CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS AT THE POPULAR UNIVERSITY OF CESAR

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Abstract

The development of critical thinking skills within the framework of language teacher training gains an important value as a transversal axis in the new curricular designs, not only for strengthening communication skills, but also their applicability from the language itself and its functionality in the life of the professionals that society demands. Therefore, we sought to understand the importance of developing critical thinking skills for learning English as a foreign language in Language Teacher Training Programs at the Popular University of Cesar. Based on what proposed by Albert (2007) in the procedure of the phenomenological investigation, allowing inquiring from the voices of the social actors: teachers and students, teachers in training, through research interviews and questionnaires designed for this purpose, together with to the documentary review. The analysis of the findings made it possible to determine that, even when teachers and students give great significance to information search, reflection and analysis skills, they do not so much with others such as argumentation, interpretation, setting positions, decision making and contributing ideas. Additionally, this significance remains in theory and intention, since it is not transferred to pedagogical practice with strategies and activities that promote and activate critical thinking skills for the effectiveness of learning English as a foreign language in higher education, which requires go beyond the grammatical and phonetic, to achieve an efficient communication of ideas.

Keywords: critical thinking skills; language training programs; English learning.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, learning English as a foreign language has been a challenge for Latin American university students in general, being easy to master for some, but for others it has become an obstacle in their academic performance. At the university level, the mastery of a foreign language such as English is a very necessary requirement, since it allows accessing, deepening and updating knowledge in various areas of knowledge, as expressed by Vizmanos et al. (2010), because it is the language of greatest use in articles in specialized national and international publications.

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen its learning, since it is not only about learning a language per se, but also about acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes that make it possible to communicate in that

language, actively participate in activities and events, interact with specialists in areas of interest, contribute opinions and take positions, learn about other cultures and socialize in a language such as English, which is widely accepted by the scientific, economic and cultural community worldwide.

In that sense, the interest in learning it attracts many, including those with a desire to learn in order to teach.

It should be noted that during the process of learning and acquiring a foreign language, according to Ussa (2011), "the construction of logical thinking, the development of imagination and creativity are involved; such learning helps to restructure thinking and contributes to the creation of communication links with the sociocultural environment of the new language" (p. 109). In the above, some of the elements involved in learning a second language are observed, however, critical thinking skills, such as reflection, analysis, argumentation, problem solving and evaluation, are equally important when learning and developing knowledge in a given context. Thus, learning English with a practical and contextual sense makes it possible to think in that language, to question and argue ideas and not only to speak it in a memorized and grammatical way.

In order to understand how communicative skills contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in students of English as a foreign language in the Bachelor's degree program in Spanish and English at the Universidad Popular del Cesar, this research was developed, considering the observation of the implementation process of planning the learning of English as a foreign language. For this purpose, the systematic observation of what was planned by the teachers was considered: cognitive strategies, didactic sequences, pedagogical mediators, instructional resources, learning environment and classroom context, as key elements for the development of communicative reading and writing skills and how these promote and encourage processes of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation, typical of critical thinking, in terms of a meaningful and contextualized learning of English.

Based on the above, the study based its epistemological foundations on the postulates of Ennis (1985; 2011) and Glase (1984) in their works on the dimensions of critical thinking, as well as Paul & Elder (2015) who approach its development from the formative aspect. From the methodological point of view, the guidelines of the qualitative paradigm were considered under the hermeneutic phenomenological approach of Heidegger (2003), guided by the phases proposed by Martínez (2008) for the development of the research procedure that allowed delving into the experiences and opinions of the social actors involved to understand the relational dynamics of learning the communicative competences of the English language with the skills of critical thinking.

1. THEORETICAL REFERENCES

For a researcher, resorting to a literature review is essential because it allows him/her to go deeper into the subject of study based on previous research and specialized authors, enabling the construction of a frame of reference that supports the research. In this regard, Piñero & Rivera (2013) state that the literature review should be conducted in a critical manner and not as a descriptive synthesis of what has

been investigated, but rather it should serve the researcher to build relationships on the contributions of what has been reviewed.

