand. In this regard, Lipman (2003) rightly views critical thinking as applied thinking, meaning that it uses knowledge to cause reasonable change where judgement is put into practice. The outcomes in the form of pictures, which can be seen as manifestations of applied thinking, clearly evidence the fact that students had to reason well to bring out them. It can be inferred that in doing the writing project students had an experience of higher level of thinking experiences including analyzing, predicting, and evaluating. Their products were the products of their mind. This is in harmony with constructivist philosophy in which teachers use cognitive terminology such as classify, analyze, predict, and create when framing tasks (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). So, her text resonates with the thinking classroom where students are given full opportunity to exercise their rational thought and judgment. Thinking classroom is a "classroom that is not only conducive to thinking but also occasions thinking, a space that is inhabited by thinking individuals as well as individuals thinking collectively, learning together, and constructing knowledge and understanding through activity and discussion" (Liljedahl, 2016, p. 364). In addition, by allowing students to discuss freely and productively, the text may be trying to tell us that productive noise is a desirable feature of today's classroom in which students are placed at the center of teaching and learning.

To put all these five protocols and their analysis together, it can be clearly seen that the teachers in this study curated the curricular contents through the inviting qualities of critical thinking instruction in the English language classroom. In administering the content, their experiences seemed to be in harmony with the basic principles of constructivism in which teachers are expected to pose problems of emerging relevance to their students, assign authentic assessment which includes analytical thinking and performance, frame learning around questions and diverse situations, seek and value students' point of views, and adapt the given curriculum to develop students' assumptions (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). As evidenced in their protocols, the teachers did not seem to push their students to cram and memorize the given content. In administering the content, they invited and allowed students to think critically by leading them to think together through their context and prior knowledge, to discuss with peers with confidence, to look for information and the logic in the text, to apply what they learnt and take responsibility of their thinking and learning. Though they did not follow any organized stages to build on students' thinking, they seemed to have worked towards developing "cultures of thinking for the students (Ritchhart, 2015, p. 102) by putting more focus on 'how' than 'what' of the content. The pursuit of the classroom seems to have been built around students' questions and explorations which echoes the classroom underpinned by constructivism (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). In this regard, the term 'experience' within the scope of hermeneutic phenomenology cannot be reduced to evidence or knowledge accumulated and conquered by us, "it is something that happens to us" (Henriksson & Saevi, 2012, p. 1). By allowing students to act and think as active agents, the teachers in this study positioned them as dynamic facilitators of the language learning process, not only as a knowledge or information transmitter.

In conclusion, the protocols that stemmed from the heart of their classroom experience brought to us what students did with the curricular contents and what the teachers did to support that learning. Thinking opportunities available to students indicate constant engagement between students and between them and their teacher. In harmony with this, the participants' experiences revealed that a good teacher can never be uncritical, neither can they be an absolutist authority in terms of the contents they teach.

Therefore, teachers' approach to instruction seemed to have made curricular contents a part of students' thinking.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented an exploration into the teachers' lived experiences of integrating critical thinking in the English language instruction. I opened the chapter with my own poem to give artistic meaning to my start-up struggle for writing the analysis part in response to the first research question. Then I had an exploration into the participants' lived experiences. The three themes that stood out from this exploration were: questioning as a rooted inquiry, sociality of critical thinking, and thinking through content. These themes were the structures of participants' experiences that revealed critical thinking as the situated phenomena in the context of English language teaching, meaning that it was encouraged and developed in students continuously rather than taught, assessed, and put away as technical rationality.

CHAPTER V
EVOLVING UNDERSTANDING OF CRITICAL THINKING

This chapter aims to answer second research question: How do English language teachers' experiences increase their understanding and practice in developing their learners' thinking? Embedded with this question were two major concerns: First, how do they conceptualize critical thinking? Or more precisely, what do they understand by critical thinking? Second, how can they integrate/are they integrating critical thinking? Both interviews and written protocols were employed to encourage the participants to share their evolving understanding of critical thinking as wholly as possible. The purpose behind using participants' written protocols was to render the structures of their experience more concretely. Those protocols provided lived experiences more concretely and offered reflections on those experiences. The use of this linguistic device was grounded on the observation of van Manen (1989) who states, 'writing abstracts our experience of the world, yet it also concretizes our understanding of the world (p. 30). I also drew on Vagle (2018) who maintains that everything is a fair game in phenomenology if you have justifications for it. By using these tools, I had access to the lived dimensions of participants' understanding of the phenomena over the years and through the recent engagement in this study.

However, I knew though phenomenology helps us describe human experiences well, it is quite difficult to gain the understandings that lie at the heart of such experiences (van Manen, 2005). Therefore, my participants' understanding was a sort of reconstruction based on the idea of circularity of coherence of the whole and parts (Gademer, 1975). With exploration into the words of participants gathered in the interviews and the written responses and the whole they form together, I have tried to capture the spirit of hermeneutic circle (Gademer, 1975) which characterizes a constant movement from the parts to the whole and vice versa. Their evolving understanding on critical thinking identified and underpinned the following three themes: critical thinking as inquiry driven learning, critical thinking as a valuing of multiple perspectives, and

critical thinking as an evolving ideal of pedagogy. Before I move onto them, I present how the concept of understanding called upon me to unlock its embeddedness in experiences.

Unlocking Understanding

"Understanding what teaching is must begin in experience", wrote van Manen (2005, p. 60). I begin to reflect on what van Manen was thinking when he wrote this. It is 9.30 pm; everyone has gone to bed. With mouse trapped under my palm and keyboard under my nose, I ask myself what it is that constitutes understanding. I begin to feel that the silent night might put a little extra effort to provide me with a full-body experience of it. I scroll up and have a quick glance at the accounts of my participants that went into chapter IV, and at a first glance I feel that they are there done, stubborn to speak further. Then I open the entire volume of verbatims from the folder 'Safe' and stare at the experiential words of my participants, drawn from both interviews and written protocols. Clustered under pseudonyms, they tend to send me an inviting clutter of calls. I take a deep breath and decide to continue. Once again, I turn to van Manen's remark used above and look for a relief with my extension of it: 'understanding what integrating critical thinking is must begin in experience'. Then I draw on additional insights that experiences can be made understandable and intelligible (van Manen, 2015). Suddenly, I feel like my stillness is broken which gives me a feeling that understanding is nothing but the experiences' ambience. This feeling brings to my mind the last two lines of the poem, 'Among School Children', written by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats:

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

In the above poetic reference, I have the sense that the experience emerges into the world as the understanding, and what one understands makes visible the experience within. In this sense and on a figurative spin, I and my participants were dancers in this collaborative performance. As teachers we shared several movements within and outside the classroom, meaning that we expressed what was 'lived' in the real world: the experience of stimulating thinking in the students (i.e., dancing). Those constant movements had meanings in their contexts. The choreography of the dance had a purpose,

and here is the articulation of participants' understanding on the phenomenon chosen for the performance.

Critical Thinking as Inquiry Driven Learning

The theme 'critical thinking as inquiry driven learning' emerged from the participants insights into the embedded relation between critical thinking and the English language lesson or the content used in the classroom. It gave voice to participants' understanding as they identified critical thinking as ingrained phenomena of inquiry into the English language text. As their experience and understanding revealed, the phenomena of critical thinking served them as an ability and empowering mechanism for promoting students' engaged learning and independent thinking. By identifying critical thinking as inquiry-driven learning and by incorporating it into English language instruction, they seemed to "challenge their students not just to memorize, but to question, examine, create, solve, interpret, and debate the material in their courses" (Crawford, 2005, p. 1). Such a focus also aligned closely with social constructivism in which the use of content is realized as a resource for thinking (Yang & Gamble, 2013). Against this backdrop, the paragraphs below try to articulate the participants' understanding of critical thinking drawing on their experiential statements.

To begin with Pawan, critical thinking can be understood as *'the ability to ask critical questions about the text and the lesson and answer them logically'.* Here, he seems to have sought and understood critical thinking in congruence with Paul's (2015) postulation that content of the course serves to stimulate and enhance students' reasoning. Mathews and Lowe (2011) also stressed that content is a vital component for effective critical thinking instruction. In the experiential statement above, Pawan views the English language text as a site for thinking and recognizes critical thinking as a capacity to debate the text critically. Against this background, critical thinking is realized as the productive interplay between asking reasoned questions and answering them logically. That is, questions that seek and value more than one arguable answer emerge from reasoned judgement, not from particular facts or preferences. Therefore, he mentioned questioning as essential in his instruction, stating: *For me, asking questions typically entails infusion of critical thinking into the text I teach... Questions help me drive quick inquiry …and both ways, I ask, and I also encourage students to ask questions.* That means questions

have the potential for leading students to stress their mind for working out answers, instead of depending on their teacher for comprehending the text. Therefore, for him questions operate both as a norm and pattern to facilitate active learning and independent thinking. As Richhart (2015) stated, teachers make students' learning and thinking visible by asking questions and probing their responses. By this he means that questions and probes bring in such a thinking entity that can be examined and discussed. In that sense, "Questions are culture builders, linking students, teachers, and content together" (Richhart, 2015, p. 221). As illustrated earlier, his interview and lived experiences protocol also reference the value of questions in referencing critical thinking. His understanding of critical thinking as framed within critical questions aligns with the finding of Kavanoz and Akbaş (2017) who conceptualized critical thinking as questioning which is used to have an exploration into the given information and one's own assumptions. By putting questions at the center of his instruction, he seems to have understood critical thinking as an ability to examine the information logically and creatively (Moon, 2008), and to guide students to new insights (Facione & Gittens, 2013; Noddings, 2006).

Unlike Pawan, Urwashi conceptualizes critical thinking as *being able to connect the subject matter to real life*. This observation clearly indicates that her understanding emerged out of her own experiences illustrated earlier. Both her interviews and the protocol discussed above evidence her understanding of critical thinking as an ability to link the course content with her students' life. Her experiences illustrated above made it explicit that she does not use content as fixed or as having closed argument by the writer. In her protocol as well, she shared a writing project in which students applied their learning in the real-life context, by working together and by exploring and inquiring about the information they needed. So, she seems to be indicating that for her critical thinking is all about encouraging students to go beyond the facts and details to connect with real life meaningfully. So, her understanding is broad enough to align with a recent study by Tan (2020) who stressed that instead of reducing critical thinking to merely technical rationality, we need to see it more broadly as a practice. Similarly, to draw on Dummett and Hughes (2019), critical thinking is a mindset that entails thinking reflectively, rationally, and reasonably. Based on my experience, I believe that the

creation and shaping of such mindset requires a familiar and natural atmosphere where students can easily make a personal connection to the subject matter and learn to evaluate the information more naturally. The writing project her students did was a fine example of this. Otherwise, their minds might lose an important opportunity to explore the logic of the subject matter if we fail to link it with their real life. I also believe that if we teach the contents without inviting students to think through their life and the context they come from, then it is very likely that their minds, shrugged off the real-life connection, will be reduced to rote memorization.

