

Developing Critical Thinking in Algerian Classrooms through Online Debate Platforms

تنمية التفكير النقدي في الفصول الدراسية الجزائرية من خلال منصات المناظرة الإلكترونية

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Abstract:

Within EFL classrooms across Algeria, developing critical thinking remains a significant challenge due to the traditional methods of teaching and the minimal use of digital technology. The paper explores the pedagogical potential of online debate platforms in provoking critical thinking capacity among Algerian EFL learners. Drawing on Ennis's model of critical thinking, the research offers a qualitative, interpretive analysis of existing research, and synthesizes evidence from the relevant literature. The research identifies the major cognitive skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and argumentation that are supported by digital debates. It also makes practical recommendations for implementation and outlines the infrastructural and pedagogical challenges to be addressed. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions in digital pedagogy and emphasize the need for new, learner-centered approaches to language instruction.

Keywords: critical thinking, online debate forums, EFL teaching, digital pedagogy, Algerian classrooms

ملخص:

في سياق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في الجزائر، لا يزال تعزيز مهارات التفكير النقدي يُعدّ من أبرز التحديات، وذلك نتيجة لاستمرار الاعتماد على الأساليب التدريسية التقليدية، إلى جانب محدودية توظيف التكنولوجيا الرقمية في العملية التعليمية. تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية الإمكانيات التربوية لمنصات المناظرات الإلكترونية في تحفيز مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر. واستنادًا إلى نموذج إينيس للتفكير النقدي، يقدم هذا البحث تحليلًا نوعيًا وتفسيريًا للأبحاث القائمة، ويُرَكَّب الأدلة المستخلصة من الأدبيات ذات الصلة. ويحدد البحث المهارات المعرفية الرئيسية، مثل التحليل

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والتقييم والجدال و التي تدعمها المناظرات الرقمية . كما يقدم توصيات عملية للتنفيذ، ويحدد التحديات البنيوية والتربوية التي يتعين معالجتها. تُسهم النتائج في المناقشات الجارية في مجال التربية الرقمية، وتؤكد على الحاجة إلى مناهج جديدة لتعليم اللغة تُركز على المتعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكير النقدي، منتديات المناظرات الإلكترونية، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التربية الرقمية، الفصول الدراسية الجزائرية

1. Introduction

In an era marked by worldwide interdependence and rapidly increasing technological innovation, the development of critical thinking is increasingly recognized as one of the essential competencies in education (Facione, 1990; Ennis, 1993). In EFL contexts, especially in the context of countries like Algeria where traditional pedagogical approaches continue to dominate, the cultivation of higher-order thinking capacities remains limited (Baghoussi, 2021; Benmouhoub, 2024). Algerian EFL classrooms, especially at secondary and higher education levels, still prioritize grammatical correctness and memorization over dialogic, reflective learning. This pedagogical approach, successful for certain linguistic objectives, fails to prepare students properly to deal effectively with complex communicative situations or to react critically to global discourses.

Contemporary pedagogical scholarship encourages more interactive and student-centered approaches bridging language learning and critical thinking development (Othman et al., 2015; Presdyasmara & Anam, 2023). Among them, online debate forums have been hailed for their potential to model reasoning, foster evidence-based argumentation, and facilitate more in-depth content engagement (Liu et al., 2015; Scott, 2008). These forums, such as Kialo Edu and Flipgrid, afford asynchronous and synchronous spaces where students take positions, critique counterarguments, and co-construct knowledge through language. Despite growing global utilization, these forums remain underutilized in Algerian EFL classrooms.

In response to this deficit, online discussions are, in this research, analyzed as pedagogical instruments for building critical thinking in Algerian EFL classrooms. It is grounded on Ennis's (1993) critical thinking model that assigns the same level of importance to cognitive abilities—e.g., clarifying, reasoning, and evaluating—as to character traits like open-mindedness, truth-seeking, and fair-mindedness. This is because the two enable the thorough examination of learners' argumentative practice and epistemic participation.