With this vision, this section gathers the product of this literature review structured in three parts: Research Background, Theoretical Bases and Legal Bases, which are presented below as theoretical support for this study, in order to deepen with a reflective sense in critical thinking skills and English as a foreign language in undergraduate students.

A synthesis of previous research work on the subject of the study is presented, as a result of the review of graduate research, as well as scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals related to critical thinking skills and communicative competence in English as a foreign language. All this, in international, national and local contexts that allowed to build the current scenario of development of research similar to the one undertaken to determine its purposes, methodologies, findings and contributions to knowledge.

International Background

As a first antecedent, we have the work of Albertiris & Cañizares (2021) entitled Communicative competence in foreign language in the process of enculturation of sciences: preliminary study, which was presented as a refereed article in the Multidisciplinary Scientific Journal UNESUM-Ciencias, of the Universidad Estatal del Sur de Manabí in Ecuador. The authors aimed to contribute to the development of the communicative competence in foreign language of Science students from a gradual process of insertion in communicative practices of disciplinary genres at Ignacio Agramonte University of Camagüey in Cuba.

For this purpose, the researchers assumed the development of communicative competence in foreign language in the process of enculturation of sciences, which served as a basis for a didactic perspective leading to a better planning and organization of the teaching-learning process that makes possible the development of communicative competence in specific contexts in university students.

Methodologically, the research was guided by the precepts of qualitative methodology under the communicative approach, the sociocultural model of teaching and learning in its integral, collaborative and interactionist dimension, as well as the integrated learning of curricular content and foreign language (Estaire & Zanón, 1990; García, 2015; Jarpa, 2013; Parodi, 2008; Pérez, 2007; Roca, Valcárcel & Verdu, 1990). We worked with the design of a simplified theoretical model in a didactic sequence that included tasks formulated around science contents with 57 undergraduate students of Science Education majors (Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, Chemistry, Biology, Biology-Geography), with 50% in their first year of studies, below A1 according to levels of the Common Frame of Reference.

As results, Albertiris & Cañizares (2021) presented, in addition to the simplified theoretical model of communicative competence focused on the learning of science contents, an exploratory instrument to evaluate the progressiveness of the students' communicative activity in the process of insertion in science.

It should be noted that the instrument designed by these researchers considered nine indicators for evaluating the progress of communicative competence: comprehension, interaction and communication;

exploration; description; interpretation and transposition; inference; argumentation; writing; evaluation and reflection; these indicators are directly related to critical thinking skills, evidencing their close link to the learning of communicative competence. Other contributions of this research, through the application of the proposed model, was the significant progress of the participating students in at least four of the processes that were the object of initial evaluation, considering the indicators described in the designed instrument, taking into account the complexity of the tasks and the low level of English language of the participants.

A second reference is the work of Cangalaya (2020), who presented an article entitled Habilidades del pensamiento crítico en estudiantes universitarios a través de la investigación, product of a research work for the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, Peru, published in Desde el Sur, Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales of the Universidad Científica del Sur, Peru. The article approaches in a theoretical way the concept of critical thinking, from authors such as Facione (1990), Paul and Elder (2003) and Curiche (2015) among others, understanding it as a capacity that makes possible in the person to improve thinking in itself, from processes of acquisition and understanding of knowledge, as well as introspection.

The article proposes, as a strategy for the development of critical thinking in the classroom, the realization of student research work that stimulates reflection within their own life context, since the recognition of this has a direct relationship with the skills of this type of thinking. The author concludes that a work of university research instruments the student for the development of the characteristics of a critical thinker, for which the most convenient thing is to progressively grow from the basic structures of thought to intellectual models.

The contribution of Cangalaya's work (2020) revolves around the affirmation of research as a suitable process for the development of critical thinking skills such as argumentation, analysis, problem solving and evaluation within their own context with problems with which they feel identified or similar to their own reality. The above allowed reflecting on the relevance of research processes as a strategy for the development of critical thinking skills in teachers in training, allowing them to investigate, analyze, evaluate and argue about content in English in order to exercise the communicative competence of that language as a foreign language.