Sagun, another female participant in this study, also views critical thinking considering the facilitation of the content. For her, critical thinking can be understood as '*delving into any topic and searching for facts and evidence to come to the result.* Here, she uses the phrase 'delving into' which means examining something carefully to discover more information, which means she understands critical thinking as an exploration into any topic at hand. By adding '*searching for facts and evidence to come to the result',* she seems to have indicated an evidence-based solution to a problem and the application of the knowledge learnt. In this regard, Hughes' (2014) postulation about the interconnectedness between critical thinking and the text is worth mentioning. He highlights the three activities learners are involved in: comprehending the meaning, matching the argument to the supporting evidence, and expressing their own views in response to the text. Moreover, in her words, critical thinking can be mainly understood as *a rational, logical, and evidence-based thinking practice where mere assumptions and baseless judgments are countered with rational questions.* Her understanding echoes the elements of critical thinking as stated by Ritchhart (2002), "seeking truth and understanding, being strategic, and being skeptical" as components of critical thinking. Such an understanding seems to have stemmed from her own experiences illustrated earlier. To reassess one of them, she created situations where her students solved an ecological problem and produced their work in a written form. The process pushed students to reason broadly to find creative and judicious solutions to the problem. This engagement resembles what Ritchhart (2015) calls "learning is a consequence of thinking" (p. 101). In addition, linking the prescribed topics in the textbook to a burning local issue, she offered students an opportunity to think critically and reflect on their own

learning achievement. So, her understanding also aligns with Wilson' (2019) observation that a fundamental aspect of critical thinking is an ability to express ideas and arguments clearly, logically, and reflectively.

Chandan, another participant in the study, offered his understanding on critical thinking drawing on his own renderings on language teaching and learning. He said,

> *Where there is teaching and learning, there is critical thinking included. Don't you think so? Take, for example, 'Read and understand'…it might mean 'read and understand deeper meanings, or 'discuss and share'…it might mean 'understand diverse perspectives before you share.' Even in speaking skill, if there is no logic what will speakers say? All language skills have a logic of their own for inclusion.*

Here, Chandan seemed to suggest that each language skills have the logic of their own, which echoes Paul's (2015) claim that each content is ripe with logical thinking. His understanding is also incongruent with Masduqi's (2011) postulation that all language skills have meaningful links to critical thinking. According to him, speaking requires students to decide what is appropriate to say and how; listening leads them to use all contextual cues to receive the meaning and disregard anything that is irrelevant; writing forces them to produce their own ideas and thoughts and organize them in a coherent whole; and reading requires them to receive the right information and evaluate their own conclusion.

Critical thinking is understood as thinking with logic or reasoning (Mulnix & Mulnix, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2019). Sharing his understanding on critical thinking, Chandan added, *it is a logical judgment about any issues. It involves thinking out of the box and seeing all the possibilities of the issues.* Making a judgement is clearly associated with the pedagogy of critical thinking (Moon, 2008). By using the word 'issues', he seems to have indicated any forms of knowledge and information that are presented to students and are debatable. So, for him critical thinking was an ability to judge things logically, which involved going beyond the given boundaries. Here, Chandan seems to have understood critical thinking as an active engagement with knowledge, as opposed to passive consumption of knowledge or rote learning. According to Moore (2013), an active engagement with knowledge is one of the defining features of critical thinking. He

situates critical thinking in a learning context of the students where they make judgements about the text at hand daily. He also claims that a judgement (on being good or bad, valid, or true) is another important feature of critical thinking.

Unlike other participants, Girish views critical thinking by situating it within the wider social context which is evident in his experiences shared earlier. Girish mainly understands critical thinking *'as the ability to analyze, evaluate and synthesize any content by linking it to the broader societal contexts… as the skill to identify the pros and cons of any idea along with its wider impact on human life'.* He seems to be placing his focus on linking the textual contents within the broader implications of the society students come from. For him, therefore, critical thinking seems to be both the ability and skill to critically explore the strengths and limitations of any content delivered to students. In this regard, his understanding resembles the commonly agreed upon skills and dispositions of critical thinking that include abilities to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information (e.g., Facione 1990; Siegel 2010; Ennis 2018).

In addition, in the sharing below, Girish expresses his pedagogical intent and embodied experience in terms of his understanding on critical thinking:

> *There was a time I had no idea about why a wide range of curricular contents and activities were included in the syllabus… Over time and with experience I knew that contents remain essential to the critical perspective. They are food for thoughts…English language syllabus is interdisciplinary in nature; it is intended not only for language skills learning. There is ideology embedded in it. So, by encouraging students to examine the texts critically, I use the content only as a means, not an end.*

His evolving learning for teaching can be clearly seen here as he seems to stress that unlike in the past, he 'uses' *the content only as a means, not an end*. That means the content teachers teach carry the writer's logic or reasoning (Paul, 2015) in them, so they demand critical engagement. The ability of students to explore issues thoughtfully offers a way to speak out against injustice and unfairness (Pescatore, 2007, p. 330). In that sense, contents and critical thinking are closely interrelated and mutually reinforced. There is empirical evidence for supporting the linkage between course contents/subject matter and critical thinking. The results of the study by Caceres, et al. (2020) revealed that teachers primarily try to develop their students' critical thinking skills by integrating them into their subjects; not teaching them separately. Lin and Zhu's (2018) study found that infusing critical thinking in regular language instruction enhances effective cognitive development and meaningful learning. Here, the former reveals the integration of critical thinking into the subject teachers teach and the latter evidence integration as a regular phenomenon.

Key quotations: Where there is teaching and learning, there is critical thinking included. Don't you think so?

I use contents only as the means, not an end.

#Writing prompt: What do these experiential statements reveal about the relationship between content and critical thinking?

These statements situate critical thinking into subject matter teaching where it is realized as an implicit and integrated component in subject matter/content teaching. Following it, it can be suggested that understanding meaning beyond the literal words in the text requires thinking skills. Discerning multiple layers of meaning from the text involves a thinking skill. If you agree with the text or its writer, you need a thinking skill; if you disagree, you need it too. Therefore, content is a lived phenomenon of thinking charged with the logic of the writer. Can you teach the text without encountering the writer's coherence of the logic? So, when are you not a thinker within the thinking text?

Girish's understanding can also be looked at by juxtaposing it with the implementation of the curricular contents of the secondary level English devised by CDC (2021) where "soft skills including critical thinking and creativity of the students have also been given due importance" and "for this purpose, a wide variety of texts have been included under various themes and topics" (p. 36). These are clear indications that contents should be treated as sites for critical and creative thinking. In my experience as well, curricular content serves as a channel for promoting students' thinking. I use it for stressing students' minds in and around the writer's logic and leading them to bring their own inquiry into it. So, my understanding is that critical thinking is all about provoking thinking in the curricular context and leading students to debate the content at hand.

All the participants' discussion above recognized critical thinking as an ingrained inquiry into the text or the content they teach. Such an understanding echoes the immersion approach, the development of critical thinking is treated as an implicit goal of the curriculum which means that critical thinking skills are integrated into the prescribed subject matter but are not put into the direct and explicit instruction (Lombardi et al., 2021). Though critical thinking was realized variously by them which is illustrated above, their experience and understanding revealed that contents were potential sites for critical thinking which is essentially a form of inquiry to explore them critically and logically. This seems to be consistent with Paul and Elder (2008) who argue that content should be used to lead students to think critically and widely, meaning that teachers' job won't be complete just lecturing the content. There are many scholars (e.g., Dilekli, 2019; Lin & Mackay, 2004; Lin & Zhu, 2018; Macleod & Holdridge, 2006) who argue that teaching critical thinking through subject content is one of the effective ways of developing thinking skills in students. In constructivism as well, an emphasis is always laid on the construction of knowledge as opposed to knowledge transmission and accumulation and recording of information (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). That means, knowledge is meant to be constructed through critical engagement, not through recall of any topic or issues. This clearly features critical thinking as a pervasive phenomenon for engaged learning and independent thinking. Unlike in a traditional classroom where curricular contents may lie hidden and unexplored, the participants in this study used critical thinking to groom students into active generators of knowledge, not into empty

vessels as Freire (1996) put it long ago. Ritchhart (2015) also reminds us that "traditionally the classroom has been the venue for dispensing information and content to students" (p. 91). Against these scholarly observations, the participants' understanding of critical thinking as an inquiry driven learning seems to be meaningful in the context of English language teaching as it reveals that teaching is not dumping content to students. Accordingly, the phenomenon of critical thinking was immersed within the subject matter instruction, so it was something to be encouraged in students continuously rather than taught and put away.

Critical Thinking as a Valuing of Multiple Perspectives

The theme 'critical thinking as a valuing of multiple perspective' gave a voice to the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of critical thinking as an inviting quality of inquiry which was employed to uncover alternative viewpoints. This theme emerged out of their emphasis on English language teaching as an opportunity for nurturing different thoughts and experiences that students bring to the English language classroom. As illustrated earlier, all the participants abandoned the domination and structure of silence in the classroom to capitalize on students' experiences and thoughts and to value different voices and views. By doing so, they seemed to recognize critical thinking as a disposition that has a tendency to be fair and open-minded, and being open to multiple viewpoints (Davies & Stevens, 2019). Their understanding echoed Thayer-Bacon's (2000) postulation that critical thinking is social, interactive, and personally engaged activity as opposed to solitary and technical rationality. This is in harmony with the social constructivist philosophy as well. According to Schunk (2004), the work of Vygotsky anticipated a social construction of critical thinking. In this regard, Yang and Gamble (2013) claimed that the integration of critical thinking skills is social constructivist in nature since social constructivism recognizes a variety of perspectives for facilitating students' thinking and learning.

Now it follows that perspectives are important avenues for facilitating students' critical thinking. As mentioned in the literature review section, the secondary level English curriculum of Grade 11 and 12 seems to have recognized the worth of critical thinking in terms of the exchange of knowledge through wider variety of texts carrying diverse viewpoints of the writers and their contexts. The curriculum has some sections

and suggested strategies that require students to debate the prescribed texts from multiple angles. In a language classroom where students are required to deal with the texts taken from diverse contexts, critical thinking helps students learn that "there is no single and uniform power of thought, but a multitude of different ways" (Dewey, 1910, p. 45). Such engaged learning can cultivate a critical mindset that can help the learners deal with the English language texts taken from across cultures. **"**This mindset enables learners to arrive at a deeper understanding of the target language, of ideas, and of the way that those ideas are communicated" (Dummet & Hughes, 2019, p. 11).

The participants in this study conceptualized critical thinking as an imperative for seeking and valuing multiple perspectives in a variety of ways which seems to have been realized as a constant engagement between the prescribed texts and their students. For Girish, critical thinking means '*enabling one or others to think about any subject from multiple perspectives.* In this brief but succinct expression, critical thinking appears to be an enabling phenomenon employed to deal with differing viewpoints. By this Girish seems to have indicated that enabling students to understand multiple perspectives is obviously a cognitive process, in that sense a thinking phenomenon. It can be inferred from here that to understand differing viewpoints and arguments, students need critical thinking skills such as interpreting and analyzing, comparing, and contrasting, justifying and evaluating (Anderson, 2001) necessary for understanding multiple perspectives. This aligns with the finding of Kavanoz and Akbaş (2017) who revealed that teachers conceptualized critical thinking as an examination of an issue from multiple perspectives. Hughes (2014) also stressed that in order to develop a critical mindset, students need to be encouraged to see an argument from all sides. In my experience as well, critical thinking is an empowering phenomenon for dealing with different perspectives. I support my students to become critical readers so that they can understand and produce multiple point of views. I offer them guiding questions to ease their exploration into the texts that I teach. Those guiding question demand exploration into the writer and her context, subject matter, main point and supporting points, agreeing, and disagreeing, similar or dissimilar in their context, relevant or irrelevant in their context and so on. Therefore, my students experience it by describing and relating, by choosing and interpreting, by comparing and contrasting, and by debating and defending as a group or individually. So, my English

language instruction also seeks and values critical thinking as an exploration into different ideas and perspectives emerged out of the texts that I teach.