Research Problem

Despite growing awareness of the importance of critical thinking, Algerian classrooms are still bound by teacher-centered teaching and memorization, with limited room for learner independence or reflective thought. Moreover, digital technologies—while growing in availability—are not utilized in ways that would promote analytical and evaluative thinking. While online debate websites have gained popularity worldwide as a way to encourage critical discussion, their pedagogical use in the Algerian context is relatively unexplored.

Scope of the Study

This research is aimed at Algerian secondary and tertiary level EFL classrooms where English is being learned as a foreign language. This research explores how online debate

platforms such as Kialo Edu, Flipgrid, or their substitutes can be used for enhancing critical thinking among students. This research does not involve quantitative measures or generalizable questionnaires but uses qualitative interpretations of the existing research and relevant literature..

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the utilization and potential of online debate platforms in developing critical thinking among Algerian EFL learners.

Research Questions

1. How can online debate platforms be practically integrated into Algerian EFL classrooms to promote critical thinking?
2. What types of critical thinking may be developed through online debate-based activities?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of integrating digital debates in language instruction?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the pedagogical prospects of online debate platforms within the Algerian EFL context
2. To identify the types of critical thinking processes supported through online debating platforms
3. To provide pedagogical solutions to the use of debate-based activities in language classrooms
4. To raise awareness of the integration of critical thinking in language education in Algeria

Methodology

This study pursues a descriptive-analytical method with a specific focus on qualitative interpretations of the existing research and relevant literature. The analysis is based on Ennis's model of critical thinking in order to enable the researcher to evaluate reasoning and argumentation from the students pedagogically. Instead of mixed methods, the research privileges interpretive depth and contextual specificity with the hope of providing insight for classroom practice and for future research.

2. Effective Use of Online Debate Platforms in Algerian EFL Classrooms

This section discusses current research on the use of online debate platforms to promote critical thinking in Algerian EFL classrooms. It begins with an overview of the benefits of asynchronous debates, followed by identifying contextual barriers and how literature and teacher beliefs inform classroom uptake. By synthesizing these strengths, this review illustrates the current deficit of empirical implementations of online debate tools in classrooms and provides a prelude to our study. Lastly, it tries to justify how online debates can assist in bridging the gap between pedagogical ideals and classroom practice.

One of the primary arguments in the literature indicates how efficient asynchronous online debates are at enhancing the learners' critical thinking. Liu, Wu, and Shieh (2015) demonstrated that EFL students participating in asynchronous debate forums had more developed critical thinking as well as writing skills compared to students in traditional teaching. Their research demonstrated that not only did students enhance their ability to organize arguments using evidence, but they also became more confident in writing essays, which implies that debate platforms promote higher-level cognitive involvement (Liu et al., 2015). This conclusion provides a strong theoretical foundation for implementing debate technology in Algerian schools.

While the potential of digital debates is evident, their practical application in the classroom setting in Algeria is beset with challenges. Baghoussi (2021) identifies overcrowded classrooms and an exam-driven curriculum as considerable challenges to the development of critical thinking in secondary EFL classrooms. English teachers are inclined to adhere to direct instruction and content-driven methods with limited space for learner-centered tasks (Baghoussi, 2021). The gap between instructional ideals and teaching realities, therefore, continues to be a barrier to using digital debates in more than a theoretical sense.

Examination of literature-based instructional approaches also provides a better insight into how language and critical thinking are related. Ouhiba (2022) found that using literary texts in first-year university classes encouraged students to practice higher-order thinking, i.e., interpretation and inference, alongside developing their linguistic ability. Students responded positively to these interventions, and teachers noted significant development in reflective judgment and advanced reasoning (Ouhiba, 2022). This series of studies contributes to the online discussion literature by emphasizing the importance of reflective material in cultivating critical thinking.

Perceptions are important to examine. Benmouhoub (2024) discovers that Algerian EFL teachers theorize critical thinking as reflective judgment, integrating it informally into pedagogical practice. Students, however, recognize its significance for both academic and life-long learning (Benmouhoub, 2024). Although such perceptions are congruent with theoretical models, they have yet to be coupled with the systematic application of critical tasks such as debate—indicative of both openness and a need for structured pedagogical models.