The third antecedent, is the research of Núñez, Ávila, and Olivares (2017) through the article El desarrollo del pensamiento crítico en estudiantes universitarios por medio del Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas, published in the Revista Iberoamericana de Educación Superior, in the context of a research work at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The purpose of this study was oriented to determine the benefit of Problem Based Learning (PBL) in the development of the generic competencies of critical thinking. For this purpose, methodologically, a mixed quantitative and qualitative method was used, which included a quantitative evaluation in pre-test and post-test and an evaluation with a qualitative rubric during the intervention in a group of 27 first semester students of Introduction to Nutrition and Dietetics of the Bachelor's Degree in Nutrition, in a private university in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.

As instruments for data collection, they used the individual generic competencies questionnaire, critical thinking section adapted from Olivares et al. (2013), as well as an observation grid for critical thinking skills, from Facione (1990). The results indicated that the activities developed under the PBL pedagogical technique had a positive effect on the development of skills related to the judgment of a specific situation, with objective and subjective data. It was evidenced that working in the classroom considering classroom work using novel techniques allows involving and integrating the group of students, which favors the participation of all. By presenting a problem in the classroom setting, students have the opportunity to develop important learning skills, such as critical thinking, through the search for solutions to the problems presented.

The above reveals the valuable contribution of this work to the purposes of this research, since it highlights the importance of working with problem situations that lead university students to think, reflect, analyze and question what happens, as well as to value the available resources and thus be able to seek alternative solutions, with which they would be developing critical thinking skills. It is worth noting the coincidence with the previous antecedent in the use of problem situations that allow motivating and promoting critical thinking skills in students in the search for solutions.

Similarly, Rubena and Fernández (2015) in their research Critical thinking and teaching modality in a course of English as a foreign language, presented at the Universidad Simón Bolívar, Venezuela, and published as a refereed article in the Journal Paradigma of the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, set out to determine the influence of the face-to-face and blended learning study modality on the acquisition of critical thinking skills in students of a course of English as a foreign language (EFL) at the aforementioned university.

For this purpose, they developed a study under the quantitative tradition of exploratory scope, with a pre-post-test design with a control group, with whom they worked with the Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test instrument (Ennis and Weir, 1985) to measure critical thinking skills considering the aforementioned modalities: face-to-face and semi-face-to-face. Thus, the experimental group received semi-face-to-face classes, one week in the classroom with traditional materials and strategies, and another week where they carried out autonomous learning activities online, specially designed for the development of critical thinking. On the other hand, the control group received face-to-face classes all the time with traditional materials and strategies. The results showed a very low performance, similar in both groups, before and after the experimentation, with little variability. For the researchers, these findings allowed them to conclude that the study modality did not have a significant influence on learning.

Esta investigación aportó el reconocimiento de teorías sobre el aprendizaje del inglés junto al desarrollo de habilidades del pensamiento crítico, a través de la aplicación de estrategias en modalidad educativa semipresencial. Cabe destacar, que esta modalidad es la que poco a poco ha ido ganando espacios a nivel mundial, sobre todo en la actualidad en contexto de pandemia y post-pandemia. En este sentido la presente investigación se nutre teóricamente y de forma general de este trabajo referencial.

Antecedentes Nacionales

Como primer antecedente nacional, se presenta el trabajo de Mindiola y Castro (2021) titulado Desarrollo del pensamiento crítico a través de foros de discusión asincrónicos con estudiantes de 8° grado, publicado en la Revista UNIMAR de la Universidad Mariana en Colombia, resultado de la investigación Desarrollo del pensamiento crítico a través de foros de discusión asincrónicos con estudiantes de 8° grado. La indagación, tuvo como objetivo contribuir al desarrollo de las habilidades de pensamiento crítico, para lo cual trabajó con autores como Facione (2007), Shakirova (2007), Ortíz (2015) y López (2013) para el desarrollo de las categorías de estudio.