Like Girish, Chandan also seems to have realized critical thinking as a cardinal of diverse perspectives. In his words, critical thinking

> *is an objective analysis of issues to make a perspective. It is an ability to think rationally, carefully, and intellectually about any situation. It involves reliable judgments based on the evidence...Critical thinkers make logical clarifications, question the issues from various perspectives, evaluate the arguments presented by others and create own arguments with depth of analysis.*

Here, by using the word 'issues' twice, Chandan seems to have used the word 'issues' twice to indicate the theme or topics to be delivered to his students. These themes or topics are embodiments of diverse perspectives which are potential for questioning and evaluating. So, he stated explicitly that critical thinking can be realized as an ideal for making one's own perspective through objective analysis and that critical thinkers arrive at logical conclusion by examining the issues from various perspectives. This is in harmony with Richhart's (2008) postulation that in promoting critical thinking in the classroom, viewing materials from multiple perspectives is particularly important.

To turn to Urwashi, one of the female participants in this study, critical thinking is *'synthesizing information'*. This precise phrase has captured the commonly held understanding of critical thinking. As synthesizing is a skill associated with criticality, she seems to have indicated exploring content from alternative viewpoints in which one is naturally encouraged to analyze and appreciate multiplicity in information and knowledge. Pescatore (2007) makes it explicit: "when students think critically, they interact with the text skillfully analyzing the message, comparing that message with their previous knowledge, considering alternate positions, and synthesizing the information gained into a richer knowledge base" (p. 326). In constructivist philosophy as well, Matthews (2003) revealed the importance of synthesizing skill as a mental activity that pushes students to make logical connections, to explore the text and context and develop new understanding of their own. To reflect on my experience, I find synthesizing a common phenomenon in English language instruction in which students relate different ideas or perspectives to see how they form similarities and differences and most

importantly to explore the connecting logic in them. Therefore, I also believe that at the heart of critical thinking is 'synthesizing information' and I find it in congruence with the spirit of hermeneutic methodology which is centered on exploring part-whole relationship.

Like Urwash, Pawan also mentions 'synthesizing' along with other skills of analyzing and evaluating to conceptualize critical thinking. In his words, critical thinking is *the higher levels of thinking such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the information gathered from various sources.* By orienting these skills towards examining *"the information gathered from various sources"* he also seems to indicate the analysis and appreciation of the multiplicity of ideas and knowledge inherent in the texture of critical thinking.

Sagun, another female participant in this study, views critical thinking around questioning with a focus on 'not taking anything for granted'. In her words, critical thinking can be understood '*as a habit of questioning, and not taking anything for granted.* (it) *involves the thorough process of assessment, and analysis before reaching any conclusion.* By referring to it as a habit of questioning, she seems to be indicating critical thinking as a norm, not simply a necessity. Her phrasing '*not taking anything for granted'* indicates the critical examination of the 'taken-for-granted' attitude thereby implying multiplicity of perspectives that demand critical thinking. This means each piece of knowledge is contestable (Baez, 2004) and at the center of such understanding are questions that seem to be constantly aiming at exploring the information critically before reaching any logical conclusion. Questions can serve as tools for stimulating deeper thinking in students; they can generate more interest with additional questions for further inquiry (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The understanding of critical thinking as a recognition of the multiplicity in perspectives implies the idea of knowledge and information as constructed, not as given, or granted for all. This is in harmony with the constructivist school of thought where knowledge is viewed as constructed rather than as transmitted and conveyed by others (Dagar & Yadav, 2016) and learning as a process in which the learner actively generates new ideas or concepts based on previous knowledge and experience (Kridel, 2010).

What does this all come down to? Firstly, my participants sought and valued multiple perspectives in their renderings of critical thinking, which seems to have emerged out of their own lived experiences. Their understanding revealed that critical thinking is all about how to examine diverse sources of information with an open, inquiring, and critical mind (Wilson, 2016). To refer to their experiences illustrated earlier, they valued multiplicity in their classroom instruction by asking questions, posing problems, connecting their learners to real life problems, drawing them into discussions and debates, and by leading them to debate the given content critically. Secondly, their experience and understanding stressed that thinking critically involves viewing the topic of inquiry or subject matter from multiple perspectives (Willingham, 2008). They observed that learning to recognize diverse viewpoints enables the learners to see and understand others' perspectives and helps them to produce new ideas. Thirdly, their understanding of critical thinking falls into one of the pedagogical goals in constructivism that acknowledges multiple perspectives in learning experiences (Dagar &Yadav, 2016) in which teachers provide support and value to their students' points of views (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). In this regard, Oldfather et al. (1999) also claimed that having multiple perspectives on any issue or phenomenon is a fundamental aspect of social constructivism where students' points of view is identified and valued.

Based on the participants' experience and understanding, it can be concluded that the recognition of varying viewpoints directly goes to the texture of the phenomena of critical thinking. Nowadays when I think of my language classroom, I always think of the different points of view and perceptions my students bring to their learning. I feel that without critical thinking in place, I might not be able to seek and value such a natural diversity in their thoughts and experiences. My experience tells me that teachers who fail to value students' point of views, nor do they lead students to explore others' fail their students. I believe that seeking and valuing multiple perspectives is deeply pervasive in all instances of English language teaching and learning, which requires students to explore the themes and topics prescribed to them from multiple angles.

Critical Thinking as an Evolving Ideal of Pedagogy

What is the status of critical thinking as an ideal of English language instruction? The theme 'critical thinking as an evolving ideal of pedagogy' was determined to witness

how participants were called upon to continually learn to integrate critical thinking and how it evolved their ideal of English language teaching and learning over time. This theme was centered on exploring the participating teachers' experience of integrating critical thinking and their reflections on it. Adeosun (2021) argues that since developing the thinking skills of students is critical to English language teaching, teachers must find ways to develop the thinking skills and abilities of their students. He views that quality of thinking not only enhances techniques of communication and interaction but also helps learners use language skills more effectively and appropriately in relevant contexts. Li's study (2011) identified the key role of the teacher in infusing critical thinking in a language classroom. A review study by Lorencova et. al (2019) also revealed that teachers are an enhancing factor for developing critical thinking in students. Many researchers have stressed the language classroom is an appropriate context for introducing and implementing critical thinking (Savu et al., 2014; Fandino, 2013; Khatib et al., 2012). Against this backdrop of scholarly observations, this theme tried to explore how the phenomena of critical thinking evolved as an ideal of English language instruction for the participants in this study.

The experiential statements for this theme came from both the interviews and written protocols. The objective of using the written protocol was to encourage participating teachers to make critical reflections on their experience and indicate the ongoing changes in their critical character as teachers. The rationale behind this was contextual. In the ELT context in Nepal, I did not find any straightforward preparation for promoting critical thinking in English language instruction. This must have been the reasons that the three participants in this study (Girish, Parshu, Urwashi, as mentioned in the participants profile in Chapter III) received an online training on critical thinking instruction in English language teaching from a foreign university). I did a similar training course in 2019 (as mentioned in the researcher's role in Chapter III). The other two participants had more than 10 years of experience in teaching English and appeared to be well-informed and experienced in relation to the integration of critical thinking in their pedagogy.

Critical thinking and language learning complement each other and mutually reinforce in every language lesson and activity (Wilson, 2019). Critical thinking enhances

language learning at every level and vice versa (Bagheri, 2015). To begin with Pawan: '*with experience and practice in the classroom, I have realized that each language lesson has potential for developing critical thinking in students. It depends on the teachers how they want their students to approach the lesson'.* Here, he admits that it is through his experience and practice with his students he learnt how each language lesson can offer thinking opportunities to his students. That means critical thinking fits within the space of any lesson he teaches. He also thinks that it is equally important how teachers guide and support their students to explore a particular lesson. So, as his understanding reveals, teachers are vital in shaping their English language lesson around thinking. In this regard, Coughlin (2010) stressed that by making critical thinking a regular phenomenon in the classroom, teachers can play a vital role in sharpening students' thinking skills and in leading them to take their own responsibility of learning. As illustrated earlier, for Pawan questions seem to work as essential tools to groom students into thinkers. He reiterates: *By raising as many questions and problems as possible, by formulating my questions clearly and precisely, by encouraging my students to raise as many questions as possible, by including open questions.* Here, challenging questions that come from the students as well as the teacher feature a critical-thinking classroom Wilson (2019). His reflection below also makes it explicit that questioning seems to have occupied the central space of his pedagogy. It can be clearly seen that he ensures critical thinking opportunities for his students by asking questions and by inviting and supporting them to ask questions.

> *I feel that my experience in critical thinking has been very fruitful and rewarding for both me and my students. I have been able to facilitate and lead my students towards the goal of the lessons through carefully raised open questions. This practice has helped my students develop well-reasoned, persuasive arguments and evaluate and respond to counterarguments. Similarly, they get a chance to learn formulating thoughtful and penetrating questions. This ultimately helps them, I believe, identify themes, and examine concepts from multiple cultural perspectives.*

Here, Pawan seems to suggest that the thinking of the students is broadened with the quality of the questions that the teachers ask (Cooper, 2013), meaning that questions that do not simply require students to repeat facts and are well poised in content and sequence

promote critical thinking (Crawford et al., 2005). In a similar vein, according to McCollister and Sayler (2010), questioning is an important means for integrating critical thinking. Findings by O'Reilly et al. (2022) suggest that questioning is one of the effective motivators in developing critical thinking skills. To reflect upon my experience as a teacher, I also believe that good questions are the construct of critical thinking. I feel that if there are no questions, there is no teaching. Therefore, I guide my students to groom into the critical readers of a text mainly through questioning strategies.

English language instructors can engage their students in several aspects of English language texts including choice of words, tone, structure, point of views and their relevance to students' life (Pescatore, 2007). According to Dummett and Hughes (2019), critical thinking enhances the deeper understanding of target language, by helping the students reach a point where the language learned can be applied in a more judicious and effective way. Urwashi, one of the participants in this study, seems to have indicated such a deeper engagement with the target language by guiding her students to *'think', 'connect' 'rethink'* and '*restructure*', as revealed in her words thus: '*By letting them think, by letting them connect, by letting them rethink, (and) by letting them restructure.* This is clearly her understanding of how she integrates critical thinking which she seems to have reached through her constant practice. Here, she seems to have understood critical thinking as that mode of thinking about any subject, content, or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 88). Critical thinking for her seems to be the construction and reconstruction of the student's own views and knowledge built around the content delivered to them. To invite students for thinking, connecting, rethinking, and restructuring is not only to recognize them as the generators of knowledge but also to seek and value the phenomenon of critical thinking. That is also to encourage students to use more amount of their target language, as active learners and thinkers in that language, not as just the repeaters and crammers of facts and information available in that language. This is in congruence with Kabilan (2000) that learners can excel in a target language if they are enabled to think creatively and critically. A study by Fathi et al. (2019) also revealed that critical thinking skills and language learning proficiencies of students were significantly correlated. Placing students at the center of active learning and independent

thinking is also backed up by social constructivist philosophy of learning in which students are expected to act and think as self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware individuals (Prawatt & Floden, 1994).

Following it, Urwashi seems to have made critical thinking an integral part of her pedagogy in her classroom. Her experiences and practice clearly reveal that teaching is no longer an act of depositing knowledge (Freire, 1996) for her. Below is her substantial experience in which she got her students to write a reflection on their learning which also helped her mirror her own teaching. Such a self-reflexive activity, or awareness of the entire process is one of the defining features of critical thinking (Moore, 2013).