Despite awareness of the importance of critical thinking, the literature reveals a long-standing disconnection between promise and practice. Baghoussi (2021) indicates that although educators and policymakers advocate for critical thinking, practical constraints—such as time shortage and traditional pedagogy—constitute a barrier to its daily application. Therefore, although the disposition is there, structural barriers reduce the efficacy of activities like online debates, with critical thinking being underdeveloped in many classrooms.

Examination of multimodal learning shows more. Bougherara and Khaldi (2021) commented that though instructors often see the promise of multimodal instruction for critical thinking, classroom implementation is inconsistent. Students, in addition, struggle with advanced thinking about multimodal texts. This confirms the premise that even when digital or diverse content is potentially rich, its pedagogical use may require additional explicit instructional design and scaffolding.

Although online media provides flexible opportunities, in-class debate is the foundation. Hattani (2021) showed classroom debates enhance argumentation, questioning, explanation, and reasoning among students. This strand of research shows that the genre of debate itself, regardless of medium, is effective. It therefore necessitates careful translation of these practices to online media to preserve their cognitive worth.

Online engagement other than debate also precipitates critical thinking. Louahala (2023) found that online engagement for the purposes of intercultural communicative competence not only improved the language proficiency of learners but also cultivated awareness, tolerance, and reflective thinking. These findings confirm the perspective that online debate websites, if culturally rich in design, can create more profound critical engagement.

In general, the literature indicates that asynchronous online debate forums have a high potential for cultivating critical thinking in Algerian EFL contexts. However, systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, exam-oriented pedagogy, and irregular exposure to digital or multimodal content persist. In contrast, the positive impact of literary activities, classroom debates, and intercultural communication reveals the possibilities of well-designed digital debate projects. This synthesis underscores the need for a study that evaluates how online debate websites can be realistically implemented in Algerian classrooms to combat the long-standing gap between critical thinking ambition and language teaching reality.

The next section will build on these findings to comment on specific features of debate sites, propose an instructional design model suitable for Algerian EFL contexts, and develop the study's research questions.

3. Critical Thinking Skills Developed through Digital Debate-Based Activities

This section discusses, in specific, the critical thinking skills that can be developed through digital debate-based activities, with some backing from different studies conducted within both Algerian and international settings. Through the analysis of quantitative data and participants' own views, the section will reveal the complex benefits of debate, not only as a communicative activity but also as a structured learning activity. These results provide theoretical and pedagogic foundations for integrating debate into EFL student classrooms, reinforcing its role in serving analytical, evaluative, and problem-solving skills of students. Furthermore, the debate throws light on teaching practices that optimize the impact of debate structures and addresses prevalent issues of implementation.

Multiple studies consistently confirm that debate exercises offline and online build a broad array of critical thinking skills. Among these, the ability to assess information, manage one's own thought, and think critically about arguments are consistently listed as key benefits (Tiasadi, 2020). These are not just byproducts of participation but products of the dialogic setting of debate, through which students must listen actively, synthesize opposing arguments, and reconstruct ideas. Students within such learning environments report metacognitive awareness and critical thinking gains, substantiating the argument that debate enhances more profound, independent thinking.

Some studies also point towards the appropriation of argumentation and problem-solving skills as learners navigate debate exercises. Presdyasmara and Anam (2023) found

that students at all achievement levels gained more confidence in constructing coherent arguments and refining claims. Debate success appears not just to be the product of knowledge of content, but also questioning assumptions and exposure to a variety of perspectives. Likewise, Field (2017) notes that structured models of debate, especially those embedded in guided instruction, yield higher intrinsic motivation and prolonged critical thinking.

Backing this up, Othman et al. (2015) present evidence that critical thinking skills such as reasoning, explanation, and questioning are highly developed following formal debate competitions. In their study, scaffolding and collaboration were the leading roles, showing that debate, when located in a supportive environment, allows learners to move beyond mechanical mind understanding. The social dimension of debate, wherein students negotiate meaning with others, appears to be a key mechanism for converting passive knowledge into active thinking.