La metodología seguida, estuvo orientada por la tradición cualitativa con enfoque socio crítico bajo los lineamientos del método de Investigación Acción. La población estuvo conformada por 30 estudiantes de 8° grado, con quienes se usaron diferentes técnicas de recolección de información como lluvia de ideas, encuestas y diarios de clase. La propuesta se desarrolló bajo la modalidad de trabajo académico en casa, en virtud de la situación pandémica, razón por la cual se recurrió a las redes sociales como WhatsApp y Facebook.

The authors report positive results in the development of critical thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation, explanation and self-regulation through the design and implementation of asynchronous discussion forums. Thus, the conclusions revolved around affirming that the ICT-supported strategy was an effective means for the promotion of skills such as reflection and the construction of knowledge to provide answers to the situations raised in the discussion forums.

As a contribution, the importance of using innovative strategies and resources that interest and motivate students in academic work, promoting the development of critical thinking skills is evident. Thus, teachers have in social networks, supported by Information and Communication Technologies, tools that can be allies of learning beyond their communicational role.

A second national antecedent is the research work by Yepes (2021) entitled Design and implementation of micro-curricular as a strategy for the development of communicative competence in foreign language: English, presented as a graduate work for the Master's degree in Educational Sciences at the Universidad San Buenaventura Colombia in Medellín. The objective of the researcher was to assess the effects of the design and implementation of micro-curricular as a strategy for the development of communicative competence in the foreign language: English, for eleventh grade students of the I.E. CEFA, in the city of Medellin, Antioquia. The researcher started from observations that led him to assume that the development of communicative competence in English does not correspond to national goals, despite the initiatives and contributions of the Ministry of National Education (MEN) and the Colombia Bilingüe project.

Methodologically, it was based on the qualitative paradigm, with a hermeneutic approach, applying documentary review techniques, together with non-participatory observation and semi-structured interviews that allowed the researcher to characterize how the 26 students who made up the work unit developed the competence, while describing their response to the implementation of a micro-curricular proposal and how the communicative competence in English was developed through it.

From the results of this research, components related to the frequent following of instructions and student participation stand out.

Among the conclusions, it is stated that the positive results in the development of communicative competence in English validate the relevance of the design and implementation of alternative micro-curricular proposals to the traditional ones, where an environment of trust prevails, developed through teamwork, which facilitates the inclusion and development of communicative competence in English as a foreign language. The above was a valuable contribution because it shows the importance of designing, planning and implementing innovative strategies that motivate students in their learning, stimulating the desire to learn in a reasoned and non-memoristic way. Likewise, the relevance of the configuration of the English learning environment and context to make it more stimulating is evidenced.

Another reference is that of Madrid (2020) who presented a refereed article entitled ¿Pensamiento Crítico? Ni lo uno ni lo otro, published in the Revista Ciencias Sociales y Educación, as part of a research at the Fundación Universitaria Claretiana, Uniclaretiana, Medellín, Colombia. In the work, the author reflects on the responsibilities assigned to students, among which stands out the development of their critical thinking, which is contemplated in the General Education Law 115 of 1994 in Colombia. According to the researcher, this has motivated a substantial academic production, which has benefited the improvement of reading comprehension and writing competence levels in short periods of time. However, the aforementioned author states that this improvement is questionable when considering the scores obtained by students in the 2018 PISA tests and the Colombian population's behavior during the mandatory confinement as a result of the pandemic.

The above is for Madrid (2020) demonstrative of a scarce correspondence with this intellectual capacity, since it has been revealed that the progress apparently achieved in the development of critical thinking skills is only observable in the school context, where the student complies with assignments that emphasize topics and do not bring him closer to his own social, historical, cultural, family, economic, religious, ideological and political context, considering that the development of critical thinking is precisely a singular attitude, individual by nature, therefore the work on this should be particularized.