> *I have this awareness that a classroom is a students' space for thinking. I recall getting my students to think and reflect on what we do in our classrooms. That was basically about how our class went the previous day… I asked them to write a reflection on their learning on a particular day. I published even an article on it...In that, I asked the students to write a reflection on three aspects: what they liked about it (*the lesson delivered to them*), what they found boring, and how we could have made it interesting… When they shared, they not only reflected on their role and engagement but also helped me investigate my way of teaching as well.*

What is explicit here is that students are not blank slates to her, neither the English language classroom is an authoritative space for a teacher to dictate the information. Her experience with getting students to write a reflection is a clear acknowledgement that she valued her students learning and she had respect for what they produced. Here, what was more valuable was that by letting her students write a reflection, she made their thinking visible (Richhart, 2015) who claimed that teachers can make students' thinking visible to them by having a respect for and an interest in their learning. Getting students to write a reflection in which they can pass their judgement on their learning and teaching are a clear instance of intellectual courage and autonomy that are key traits in critical thinking today (Paul, 2005). Here it also seems obvious that students got more opportunities for using the target language by writing their critical responses.

Reflecting on her experience, Urwashi added,

> *I cannot claim I'm fostering critical thinking enough, after all final exam marks matter till now. But I'm doing justice by letting them think, by inviting them to ask questions over what the writer is saying; whether the writer's ideas are valid and justifiable; whether the same thing happens in our context; evaluate--was that justifiable?*

Her reflection can be taken as a measure of what she practiced and how she positions herself as a teacher. Though she denies claiming that she has done enough to promote critical thinking, her experience and understanding illustrated so far clearly indicate that the phenomenon of critical thinking is clearly visible in her instruction and that seems to have become an ideal of her pedagogy. She fairly reports that she is doing justice by inviting students to reason well before admiring or critiquing the writer's ideas. Several instances presented above demonstrated that her instruction occasions thinking opportunities well. However, she reminded me that in the Nepali context test and exam score still dominate the instruction. The point is that teaching for tests leads the students to cram the pieces of contents or information, neglecting the fact that those bits of information form a meaningful whole (Paul and Elder, 2008). Several researchers (e.g., Smith & Szymanski, 2013; Stapleton, 2011) claimed that over emphasis on test scores discourages teachers' efforts and ability to concentrate on critical thinking skills in the classroom.

What follows from Urwashi is that at the hands of good teachers there is always an opportunity for students to think actively and critically, despite the focus on tests and exams. It follows that effective teaching is for, of and about thinking (Costa, 2001), meaning that it aims at developing minds, not at producing unquestioning and domesticated students. Sagun, another female participant, brings to light similar ideals from her experience and practice. She captures her gradual grooming into a thinking teacher, and below is a brief instance of how she came of experience to invite her students to debate the material critically. She stated,

> *I was a perfectionist in the beginning. I would consider myself successful if I delivered the prescribed content well. (content je chha tyo sabistar bhanidiyepachhi pugyo, tyo lekhayepachhi success feel hunthyo). As I reflect now, I have realized that the content I present is just something to tell but it may*

> *not be true every time. It cannot be free from the readers' doubts and questions… Students have right to argue which I cannot take away from them. …So, when I introduce a new topic, I often alert myself how students can bring their own ideas and knowledge about it.*

Here, she asserts that she was the content disseminator in the beginning, believing that dictating the content is the main job of teaching. That means she had yet to learn that dictating the content is not the main goal of good teaching. As she came through her experience and practice, she came to realize that teaching is not about telling since learning cannot be devoid of students' questions and arguments, as she pointed out explicitly: *Students have right to argue which I cannot take away from them*. For her, the classroom seems to be a dynamic space for knowledge exchange where *students learn to argue independently*. This realization as an English language instructor was crucial, since knowing the meaning in the target language is not enough in language learning, it must involve critical thinking experiences for learners (Kabilan, 2000). English language instruction, as maintained by Yang et al. (2013), is an appropriate forum for challenging learners to stretch and expand the horizon of students' thinking.

In her reflection however, Sagun acknowledged with a smile on her face: *I feel that my experience in critical thinking is not that systematic and process oriented. Though I am trying to use critical thinking in the classroom through different practices, I need to learn more.* While she was pointing out her lack of knowledge about the theoretical aspects and pedagogical stages of critical thinking, I was recalling her several experiential accounts that clearly demonstrated the opportunities of critical thinking. According to Ritchhart and Perkins (2008), "thinking doesn't happen in a lockstep, sequential manner, systematically progressing from one level to the next. It is much messier, complex, dynamic, and interconnected than that" (p. 8). According to Li (2016), critical thinking is not a clearly defined concept, and many teachers are unsure how to operationalize it in their classrooms. Ritchhart and Perkins (2008) find both Bloom's taxonomies (1957) and its developed version by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) problematic in that they presented ways of thinking in hierarchies. They argue that thinking does not happen in a sequence but in a back-and-forth movement allowing a productive space for learning. Against the background of these scholarly observations, I felt that it was Sagun's sheer

openness to acknowledge her lack of systematic knowledge and process for teaching critical thinking. However, her experience and practice provided a witness that her instruction contained several elements and traits of critical thinking for her students, which were enrooted in her context of the classroom. After all, as Lipman (2000) said, "all instances of critical thinking are thinking about thinking" (p. 21). In a similar vein, Chafee (2012) stated, "thinking about your thinking so that you can clarify and improve it" (p, 52). Therefore, as a teacher with a growth mindset, Sagun expressed her realization openly: '*I need to learn more'.* That means she wanted to learn more about the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of critical thinking instruction.

It follows that though Sagun hinted at the lack of concrete knowledge in theory and pedagogy, she did not mention any institutional detriments, neither did she point out what teachers in general should do. Unlike other participants, Chandan shared his experience by mocking at the TPD training that rarely puts emphasis on critical thinking in its scheduled program for teachers:

> *I completed one month teacher training (TPD) a couple of years ago, but in that whole month we rarely discussed critical thinking in teachers. We did the basics, ritualistic kind of things such as teaching poems, teaching drama, teaching short stories. In many training courses I have had a similar experience. This is the reality…(He looked a bit frustrated). Critical thinking is an important aspect of the English curriculum, and the syllabus but I wonder why that is not yet part of such longer training for teachers' professional development…I recall some of my trainee colleagues sharing that they skip critical thinking section included in the form of questions in Grades 11 and 12 just because those questions are not asked in the exam.*

He added his thoughts,

… I think that teachers need training and institutional support on this. We need to focus on the integration of critical thinking in teacher training courses. We need to encourage the teachers who are doing well following the spirit of the curriculum.

In this reflection, Chandan reveals different facets of English language teaching and training in our context. He seems to know critical thinking has also been given due importance in the curriculum and the syllabus, but that orientation is yet to be realized in

both teaching and training. What bothers him further is some teachers of his acquaintance skip the section critical thinking questions driven the sheer exclusion of such questions in the final exam. Thus, his reflection reveals a cold reality in the ELT context in Nepal that even longer trainings designed for professional development of teachers are yet to recognize the value of critical thinking in English language instruction. What seems to be even worse is despite the due importance given to both curriculum and the syllabus, training still tends to be too traditional to incorporate this. Then who is addressing this gap? Though a small populace, to take the participants in this study as an example, it is the teachers that are trying to address the spirit of the curriculum and the syllabus in their own interest and capacity.

As a teacher myself and a witness of such training, I was drawn into Chandan's reflection naturally and there were moments we felt like we were in a very natural setting of sharing. I shared with him my own experience and realization that the training focuses more on the 'methods of teaching' but fails to incorporate the major learning outcome in 21-century education (Bart, 2010). However, we share our collective hope that the generation that is coming up is more capable of and enthusiastic in grooming students into thinkers. This mutual sharing was consistent with Seidman (2006) who maintained that phenomenological researchers can share their experiences with the participants in order to encourage them to discuss the phenomena as fully and comfortably as possible, I shared some of my own experiences of training to secondary level English teachers (both online and onsite) in which I delivered some strategies for infusing critical thinking in English language instruction followed by authentic examples extracted from the prescribed textbooks they teach. My realization was that the current generation has the potential and needs an explicit orientation and support for infusing critical thinking in their instruction. Renowned scholars in critical thinking literature such as Paul and Elder (2008) claimed that teachers play a key role in shaping, refining, and polishing the thinking ability of the students. Similarly, O'Reilly et al. (2022) also stressed that if educators are aware of critical thinking, they can scaffold thinking skills through diverse pedagogical practices.

Drawing on his experience, Chandan listed the following ways by which he integrates critical thinking: *Involving students into group discussion, training the students*

to questioning skills, forming their habit on evaluating the author perspectives, involving them in predications skills/making them train on inferential skills, reserving my judgments until I listen to them.

Here, it is obvious that Chandan does not seem to limit teaching to only presenting information, neither does he reduce learning only to recall. Through this explicit list of 'ing-phrases' that put students at the center of activities, he seems to be referencing how his students realize critical thinking instruction in his classroom. This infusion seems to make it explicit that critical thinking is desirable because every single student needs to be good at putting questions precisely, looking for relevant information, producing good reasons, and thinking within different points of view (Dunn, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Leicester, 2010). In his focus on the infusion of critical thinking, Chandan also noted, *Textbook is for students, curriculum is for teachers. (Curriculum ko udesya nabujhi padhaunu bhaneko compass binako jahaj jastai ho ni).* In this expression, Chandan seemed to be concerned about the need to understand the goal of the curriculum and the curricular contents assembled and presented in the form of a textbook. What can be inferred from here and what he shared above is that the main goal of the curriculum is to harness active learning and thinking in students through the curricular contents prescribed to them. There are scholars who claim that critical thinking is as an integral part of English language curriculum (e.g., Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Sun, 2015; Tang, 2016). To draw on my experience, I also believe that curriculum is a guideline for teachers to harness the possibilities of integrating critical thinking and a textbook is a tool to put those possibilities into practice.

Chandan also pointed out the need for the change in the question patterns that do not seem to encourage critical thinking due to undue focus on recall in our exams: *Our exam system has a problem…In order to foster critical thinking in students, question patterns must be changed. It is obvious that our teaching pedagogy is driven by test questions that do not require much critical thinking.* In this context, teachers are the key to providing their students with opportunities for critical thinking, so he added '*a good teacher cannot be uncritical'.* By this he seemed to indicate the critical role English language teachers needs to play in facilitating the diverse curricular content prescribed to his students. In this regard, Wilson's (2019) observation is worth mentioning. He argues

that the role of English language teachers is not limited to teaching English since language learning and critical thinking are mutually reinforcing. He also maintains that academic English is critical English. Arguably then, "the infusion of critical thinking into the curriculum carries with it the promise of the academic empowerment of the student" (Lipman, 2003, p. 227). Based on my experience in dealing with the contents in the English language and literature syllabus, I also believe that teachers who are expected to mediate between the English language text (writer's thinking) and the students operate in a critical sphere of knowledge exchange and production.