Research also indicates that debate allows the growth of information acquisition and research skills. Debate-based students are often required to find, evaluate, and integrate external sources when building argumentation (Scott, 2008). This process not only increases their ability to make decisions regarding the validity of information but also strengthens independence and intellectual curiosity. When combined with digital tools that provide greater access to information, debate is a means of achieving information literacy together with critical literacy.

Interpersonal and communication competencies also come in the form of overarching benefits of teaching through debates. Scott (2008) and Presdyasmara and Anam (2023) are observed to highlight that students improve their ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, and group communication by continually engaging in debates. These are not merely abilities necessitated by academic development but for average societal interaction, especially in digitally-driven and multilingual learning contexts. Debate thus does not isolate itself but aids holistic communicative development.

Despite such strengths, unfamiliarity with debate structure could decrease students' initial performance. In several cases, like Presdyasmara and Anam (2023), students had expressed initial confusion over debate structure and requirement. This suggests the need for intentional instructional direction, whereby teachers present debate mechanics in explicit terms and help students navigate the transition from passive reception to active argumentation construction. Without this initial support, the benefits of debate may remain inaccessible to less confident or lower-achieving students.

The role of debate in language education is further illuminated in Hattani's (2021) work on communicative language teaching. According to his findings, in-class debate promotes a variety of higher-order skills including reasoning, negotiation, and explanation. These are not merely byproducts of conversation but rather intentional outcomes of pedagogical design. This is echoed with more general learning goals that put critical thinking at the forefront of 21st-century learning, especially where it is needed in contexts like Algeria where traditional language learning has a tendency to overlook these skills.

Chen et al. (2024) contribute to this conversation through studies of the cognitive depth of students participating in argument map-supported online debates. From their work, they observe cases of progressive gains in students' ability to identify, understand, assess, and

construct arguments. Of special interest is the discovery of patterns of processing that indicate debate does not simply elicit critical responses but also influences the way that learners internalize and use thinking strategies. This research supports the careful crafting of digital debate environments according to students' cognitive development processes.

Similarly, Naqia, As'ari, and Suaidi (2023) demonstrate that students undertaking debate hone research, argumentation, and problem-solving abilities. The participants in this study demonstrated the ability to synthesize facts, formulate key issues, and come up with viable solutions. Such discoveries vindicate the argument that debate not only trains logical thinking but also ethical and pragmatic judgment, which is a capability demanded of global citizenship and intellectual endeavors.

Considered as a whole, these studies highlight that debate instruction develops a broad framework of critical thinking competencies: from argumentation and analysis to self-regulation and evaluation. Regardless of face-to-face or virtual formats, debate engages significant interaction with language, thinking, and dialogue. This convergence of cognitive, communicative, and interpersonal development renders debate an invaluable pedagogical tool in Algerian EFL instruction.

This multi-faceted skills-and-dispositions model is graphically synthesised in Figure 1, which presents a contextualised implementation of Ennis's (1993) critical thinking framework in digital debate environments in EFL contexts. The figure depicts how structured debate activities facilitate cognitive skills (e.g., clarifying meaning, evaluating claims, constructing arguments) and critical dispositions (e.g., being open-minded, intellectually humble, and fair-minded), all of which must be facilitated for fostering autonomous and reflective language learners.