Like other participants, Girish also seemed to have recognized and valued critical thinking as an evolving focus of his pedagogy i.e., as a key to the process and outcome of learning (Lai, 2011). Reflecting on his years long experience, he said, *padhaunu sikaunu bhanne kura bokra udhinna* lagaune *ta rahexa haina ra ?(laughs) (Teaching-learning is all about guiding (students) to peel, isn't it?* This experiential belief, emerged out of his own organic experience, presented his applied knowledge in critical thinking implicitly. By implication, this means that effective teaching integrates critical thinking by letting language learners look for alternatives, make inferences, ask questions, and solve problems, thereby showing understanding in different complex ways (Liaw, 2007). With respect to critical thinking, researchers have noted that the teachers' beliefs influence their approaches to and success in promoting critical thinking to their students (Howe, 2004; Walthew, 2004; Dike et al., 2006; Moore, 2013). Here, the homegrown imagery '*bokra udhinna lagaune'* (an act of peeling the skin) is indicative of his critical approach to the contents, as opposed to uncritical transfer of the content and replication of it in the examination. I found this imagery meaningful in that it requires the doers to have both applied knowledge and skill to process the content. It indicates that teaching and learning cannot be reduced to swallowing the whole content without digesting it. However, he asserted: *This realization came slowly because teaching is not just reading (dictating) a text to the students. My own reading, training, and experiences increased my awareness on critical thinking… Now I realize, a lot relies on teachers.* In describing his realization, he points out that the role of teachers is vital in promoting critical thinking. Based on my experience and the experiences of all the participants in this study, I also believe that teachers have a vital role in developing students' thinking skills.

In his reflection, Girish recounted:

> *I feel that my experience in critical thinking got recalled. I got the opportunity to think critically about various classroom activities such as students' engagement, extension of students learning to the higher level. Moreover, I could reflect myself how much critical thinking skills are integrated into my classroom pedagogy. I realized that critical thinking skills can be inculcated in our students in any phase of teaching such as while brainstorming, presenting, practicing, evaluating and postproduction phase as well. I committed myself on several occasions to integrate critical thinking skills in my teaching.*

At the heart of this reflection is that he occasions critical thinking through various classroom activities and in any stages of a lesson. In this context, in my request to share his understanding why critical thinking is treated as a separate and additional skill in the curriculum, he said, *Yo chai budhdi napugeko ho ki? Tapailai kasto lagchha?(laughs) (They do not seem to have done it wisely, what do you think?).* This expression reveals his understanding that within the scope of English language teaching, critical thinking cannot be reduced to an isolated or a separate skill. That means he deems critical thinking as enrooted in English language instruction at the hands of critically conscious teachers. This is in congruence with Paul and Elder (2008) who claimed that each subject has their own interconnected logic, so we should teach students "how to think clearly, accurately, precisely, relevantly, deeply, broadly, logically, significantly, fairly" (p. 88). With my experience and expertise over time, I also come to realize that critical thinking is an interconnected phenomenon in language teaching, a particular way of knowing (Dummett & Hughes, 2019) that nestles into the engaged process of knowledge building.

What does this all come down to? The experiential statements presented above reflect the phenomena of critical thinking as becoming an evolving ideal of English language teachers. All the participants seemed to seek and value critical thinking in their instruction. The experiences and reflections shared by the participants provided a window into their pedagogical thoughtfulness (van, Manen, 1991). Their accounts revealed that their realization came slowly and gradually, and though exams did not have the inviting quality for critical thinking, they valued thoughts and experiences, and knowledge and inquiry by giving them engaging opportunities for using their thinking skills. The

participants' experiences and sharing clearly revealed that they all have increasingly realized the need of developing their own skill for developing students' ability for critical thinking. In this regard, it is argued that thinking becomes pervasive and necessary when a classroom design makes critical thinking a norm (Cohen, 2010; Tittle, 2010; Vaughn, 2009), and for that to become a reality, teacher's role is instrumental. To reiterate, the participants of this study seemed to be routinely encouraging their students to the center of teaching and learning.

In this context, the experiences and understanding shared by the participants not only revealed how critical thinking is becoming an integral part of English language education but also illustrated how critical thinking is permeated in English curriculum and its pedagogy. From their experiential accounts, it can be inferred that teachers can use their autonomy to rearrange the given syllabus and create rooms for critical thinking even within the set curricular structure and divisions of knowledge dimensions (An Le & Hockey, 2022). This seems to be an important shift from teaching to learning and thinking because without any explicit training and orientation on critical thinking in their context, the teachers were all taking it as their pedagogical goal and ideal. The following figure emerged out of this analysis and discussion:

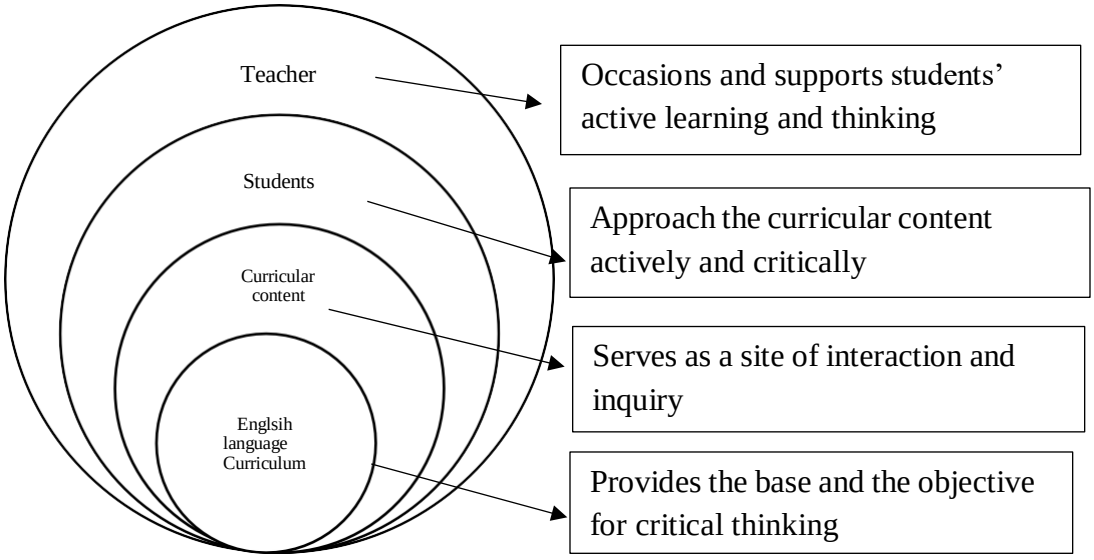


Fig. 3: The life world of the pedagogy of critical thinking

This figure above was planted to see the situatedness of the pedagogy of critical thinking. Here, English language curriculum is not treated as fixed and static as it provides the base and the objective for meaningful teaching and learning. Curricular contents as a part of the curriculum serve as the sites of inquiry. Students are expected to approach the curricular contents actively and critically. The teacher occasions and supports students' active learning and thinking by stressing their minds through the textbook contents.

Chapter Summary

In the context of English language teaching, the understanding rendered by the participants determined and underpinned how their lived experience contributed to their evolving understanding of critical thinking. The themes that emerged from the exploration are the embodiments of how the participants experienced and understood the phenomena of critical thinking in the ELT context in Nepal. Their understanding situated the phenomena in three different themes: critical thinking as inquiry-driven learning, critical thinking as a valuing of multiple perspectives, and critical thinking as an evolving ideal of pedagogy.

CHAPTER VI
CONSOLIDATING PARTS AND WHOLE

In this final chapter, I make an attempt to understand the complex whole of this hermeneutic inquiry by interpreting the meanings of its parts. The goal of understanding is to produce a fusion of horizons that aims to bring to light a coherent message by adapting to the hermeneutical situations in which it belongs. As the chapter stands, I first share my experience on how research is akin to going on a date. Secondly, I describe my journey across the hermeneutic river from a naïve swimmer's perspective. Thirdly, I squeeze key insights of this study and let the conclusion clot poetically. Finally, I capitalize on the fusion of horizons by critically reflecting on the phenomenon of critical thinking and by looking for ways to advance critical consciousness in the ELT context in Nepal. Overall, the chapter situates all the experiences into the interpretive act of understanding and stimulates a dialogue about this study. While the interpretive understanding is creatively and critically tailored to present the underlying meanings and/or messages, it avoids advocacy for a perfect offering to recognize and value the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon under exploration. In a nutshell, the spirit of the whole chapter can be envisaged through the following poetic lines by Leonard Cohen:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Researching as Dating

As I love the nature of going out on a date to gather information about the person one wishes to know more closely, researching is dating for me. I take dating seriously and here is the key question: What lies at the heart of this dating?

Here I give a figurative spin on my journey as a researcher, stimulating all the experiences that I have lived through. I am overwhelmed with my experiences--the choice, the context, the questions, and the probes within which I turned to the phenomenon of my interest (van Manen, 2015). I was drawn to engage with the lifeworld

where I gathered experiences relating to the pedagogy of teaching and the phenomenology of researching. Nothing was a waste even when I was in the most confused state of my mind. But the confusion was not for negation, but for deeper engagement with "the phenomenology of meaning, the limits of language, and with the enigmatic nature of words, text, interpretation, and truth" (van Manen, 2005, P. i). I enjoyed everything as I made no claims to perfection in my engagement. To put it straight, I was on a date with this research. I 'dated' with ideas that stimulated my mind. I 'dated' with the questions that kept pushing me so passionately. I dated with the theory that gave me a lens for the exploration. I dated with the methods that channeled my exploration. I dated with the data that gave me the horizons of understanding. As a dater, I came to realize that research is not just clinical and methodological, rather it is the heart and mind connection. In this sense, my dating experience was a composite of curiosity and questions, passion and anxiety, fear and disappointment, honesty and integrity, emotions, and feelings, to mention a few. I was really in love.

Just as in love, dating seemed to take on a life of its own. Everything started with a fascination embellished with a strange wonder. From the first encounter to this prolonged and meaty engagement, one constant and deeply pervasive feeling was that research is all about going on a date for gathering more and more information about the phenomena under exploration. As the research question lies at the center of the entire inquiry, I learnt to "love the question because the question itself is infused in the researcher's being". (Moustakas,1990, p. 43). I remember the first date when she drew me in by parting the cloud of pin-drop silence in my classroom. That was the first stimulation in my young teacher-being that cherished the glory of pin-drop silence in all those beginning years. After that stimulation, she nestled into my being naturally. She then evolved as a phenomenon of self-inquiry and encouraged me to investigate my teaching pedagogy and purpose continuously and consistently. Slowly and gradually, we fell into engaging conversations. She began to develop a sense in me that she was my wonderer, my thinker, my hoper, my dreamer, my agency to explore what is empowering in the real world of work. She made me write and reflect on her aim and scope so that I could frame her in precise words for deeper engagement and exploration.

I wanted to explore her fully, so I dated her methodology, theory, and data to stitch together and give meaning to all the lived experiences and understanding surrounding her. In fact, it was a full body experience, both physically and mentally as I was pathologically curious and deeply charged by my question-queen. “This thirst to discover, clarify and understand the research question is ultimately an attentive, unchained wandering into the soul of the question” (Friesen & Saevi, 2012, p. 13). I fooled myself so many times in this wandering into her soul as it required deep penetration into my decisions charged with doubt, questioning and risk. But I was unstoppable with my participants’ accounts and with the need to give them meaning for a bigger purpose. I came to learn that in their lived experiences, thinking is a verb, a causative force in all their inquiries and renditions in the classroom. As I explored the phenomena of pedagogic importance, throughout the journey I felt that I was moving between the parts of it and the whole picture. I was drawn to reflect, and I surrendered myself to that reflective mood. Strangely, in all moments, researching was dating.

Navigating the Hermeneutic Phenomenological River: An Experience of a Naive Swimmer

What runs inside this metaphorically imbued hermeneutic river? A non-swimmer, or you may now call me ‘a naïve swimmer’ is constrained by his experience and knowledge to give you a fuller detail. Worth the effort, I become the swimmer having arrived at this side of the river. The anecdote presented below was planted during the interview with Chandan and was a self-critical reflection upon the challenges I was facing by using phenomenology as a research method. Before deciding on swimming, I prepared myself by reading books written by phenomenological writers. I wanted to learn the skills with a more focus on the river of hermeneutic philosophers. As I got into the river of hermeneutic phenomenologists, I got to know that primary intention of hermeneutic inquiry was to understand how a phenomenon is experienced and made sense of by the participants. I looked for the exploration in the educational context. Through my search, I came to learn that van Manen’s (2015) phenomenology is essentially hermeneutic and has an educational focus (Friesen & Saevi, 2012). So, I framed my study methodologically around the main spirit of his six steps which were applied to the process of analysis.

I illustrated those stages in fuller detail in Chapter III. Though my experiences with those stages were not linear, they helped me chart a swimming route to hermeneutic phenomenological research.

You are still in the dark!

It was almost 9 pm; it was the dark *aunsi* night. I was getting ready for the second interview with Chandan who chose this time for the interview. After he joined my Zoom link, I was adjusting the camera while building a rapport through some commonplace questions. He said, *"You are in the dark and the face is not clear; maybe because of anti-light…"* A little uncanny and awoken, I replied, *"Let me readjust my position… Is it okay now?"* He laughed, as if in a teasing manner, saying "*No, you are still in the dark",* and waited with patience. I wondered, by the expression *"you are still in the dark"* he was indicating the whole lot of things that I was going through my study. I felt immediately he was speaking the truth. His comment captured my naive experiences of doing phenomenological research and writing phenomenologically. And the coincidence was real to me. The earlier night I was reading *Writing in the Dark*, a book by van Manen (2005). So, I felt that the 'anti light' carried phenomenological meaning for me. The light blurred my face which was the face of a phenomenological vigilant who was trying to write phenomenologically. For me, it seemed to reveal both the limits of my methodological aura and the language of delivery. I was entering the text produced by my participants and there were many things that were overwhelming to me. The territory of phenomenology, the interpretive dimension of hermeneutics, the underlying meaning of experiential words, the text in parts and as whole, and so on. As I was trying to figure out the difficulties in writing, everything appeared to me as enigmatic and provoking.

In critical retrospect, the greatest challenge for me was to grasp the meaning of critical thinking considering the phenomenological rendering. This was due to the immense diversity in the scholarship of both critical thinking and phenomenology. There were several moments when I felt like I was swept away by the flood of phenomenology and the phenomena under exploration. There were several times I stressed my mind, tore my hair, and pulled my nose. To a naïve swimmer like me, the stages mentioned above

served me as swimming lane lines that saved me from falling into the temptation of searching unfathomable depth of knowledge in relation to both phenomenology and the phenomenon under investigation.

In swimming in the hermeneutic phenomenological river, I was interested in the lived experiences of English language teachers, and the meaning that experiences hold for them. Accordingly, I had a focus on how English language teachers experience integrating critical thinking and how their experiences increase their understanding. Hermeneutic phenomenology really worked for the question that I was interested in. As acknowledged in the literature of hermeneutic phenomenology, in my exploration into the lived experiences, I did not reduce the phenomenon of critical thinking as tucked in taxonomies, neither did I fall into the dichotomies of critical thinking as skills and dispositions. The pedagogy of critical thinking and the meanings of it were the enrooted experiences based on the participants' accounts. This was in consistent with Henriksson (2012) who claimed that "hermeneutic phenomenology works against compartmentalizing: It is neither simply subjective nor objective, it does not seek to derive the particular from the universal…Its interest is in our lifeworld as a whole" (p. 135). Therefore, I moved back and forth to look at parts in relation to the whole and vice versa. I cannot deny that there were many moments when I was interested solely in a typical part—not in relation to whole but treating it whole. And again, after some reflections on it, I would be tempted to look at it in relation to the whole. Those moments were no less than riddles. But as a researcher doing research on critical thinking, I would naturally be driven by inner relationships, the inner logic that constitutes a whole. In this heightened interplay between parts and whole, I drew on my prior experiences, both academic and professional, to juxtapose them with the accounts of my participants. I finally realized that swimming in the hermeneutic river was all about connecting parts and whole of the experiences and understanding. The inclusion of my horizon of understanding was consistent with van Manen (2015) who stressed the back-and-forth movement of the researcher and the text, and with Heideggar (1962) and Gadamer (1975) who offered a philosophical perspective about hermeneutics which engages with our embodied understanding as fundamentally informing being in the world, our horizons from which we interpret experience.

My swimming in the hermeneutic river was further heightened by the postulation made by Koch (1996), who claimed that hermeneutic phenomenology is not about "what to do" in the research process but about asking constantly "what is going on" in the accounts that we want to capture in the research process. Accordingly, I was focused on exploring the experiences of the phenomenon and the meanings they constituted. The hermeneutic tools used to swim across the hermeneutic river were interviews, written protocols, memos, and anecdotes. As I recall, in some cases, the participant's words were ambiguous and open to different understandings, meaning that they were a kind of detriment to understanding their perspective. Therefore, there were several such moments I listened to their whole interviews again and revisited the transcripts to explore further. I used the hermeneutic circle to look at the tricky part in relation to the whole. However, I still have a feeling that there might be some amount of ambiguity in the extract.

In my experience, the most painstaking and time-consuming part of doing hermeneutic phenomenology was the analysis which was the place to report my whole account to the audience. At this stage, I was overwhelmed with a range of experiences and understanding of critical thinking which were revealed by means of swimming into the hermeneutic river. It was a place where I was expected to demonstrate how the themes were revealed and what they mean to the broader scholarship. Here again, I realized that everything was iterative, with movements between parts and whole. It is through these movements the themes that constituted the phenomenon of critical thinking were realized as embodied, equipped, and goal directed. During the analysis, as I recall, I had a constant feeling that every interview I did was a new event. Every participating teacher who produced a written protocol was a new text. Those memos and anecdotes I wrote to further embed my conversation with my data were unique phenomena to me. To each of those encounters I brought my thoughts and experience I had, and none of them was straightforward. That was consistent with Keikelame's (2018) observation that the process of knowledge generation through hermeneutic inquiry increasingly influences the researcher's 'insider' and 'outsider' identity.

Finally, how did I feel after navigating the river for the first time? Obviously, it was a full body experience, both pathologically and mentally. As I could see my swim work on these pages, I had a strange curiosity: It filled me up or I filled it up. It was

because it kept me stuck, jarred, charged, and heightened on several months. As a teacher, as a researcher there were moments of surprise, unpredictability, and wisdom. Here is one:

Having arrived at this stage, I reflected upon my daughter's questions and what I wrote following that. I felt like I was drawn into ontological questions related to the relationships between the researcher and the participants. Who were my participants? Why did I need to listen to them? What did I do with what gathered from them? For whom? I got my participants thinking, got them feeling, got them laughing, got them reflecting. That prolonged engagement with the participants gave me a feeling that "phenomenology is an encounter, a way of living, and craft" (Vagle, 2018, pp. 11-12). It gave me a site of inquiry, a purpose, a passion for another journey across the hermeneutic river.

> *One evening I was listening to the recording of one of the interviews with a female participant in this study. My middle daughter, 10 years old, drew closer to my laptop, listened to some portion of the interview, and looked at me with a questioning gesture. Then she threw a couple of questions at me: Who is she? Why are you listening to her? What is she saying? What do you do with this?... I did not tell her, "You won't understand". To do so would be to kill her natural curiosities. Instead, I said, "She is a teacher, and she is sharing her words". I said "Words" without thinking much about them. The words came out naturally. I now understand more fully that words are the consequences of enrooted experiences and thoughts. Here I weave the words and I am still thinking of the curiosities of my daughter. In fact, I am immersed in the world of words and thinking about a word as a little penetration into thinking, a word of wisdom.*

Mining the Moon: Drawing on Key Insights

At this stage overwhelmed and heightened all at once, the challenge I faced was how to report the key insights more precisely and succinctly without compromising the depth of the knowledge that emerged out of the exploration into the lived experiences of my participants. I knew I must let my analysis speak those insights, but I was overwhelmed with the wide range of meanings and insights that emerged from the interpretive threads substantiated through multiple interviews, written protocols, memos, and anecdotes. Upon rereading, I felt like I was swept away in thinking by a range of different themes and sub-themes directed to answering the research questions of this study. They were speaking of moving interchange of thinking and learning at the micro level so powerfully that drawing key insights was like mining the moon for me. In this context, van Manen's (2005) observation appeared insightful to me:

> To do research is to write, and the insights achieved depend on the right words and phrases, on styles and traditions, on metaphor and figures of speech, on argument and poetic image. Even then, writing can mean both insight or illusion. And these are values that cannot be decided, fixed, or settled, since the one always implies, hints at, or complicates the other (p. 237).

Having arrived at this final stage of the research reporting, I also had a feeling that finding appropriate language and style to squeeze key insights is challenging. As suggested by him, I used some aspects of reporting figuratively and that was a constructive release of the pressure. Interestingly and insightfully, he suggested that as no values can be "decided, fixed or settled", we can only imply, hint, or complicate them. By using this quote as a vantage point, I tried to articulate the key insights of my study.

In the education system in general and in the ELT context in particular, the participating teachers in this study gave answers to two important questions: How we teach and why our students should come to learn actively and critically. The changes in English language teaching that invites students to think critically emerged gradually as the teachers came of experience. Every participating teacher in this study experienced the phenomena of integrating critical thinking in the form of engaged teaching that placed students at the center of activities. Their lived experiences and understanding with a fusion of horizons with the researcher indicate that thinking classrooms are in the making

in their own capacities and attributes. The key insights presented below echo a growing shift initiated by the English language teachers at the grassroots level. As this study was carried out on a small populace of English language teachers, their lived experiences and understanding may not be the norm; however, their experiential accounts reflect the changing dynamics of English language instruction at the grassroots level.

Firstly, the teachers did not dump textbook contents by just summarizing and explaining them as there is very little use of it. Instead, they used them as sites of inquiry and exchange of thoughts and experience. In such engagements, they employed questions as the key structures for provoking students' thinking in and around the contents delivered to them. As I see now, this is an important shift, an indicative of the change happening organically at the grassroots level which stands against the collective rhetoric that the Nepali classrooms are traditional irrespective of the generation and context. Their experiences gave me insights that sweeping generalizations of the Nepali classrooms are undesirable and never helpful.

Secondly, the teachers translated teaching into the culture of inquiry by inviting students for discussions, debates, conversations. That helped them nurture an inherent capacity of learners to exchange and produce knowledge naturally and contextually. By situating students in these social dynamics of critical thinking, they not only gave voice and purpose to their learners but also offered more space to learners to use more amount of the target language for active learning and independent thinking. Such engagements are meaningful in language learning as they require students to produce more thinking for learning. They made me realize that what is the information is less important than how we as teachers lead students to process the information. In that sense, now I see that as critical thinking is an ongoing phenomenon realized in the culture of inquiry in the English language classroom, teachers are pivotal in shaping that culture.