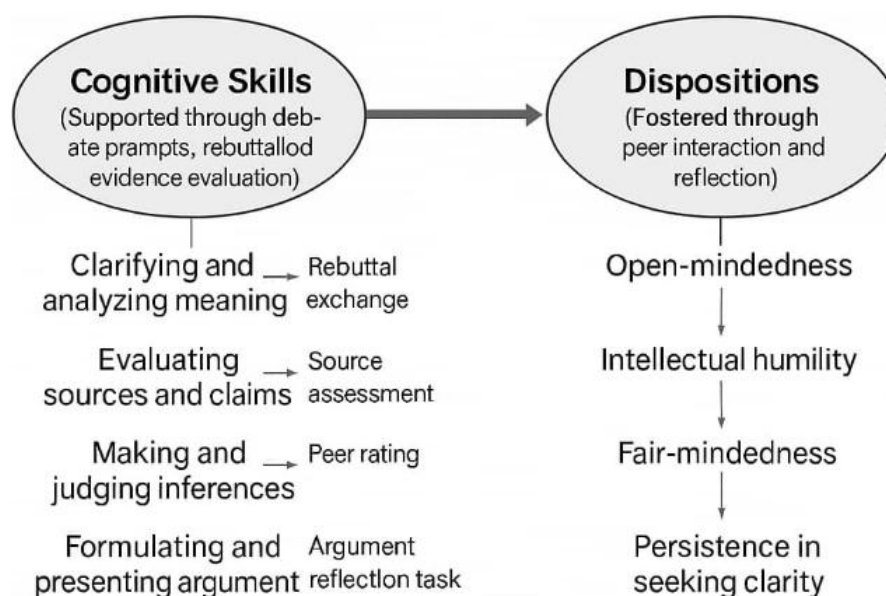


Figure 1: Ennis's Critical Thinking Framework Applied to Digital Debate in EFL Contexts. Adapted from Ennis, R. H. (1993). *Critical Thinking Assessment. Theory Into Practice*, 32(3), 179-186.

As Figure 1 indicates, the context of debate engages Ennis's cognitive and dispositional dimensions. Online environments' design (e.g., feedback, peer review, and grading) encourages students to express meaning, subject counterarguments to test, and construct well-organized argumentation. Meanwhile, peer visibility and instructor feedback encourage dispositions of fairness, open-mindedness, and intellectual persistence. Double scaffolding extends the applicability of Ennis's model in developing dense critical thinking EFL contexts.

In summary, computer debate activities offer deep, multilayered gains in the development of critical thinking skills in EFL students. They promote intensive engagement with ideas, hone the analytical and evaluative ability of learners, and render them more proficient in arguing and holding ground. But for the realization of such gains, these activities need to be subjected to organized direction, careful embedding, and pedagogical openness. As the Algerian education system attempts to move beyond rote memorization and teacher-led instruction, the incorporation of debate into online learning environments might be an optimal approach to cultivating intellectually autonomous, critically aware learners. Pedagogical approaches and design principles to employ online debate platforms in the Algerian EFL classroom will be discussed in the following section.

4. Pedagogical Implications of Incorporating Digital Debates in Language Instruction

Basing the arguments on the previous discussion of the critical thinking ability developed through debate-based learning, this part of the presentation moves attention to the pedagogical significance of using digital debates in language teaching. With more teachers integrating dynamic and student-oriented approaches, understanding how digital debate systems can be coordinated with language teaching objectives becomes very important. This part explains how debates enrich language learning, cognitive engagement, and online competence and acknowledges the possible difficulties of implementation. Drawing on current publications and empirical studies, it maps directions for integrating digital debates into pedagogical planning effectively, particularly in EFL contexts such as Algeria.

Digital technology has irrevocably revolutionized the landscape of language learning. Their implementation has increased access to resources, made learning environments more diversified, and brought with them new pedagogical approaches (Obidovna & Rustambekovich, 2024). Of all of these, debate as a pedagogic approach stands out as one that utilizes these technologic advancements to foster linguistic and cognitive growth. Nonetheless, although promising prospects are presented by digital tools, their pedagogical utility hinges critically on deliberate design and congruence with learning aims.

Argumentation itself has been found to possess high potential in the development of second language fluency speaking ability. To el Majidi et al. (2021), contentious students experienced impressive improvement in fluency, accuracy, cohesion, and lexical density. These indicate that debating provides a communicative context in which students are compelled to think under pressure, express themselves well, and build meaning, all of which lead to more competent and accomplished language use. Such results bolster the argument that incorporating debate into language teaching is not just an addition, but an educationally sound practice which addresses essential linguistic skills.

In addition to speaking competence, pedagogy of debate also helps in learning writing skill, particularly argumentative writing. Majidi, de Graaff, and Janssen (2023) found that

students who participated in debate-based writing practice wrote more effective argumentative essays compared to their peers in traditional writing classes. The polite engagement of debate—where arguments have to be defended based on evidence and counterarguments answered in a proper manner—is similar to the expectations of academic writing. Thus, the use of debate as a writing scaffolding tool allows students to practice argumentative structures verbally prior to adopting the same abilities to written forms.

But including digital debates should consider the cognitive elements of learning. Klimova and Pikhart (2023) recommend that although online learning settings can support cognitive development, they are not necessarily superior to traditional methodologies. Their findings suggest that texts in print, for example, can be more cognitively beneficial under certain conditions. Pedagogical decisions should therefore not favor technology for the sake of novelty but should be guided by a concern for the ways digital and nondigital modes are shaping learning processes. Integrating multisensory methods and feedback possibilities are a few of the means through which digital debate exercises can be made cognitively stimulating.

Incorporating debates also fulfills broader educational purposes, such as the development of argumentation competence and critical awareness. Pardo and Téllez (2012) argue that debates enable students to labor with matters of social significance while acquiring language in a natural environment. This dual function of debates—as linguistic and socio-cognitive resources—positions them as a productive method of fostering communicative competence and active citizenship. Placed in culturally authentic and real-world issues, debate is a means of transformative learning in which students have the opportunity to question their assumptions and present well-informed views.

Though all these advantages are present, difficulties arise, and one of them is being overly reliant on information and communication technologies. Bakla (2024) suggests digital minimalism for language learning, where teachers are encouraged to engage more intentionally with technology. Overuse of online interaction can potentially contribute to cognitive overload, lowered attention, and lowered well-being for students. Therefore, the introduction of debate platforms should be accompanied with careful pacing and clear objectives so that the technology enhances learning and is not sacrificed for it. The position highlights the essentiality of moderation and deliberate inclusion while organizing online debate activities.

Moreover, digital debates demand some level of digital literacy on the part of teachers as well as students. Dudeney, Hockly, and Pegrum (2013) provide a comprehensive handbook on establishing digital literacies in language learning and emphasize the importance of educating learners to navigate online platforms, critically assess digital materials, and communicate competently in online spaces. Incorporating digital literacy in debate instruction not only prepares students for scholarly life but also equips them with essential skills for professional and civic participation in a rapidly digitalizing world.

In addition to technical proficiency, design of debate tasks should incorporate multimedia learning principles. Liontas (2013) espouses cautious use of multimedia resources for language instruction, and it's the suggestion that visual, auditory, and textual input can be applied to enhance comprehension and retention when adequately integrated. This can include the use of infographics, short video questions, or interactive argument maps to support

students' understanding and expression of sophisticated ideas in digital debate contexts. These multimodal tools can enhance debate preparation and support multiple forms of expression.

The educational potential of debate extends from student individual skill acquisition to motivation and classroom culture. Carefully planned debates, when well implemented, have the potential to act as a stimulus to the classroom as a learning community of active students who interact, question, and build knowledge collaboratively. As the foregoing discussions have revealed, this interactive dialogue fosters critical thinking, metacognition, and social interaction. Teachers planning digital debates therefore must assume facilitator and moderator roles to foster inclusive learning environments where all voices are heard and valued.

In short, the inclusion of digital debates in language pedagogy is of immense pedagogical potential, if only motivated by evidence-led practice and contextual awareness. These activities not only serve to improve language competence and critical thinking but also encourage valuable digital and social competencies. However, effective incorporation requires more than technological availability—it demands pedagogical purposefulness, scaffolded teaching, and a penetrating understanding of learners' needs. As Algerian EFL education progresses in the context of digital global trends, embracement of debate pedagogy can be a powerful agent for change and learner agency. Challenges, constraints, and practicalities for deploying digital debate platforms in Algerian EFL contexts will be discussed in the next section.