Thirdly, they experienced critical thinking more broadly as inquiry-driven learning, and as a recognition of multiple perspectives, not just as a technical and rational set of hierarchies. Accordingly, they encouraged students to deal with different opinions and to make group decisions by bringing multiple perspectives and by talking over various ideas. For them, the diversity available in the classroom was a resource for inculcating in students the multiplicity of ideas and perspectives. My participants sought

and valued the phenomenon of critical thinking through a working dimension in which an appeal to inquiry and the recognition of multiplicity were in focus. It is plausible that in a context where critical thinking is yet to become a prized goal of pedagogy, allowing students to experience it organically was a remarkable move which deserves both recognition and exploration. Such a move has the potential to open a dialogue with those who tend to view critical thinking only through a neat set of hierarchies and therefore very remote and time consuming in everyday pedagogy.

Finally, they recognized and valued critical thinking as an evolving ideal of their pedagogy which encompassed their gradual shift from narrating the textbook contents to fostering the impulse in students to think critically. In that shift, curriculum implicitly offered purpose and meaning for teaching and learning, textbook contents served as sites of inquiry, teachers created spaces for thinking and provided scaffolding, and students learnt to debate the contents delivered to them critically. As I see it now, opening a door to active learning and independent thinking is in itself a prized ideal of pedagogy. They gave me a potential thread to recognize the core principle and requirement of a true teacher which is the ability to help students learn and think independently.

Hence, teachers are important agency in the entire orientation towards making the English language classroom as site of inquiry and meaningful learning, as opposed to a classroom that traps students into a life of conformity of textbook contents. I realized that the direction taken by the teachers is more important than the accuracy of taxonomies since advanced thinking skills will never be possible without putting the basics of pedagogy right. Putting pedagogy in the right direction is to make critical thinking of students a characteristic of everyday classroom by giving them an experience of inquiry into any subject matter presented to them. Against the backdrop of a prolonged engagement with this small populace of the participants, I came to realize that teachers have a rich potential for fostering and nurturing critical thinking in students. As phenomenological research is expected to have a transformative impact on the researcher (van Manen, 1984), I am now thoroughly guided by the insight that teaching without the experience of critical thinking for students is robbed of a real experience of learning. The grassroots experiences shared by my participants are at the heart of this impulse for critical thinking in the English language classroom.

Clotting the Conclusions

How to clot the conclusions phenomenologically? As I began thinking about writing the conclusion for this dissertation, I was overwhelmed with a unique sense of self-reflections. Here again, I experienced a dilemma of putting everything in an orderly whole, which seemed to be undesirable in phenomenological research. According to van Manen (2005), phenomenological researcher avoids the reporting of any conclusive set of arguments with an aim "to be allusive by orienting the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form" (p. 238). In a similar vein, Saldana (2018) views "researcher as a self -reflective poet" and claims that "writing poetically necessitates thinking poetically" (Saldana, 2018, p. 120). These observations encouraged me to think poetically and to frame my conclusion section albeit differently. Accordingly, I divided it into two poetic conclusions: First, the poem entitled 'when the sealed silence was broken' is a poetic summary of my research, framed as a tale of my research from the inception of the phenomenon to the fusion of horizons; Second, the poem entitled 'unbelonging to belong broadly' aims to render a broader goal of my research at the cost of some methodological traits and characteristics. It is because of these two different but embedded parts of the conclusion, I decided to report my conclusion as 'conclusions', and this plurality is characteristic of part-whole relationships. The poem below, which carries the first part of the conclusion, is a result of three drafts that aim to keep my work in motion from start to finish.

When the Sealed Silence Was Broken

Taking me back down the years of ignorance
Moving through a long-cherished silence
I knew how to spin and narrate all the tales
Several years witnessed those dry details.
One afternoon, after I was done with the text
One student, confused and bewildered from among the rest
Rose up and ushered to throw a response
Sir, tapaiko angreji sunda ta ramrai lagyo tara maile ta kei ni bujhina
(You spoke English beautifully, but I could not understand anything)
Alas! All of a sudden

I was shaken
Not knowing how to shed that all
I desperately repeated the same mundane.

In retrospection to reassess and decompose
I was struck by the basic questions--
'What do I teach when I teach?'
'How do I teach when I teach?'
'And why do I teach?'
Or—
Do I just preach?

In search of the enrooted in all inquiry and renditions
What is it like to live this experience?
None of them are the containers
None are the crammers
Are you afraid of using the hammers?
The agency and their accounts
Ah! that astral phenomenon of light
Uncovered its elements bright.

Hammering out the stagnation
Here I see the spark
Wisely and warmly
Transforming and twisting
Glowing and grooming
We deserve a more perfect union
The old fug has to go
And a fresh wind has to come in!

Through this poem, I tried to present the totality of my inquiry. I began with how my silent classroom pushed me to a phenomenon of inquiry with basic questions that

came from my lifeworld at work. Then I hinted at investigating the enrooted experiences as my participants revealed. Next, I curated the themes which characterized critical thinking as inquiry-driven learning in which learners are active producers of knowledge. That is, they are not the containers to be filled, neither the crammers to consume the contents passively. Finally, I recognized the teachers as agency to drive out the indoctrination and stagnation in English language teaching and learning. I hinted at that by being allusive through the live metaphors such as 'hammers' 'phenomenon of light' 'spark', and 'fresh wind'. These metaphors were the embodiments of the phenomena of critical thinking which emerged from the horizon of understanding between the researcher and the participants as the two were brought together in dialogue (Gimbel, 2016, p. 79). I came to realize that these horizons 'might function as a limit at a particular time, but they are always also gateways to something beyond' (Vessy, 2009, p. 533). The last two lines from the poem 'The old fug has to go', 'And a fresh wind has to come in!' tried to give rationale to my participants' lived experiences from their lifeworld at work. According to Gadamer (1975), 'horizons change for a person who is moving' (p. 304). Under this observation, I think of my entire study as movements in which both the researcher and the participants got an opportunity to extend, revisit and revise their perspectives.

Unbelonging to Belong Broadly

In this second part of the conclusion, I tried to present how 'unbelonging' is belonging broadly in terms of the methodology chosen for the exploration into the phenomena of critical thinking. This was in response to the discomfort that I experienced in drawing out the conclusion.

Though "the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology is more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique" (Eilifsen, 2011, p. 241), throughout this study I had an uncomfortable feeling speculating that my study would not perfectly fit into any theory or methodology. This discomfort was the consequence of my limitation to be pulled into any theory, approach, or a box. I made desperate attempts to gain methodological support to give meaning to my discomfort. According to Henriksson (2012), phenomenology is "uncomfortable" since it challenges taken-for-granted attitudes (p. 121). This aligns with van Manen's (2015) postulation that "every interpretation can

be called into question; every inquiry we can begin anew; every hermeneutic phenomenological conversation is unending" (p. xv). The impulse to avoid offering a neatly cut out conclusion was informed by this 'uncomfortable' and "unending" nature of conversation initiated by my study itself. This impulse pushed me to plant my feeling of unbelonging in the form of a poem presented below:

Miss me!

Miss me with methodological purity
And mindless theoretical loyalty
With editing or avoiding
Here I predict the cost of such unbelonging:
"He doesn't look like a phenomenological researcher!"
"Did you go through his writing?"
"Did his work embody phenomenological aura?"
"Did he really capture the lived experiences?"
"Did his interpretation do justice to the data?"
"Did he use enough of theory to interpret the data?"
The look like
The write-up
The aura
The data
And the interpretation—
Cripes, there is so much in motion
No inertia but engagement
Refusing to be pulled into any petty perfection
Moving in, moving out
I speculate a barrage of questions
Encountering the tyranny of fit-in phenomenon
Submerging the accounts of six souls
Setting my sights on the systemic overhaul
Here I rejoice looking at the part in relation to the whole
Miss me!

Through this poem I tried to advance my experience and understanding that the dynamics of our minds cannot be reduced to constantly repeating what has already been done and shaped, both in concept and methodologies. In this regard, the poem above goes to the heart of hermeneutic phenomenology which celebrates "a bottom-up perspective on pedagogical issues and as such is a democratic way of doing research" (Henriksson, 2012, p. 134). The democratic nature of phenomenology provided me a vantage point to explore the lived experience of critical thinking as an inquiry driven learning initiated and nurtured by the English language teachers in lived locations of their classroom. This saved me from being insensitive to the phenomena of critical thinking in terms of contextual factors that shape and create it. Therefore, instead of following the hegemony of recognizing critical thinking in neat taxonomies and hierarchies, I attempted to capture the lived meaning without confusing it with absolute conceptions of knowledge.

Against this background, my exploration into the lived experiences of my participants was essentially grounded on contextual knowing that emerged from the context of integrating critical thinking in teaching and learning. In that exploration, as "objectivity is sought through the understanding of, and ability to work with subjectivity", I was drawn into "the essential subjectivity of the process of knowing" (Moon, 2008, p. 127). That is, I focused more on exploring how the phenomena of critical thinking nestled into the enrooted experience of teaching and learning. The exploration revealed that critical thinking is not just something sophisticated and remote requiring a very specific slot or a lesson plan, but it is organically ingrained in the inquiry-driven teaching and learning. I analyzed my participants' experiences considering part-whole relationships, meaning that I did not juxtapose their experience about the phenomena of critical thinking with the absolute conceptions of critical thinking as cut out in hierarchies or order. Their experience with the phenomena of critical thinking revealed it more as opening worlds of meaning (Alston, 2001) than as sophisticated skills or dispositions. Their understanding revealed that teachers at the grassroots level do not view their learners as passive consumers of the content or subject matter. Instead, they are focused on helping their learners process the content/subject matter actively and critically. Such an understanding not only indicated a sort of unbelonging to the rigid set

of principles or hierarchies but also offered the elements of systemic overhaul in bringing the phenomena of critical thinking to the core of teaching and learning.

In addition, I experienced the discomfort of unbelonging in the context of both methodology and the object of the phenomena. Throughout this dissertation journey, I felt being pulled into tensions between the principle and aura of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the objectivity of critical thinking scholarship. There were moments that sent me a feeling that I must have misunderstood the meanings of hermeneutic inquiry into the phenomenon of critical thinking. As hermeneutic phenomenology as a method could serve to extract meaning by helping us analyze the spoken or written language by individuals (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Langdridge, 2007), I used both interviews and written protocols to exploit the phenomena of critical thinking as manifested in the lived experiences. Following the spirit of a phenomenological method "which focuses on what was present or absent in the teachers' pedagogical experiences" (Foran & Olson, 2012, p. 179), both these tools carried flexibility in the approach and presentation.

Moving on with all those preferences and purpose, I convinced myself: everything is a fair game in phenomenology if it is justified (Vagle, 2018). As I had a practice of no practice as a relativist social science researcher (Jipson & Paley, 2008), perhaps I did the phenomenology of thinking outside the box.

Implications: Looking Forward to New Horizons

One research study can't be expected to answer all the questions about any study at once. It is too hard to see all the inquiries resolved, when there might still emerge several curiosities, questions, and challenges along the way. However, all English language teachers -- current and future -- who are concerned about promoting critical thinking of their students will certainly have some takeaways from this study. Focused on a small group of participants and built on their lived experiences gathered through multiple interviews, memos, and protocols, this study will offer them grassroots' thoughts and experiences about integrating critical thinking in the English language classroom. Through the major implications discussed below, there is a need to look forward to new horizons for making critical thinking a norm, not just a necessity.