5. Discussion

Implications derived from the literature covered are that online debate sites have great potential in cultivating critical thinking in Algerian EFL classrooms. Learners acquired argumentation skills, analyzing evidence, problem-solving, and reflective thinking. The interactive process of online debates also facilitated communication and negotiation, resulting in greater learner autonomy and participation. These findings align with the general imperatives of learner-centered instruction and answer global calls for education innovation through digital technologies.

By participating in synchronous and asynchronous discussions, students practiced constructing claims, considering perspectives, and developing sound arguments—an interaction process mirroring actual language production. This suggests that computer debate not only improves cognitive abilities but also enhances pragmatic and discourse-level competence in English. Remarkably, observable exposure to others' responses allowed learners to assess argument quality and adapt thought, thereby enhancing metacognitive growth.

Furthermore, by Ennis's model, not only were students found to have employed surface-level thinking but also critical dispositions of fairness-mindedness, open-mindedness towards other opinions, and persistence in seeking to get clear. These findings indicate that systematic debate exercises can be used for the development of the skill as well as disposition for critical thinking, towards an integrated pedagogy of EFL teaching.

6. Limitations

A few limitations do reduce the scope and broad applicability of these findings, however. The descriptive-analytical design, while convenient for abundant qualitative data collection, precludes statistical tests or causality. Further, digital inequality still persists in

Algerian schools and universities, limiting access to stable internet access and digital tools—especially in rural and marginalized areas. The varying levels of digital literacy among teachers and lack of professional programs in digital pedagogy could also restrict the effective usage of such tools.

Moreover, resistance to pedagogical innovation at the institutional and cultural level may discourage the adoption of debate-based methods. Debates are in most cases still perceived as adversarial, and education policy that emphasizes rote memorization over argument or reason is not debate-friendly. Such systemic barriers must be addressed in the case that integration is to be meaningful and durable.

7. Recommendations

To overcome such difficulties and promote wider usage, the following are suggested recommendations. Firstly, in-service training for teachers and teacher education curricula should incorporate debate pedagogy and digital literacy modules. Training of teachers on hosting and facilitating online debates is the pre-requirement to their success.

Secondly, schools and policymakers should invest in technology infrastructure at the top of the agenda to provide students with an equal opportunity to access online resources. Pilot programs using best practice in digital debate may be undertaken to demonstrate feasibility and impact.

Thirdly, language syllabi would have to be redirected towards including critical thinking outcomes, explicitly integrating debate-based activities against communicative competence. Cross-curricular collaboration between the language and civics teachers could also strengthen students' learning of analytical and argument skills.

Finally, future studies must employ experimental or mixed-methods designs to measure the effect of online debate on student learning and motivation in diverse learning contexts. Inter-study comparisons between ages and regions would provide more information about its scalability and adaptability.

8. Conclusion

This research brings to light the pedagogical potential of online debating forums as a vehicle for the development of critical thinking skills in Algerian EFL classrooms. Through the breaking of traditional models of language teaching, online debates establish vital 21st-century skills and enhance linguistic and cognitive capacity. By the proper infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum integration, debate classes can alter the dynamics of the class, prepare students to think autonomously, and bridge the gap between classroom language acquisition and communication in real-world environments.

The study demonstrated that students who engaged in online debates not only acquired argumentation and reasoning but also began internalizing critical dispositions of open-mindedness and intellectual humility—central components of Ennis's model. This suggests that the development of critical thinking through debate is not confined to skills development but extends to the realm of learner identity and epistemic practice.

While digital debates are challenging to implement, particularly in low-resource environments, the advantages that have been identified in this research provide a strong argument for their integration into Algerian EFL pedagogy. This research is an addition to ongoing discussion of digital pedagogy in EFL learning and reaffirms the need to revisit class practice in order to address students' realities as modern learners. By the use of reflective speech, critical thinking, and technical support, online debates have the potential to produce an even more engaged, articulate, and critically aware generation of EFL learners.

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