The first is an acknowledgement of critical thinking as a significant resource for promoting the flow of knowledge and experience in the English language classroom. Tapping into and building upon this resource is instrumental to effective language learning and knowledge making. To just dump content is not only to show disregard toward students as passive consumers and crammers by default but also to witness a tragic waste of their potential as active learners and thinkers. All students deserve to be educated about the why and what and how of the contents delivered to them. As one of the participants said explicitly, 'students have right to argue', developing a sense that we have no right to suppress their right to thinking critically in and around the subject matter presented to them. Therefore, there is a need to discuss the social costs of parroting facts and fiction instead of guiding students to approach them contextually and critically.

The second implication is a need for policy experts, textbook writers, and educators to go beyond reducing critical thinking to merely technical rationality tucked and sophisticated in taxonomies and see it more broadly as inquiry-driven learning. This is to acknowledge the working model of critical thinking as lateral and dynamic rather neatly layered hierarchies. Another reason that has skewed critical thinking in my context is that it is treated as an additional skill, or a separate skill, not as a deeply engrained phenomenon of education. Policy experts, English curriculum and syllabus designers, and educators need to situate the phenomenon of critical thinking as the main goal of education by advancing critical consciousness about English language education. This is crucial because none of them aim to parrot the content.

The third implication is a need to incorporate critical thinking in teacher training and short-term in-service programs. There is a need to bridge the gap between education policy, curriculum, and practice and provide training to help teachers recognize the potential of the integration of critical thinking in the language classroom. This bridging should be operational because even when curriculum goals and guidelines are put forth purposefully, it seems inevitable that our tests and exams will mutilate them to prize parroting. Teachers across contexts have a challenge to work against the disease of this age-old parroting. Meaningful training and orientation will help them guide their pedagogy in that direction.

Finally, the fourth implication is a call to the time for further investigation by involving teachers from wider geographic and educational backgrounds, and by applying other methodologies to investigate how it is realized in the language classroom. It is quite natural that critical thinking is perceived and practiced in a wide range of classroom settings in the ELT context in Nepal. Exploration of these diverse settings can offer practical implications for teacher education programs about how to help teachers integrate critical thinking as well as open new directions for interested researchers in the fields of English language teaching. This will not only demonstrate the diverse range of experiences and insights but also evidence how teachers are vital in shaping and promoting meaningful language learning and the flow of knowledge production. Such explorations will have a long-term impact because the teacher population at the grassroots level is becoming conscious, active, and change driven. To illustrate quickly, they are guiding students to link and assess their thoughts and experiences, to read and critically examine the textbook contents, to evaluate and write critical summaries, and to discuss, synthesize and expand their knowledge and perspectives. Therefore, there is a need to grasp this change for the larger benefit of our teaching populace.

To conclude, we need more research on how critical thinking can enhance knowledge and how we can recognize and value what is within the capacity of teachers. We should not shrink the scope of teachers' work at the grassroots level. Continued research into lived experiences and understanding about critical thinking can provide worthwhile learning experiences to teacher educators. A more in-depth study including classroom observations may help expand on the nexus of inquiry initiated by the current study.

Reflections and Confessions

Having arrived at this final point of my research journey, I am struck by a simple but significant question: What do I take away from the dissertation I wrote as part of my M.Phil. study: is it the information contained in it or the intellectual, cultural, and self-growth journey that shaped my future directions? For me, the latter was more powerful. I felt this study placed me into a hermeneutic situation in which I can ask question about myself, and about who I should be and become in it (Friesen, 2012). I present my reflections in two sections. In the first section, I view myself and my work as a work in

progress, rejoicing a sense that my research is an unending pathway to another inquiry. In the second section, I just wonder if I could capture the half-baked and the unsaid experiences of my participants.

Am I Work in Progress?

This study was a penetration into my being both as a teacher and researcher. Throughout this research journey, I rarely had a feeling that I would be complete at certain point where I would be fully convinced with my work. I always felt that I am a work in progress for three major reasons.

The first emerged from my participants' experiential words that still echo in my mind and tend to push me think through them again. In each rereading, I feel that participants' words have an unending appeal to meaning within and beyond their scope, as if words do not always reveal themselves, they have a timeline of their own for the interpreter. What is the reason behind such a constant evolution of meanings? Is it because I have progressed from the time of interpretation, or is it an inherent nature of the world of interpretation? In this regard, I found myself reflected in the words of Myers (2013) who pointed out the difficulty in concluding a hermeneutic study stating: when does the interpretive process stop? In both cases, I tend to become a work in progress.

I am a work in progress!

It was the last week of October 2022 when I was at Kathmandu University in the course of my work in this study. I would spend the whole afternoon in the library with a few tea-snack breaks in between. One day I had a chance conversation with the Dean sir in the canteen. As usual, across informal chats, he asked, "Did you complete your dissertation?" Not knowing how to capture and report the status of my work, I replied, "I am doing, sir!" He laughed and shared a poking joke, "This present continuous is dangerous!" As I understood, he meant that any reporting in the present progressive tense gives the candidates an unlimited luxury of 'doing' something continuously. As I reflect now, his expression was so true. If one asked me to report the updates of my work even now, I would instinctively employ the same reply, "I am doing it!"

The second came out from the challenge of working with the phenomenon of critical thinking. I have a constant feeling that "the heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works" (Hooks, 2010, p.7). The nexus of my being-as-researcher and my being-in-the-world as a teacher have cultivated in me an unending desire for thinking critically about the world of work in which I am a part of. To quote, Brookfield (2012), "no matter what the context, being able to think critically is crucial to your survival and to helping you make choices that are in your best interests" (p. 259). Therefore, I have begun to look at critical thinking "not a concept to be devoured in a single sitting, nor at a single event. It is one to be savored and reflected upon. It is something to live and grow with" (The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2023). As I reflect now, I cannot survive as a teacher without making critical thinking a life of teaching and learning, neither can I let the experiences and insights shared by my participants lie hidden in the library of my university. I have a challenge to make thinking a norm of my pedagogy and spread the same for the larger social benefits of teaching and learning in my context. Owing to this challenge of capitalizing on the thinking capital garnered by this study, I am a work in progress.

Finally, the third emerged from "the pleasure of working with ideas, of thinking as an action" (Hooks, 2010, p. 10). The nexus of this pleasure is spread over my identity as a researcher of this study and as an English language teacher. I have come to learn more firmly that a true teacher always has an inviting appeal to students, knows how to spark interest for learning, and always gets ready to occasion opportunities for active learning and independent thinking. As I see it now, my mission both as a teacher and researcher is to explore further the potential of critical thinking as an organizing principle for quality teaching and learning. I have realized that I should not have the right to bandy about critical thinking if I fail to make it an avenue of pedagogy and research. Interestingly, hermeneutic phenomenology has a potential to lead us to "see our students and ourselves with new eyes" (Henriksson, 2012, p. 135). Therefore, I take the responsibility as open for deeper and wider exploration into teaching which is no longer understood as just going to class, giving long lectures, and taking tests and exams. Against the background of this responsibility as well, I am a work in progress.

Falling into Half-baked and Unsaid

I was fortunate to have participants as humble and thoughtful. None of them looked bored during those multiple interviews, nor did they hesitate to produce written protocols. I knew they were all busy, but they managed to take time out of their professional and personal commitments to share their experiences. All those prolonged engagements were very inspiring and insightful moments for me.

However, their experiences gathered and reported in this study are just the tip of the iceberg. In my engagement with the participants, I could see their facial appearance, their sitting position, their mood, to mention a few. But there were many things that were invisible and not easily accessible: their beliefs, their moving thoughts, their existing knowledge, and a range of experiences and so on. I had to rely on their accounts as shared by them. There were several moments my participants gave me half-baked thoughts and experiences, despite my insistence on more of them. I wanted to let the conversation flow naturally, so I did not interfere with them. I witnessed several moments of pauses and silences, connections, and disconnections in their attempt to share actual experiences they lived through. As I was clear that each participant's lived experiences are the consequences of intricate institutional structures, contexts, and challenges, I did not bother much when they presented thoughts and experiences that were half-baked or delivered with pauses and silence across the conversation. Sometimes, I wondered if some of their pedagogical experiences are better left unsaid. van Manen (2015) rightly observed that certain words or expressions may hold personal meaning for an individual that no one else can ever fully grasp.

In this study, I made my participants recall, rethink, revisit their experiences and thoughts in my attempt to try to enter their world of work as English language teachers. In so doing, I came to learn that it is quite natural for research participants to not say what they mean by certain experience, so they sometimes leave things hidden. And interestingly, at some other times, they happen to come up with certain experiences that speak a lot with few words. In this context, my challenge as a researcher was to capture deeper inferences implied in the phrases or statements of the participants. Therefore, I used memos to compensate for the 'half-baked' experiences enmeshed in the broader conversation. I also wrote anecdotes to get the conversation going. However, I still felt

that perhaps the unspoken words of my participants are more powerful than what was made explicit in this study. In this context, I found van Manen's (2015) remarks so pressing: "Instead of committing the sin of "overwriting" it is sometimes more important to leave things unsaid" (pp. 112-113). This situation reminded me a poem entitled 'Ode on A Grecian Urn' by John Keats where he writes,

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guidelines

(1) How many years have you been in the field of teaching?

(2) Have you experienced any significant changes in the way you have been teaching English for these many years?

(3) What is typical of your daily pedagogy? How do you use English language lesson or text to develop your students' critical thinking?

(4) What is your understanding of critical thinking? What does this term mean to you and to your students in the context of English language teaching at the secondary level?

(5) How are you supporting your students to enhance their critical thinking skills? Do you encourage your students to ask questions? Do you encourage them to think about multiple answers?

(6) Are there any special ways or activities you have been doing to foster students' thinking?

Appendix B

Writing Protocol-I: Lived Experience Description

The protocol writing or lived-experience descriptions presented below is taken from van Manen (2015, p. 65). Please write a direct account of your teaching experience which included the phenomena of critical thinking or the elements that constituted it. Try to give a description of a particular experience or life world practice (of the daily experience of teaching English) as you lived through it, focusing on an example of the experience. Please "avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations" (vanManen, 2015, p. 65).

Here is an example of a lived-experience description, provided by a mother, of the daily experience of mothering:

> Lately I have been wondering if I expect too much of my son. He gets all mixed up in his homework, is overtired, can't think straight, and spends hours doing one straightforward assignment when he should just be relaxing and enjoying family life like all the other kids in his class; he has misread the instructions and has to do the whole thing again; he has a thousand ideas for a report on gorillas, but can't seem to get it together to write even the opening sentence. So yesterday I looked at Robbie's cumulative file at school. I felt guilty in a way, resorting to that, especially since those numbers have so little to say about a person. And my love and hopes for him are unconditional of course, they don't depend on his achievement or IQ scores. But the numbers weren't supposed to tell me whether Rob is special or not--they were supposed to tell me what to do: whether it is alright for me to tease, prod and cajole him about his homework, and say, "Hey, you lazy schmuck, get some of this work finished in school instead of fooling around," or maybe, "Of course you can't think straight when you're so tired. You'll have to get home earlier and do this homework before supper."

Appendix C

Writing Protocol II: Understanding, Application, and Reflection

I. To me, critical thinking means: ----------

II. In other words, I mainly understand critical thinking as:
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III. I can integrate/am integrating critical thinking in my English language classroom in the following ways:
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IV. As a research participant, I have spent a considerable amount of time (through multiple interviews and lived experience description) in this study. To reflect on this engagement, I feel that my experience in critical thinking
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