This third national antecedent relates the concern of the present research to the provisions of the General Law of Education, while providing theories on critical thinking derived from a review of specialist authors. However, the most relevant aspect is that it points to the need to work with strategies that allow students to confront the reality of their contexts and not to base themselves only on curricular topics, since this does not allow students to go beyond school assignments, without being able to apply what they have learned in their daily lives, as has been evidenced during the period of confinement due to the pandemic.

Thus, the contemporaneity of the present research is confirmed.

A fourth study in the Colombian scenario that serves as a research reference to build the state of the art, is the work of Flórez & Trujillo (2018) who developed a research entitled Conceptions on critical thinking mediated by ICT and its impact on the teaching-learning process in students in Colombia, within the framework of the Specialization in Pedagogy for the Development of Autonomous Learning of the

National Open and Distance University in Manizales. The research was developed through a documentary analysis that sought to reflect on the impact of the conceptions on critical thinking mediated by ICT in the teaching-learning processes in Colombian students and some international references.

For its development, the authors used main documentary sources, including research conducted at the national level, related to the use of ICT in students in pedagogical practices, as well as the elements for the development of critical thinking and research related to meaningful learning focused on the development of critical thinking mediated by ICT for meaningful learning. We worked under the tradition of qualitative research, with data collection through documentary analysis of bibliographic references based on the topic, using the RAE (Educational Analytical Summary) and a Documentary Review Form as technique and data collection instrument, respectively.

Among the conclusions drawn from the documentary review, the researchers affirmed that developing critical thinking constitutes a great challenge for the Colombian educational context; it was demonstrated that its transversal application to all areas allows forming citizens with competencies for decision making and problem solving in an analytical and argued manner. On the other hand, the relevance of Information and Communication Technologies as tools of significant contribution to the development of critical thinking was evidenced, since they allow working with interesting resources that capture the students' attention and motivate them to reach learning achievements.

This background constituted a relevant contribution because, in addition to offering a theoretical reference on critical thinking, it explains strategies mediated by ICTs for the achievement of meaningful learning in the development of critical thinking skills. This allowed reflecting and reaffirming the significant use of technologies applied to education in the learning of English as a foreign language given the range of digital resources that currently exist, which open a way of analyzing the development of critical thinking skills in teacher training programs in languages at the UPC.

Local Background

From the literature review in the local context of the department of Cesar, we reviewed the work of Redondo and Urbina (2020) entitled Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and the development of writing skills in undergraduate students in Spanish and English, published in the LASIRC Journal, and which is part of an investigation at the Universidad Popular del Cesar, with the objective of determining the relationship between the implementation of VLE and the development of writing skills in a group of students at this university. The authors were guided by the qualitative approach with the objective of seeking how is the relationship between the study categories. In spite of being in development at the time of publication, the authors reported preliminary results that evidenced the importance of the teacher's role as a mediator in the VPAs to achieve progress in the development of writing skills in the population under study.

Although the above research is not directly related to the topics of study of this inquiry, its relevance and contribution has been considered because it addresses a virtual scenario, represented by the AVA, as a means for the development of skills inherent to the learning of English as a foreign language in university students of Bachelor's Degree in Spanish and English, highlighting the educational benefits of

these digital spaces. This is considered relevant when analyzing the elements that are configured in the environment and context of the English as a foreign language class for the development of critical thinking skills of teachers in training, the last of the specific objectives of this research. Additionally, having determined the importance of the teacher's role as mediator in these virtual scenarios is also a valuable input for the specific objectives of this research.

Once the background review was completed, it can be affirmed that it, as a whole, allowed the researcher to have an overview of recent studies on the topics of critical thinking skills and the learning of communicative competence in English as a foreign language. This allowed ratifying the importance of approaching them with an investigative sense and generating a significant contribution to knowledge.

Skills for Critical Thinking Development

Critical thinking is in itself a complex process, which refers to a repertoire of cognitive activities that act in a linked manner (Laskey & Gibson, 1997), which include skills such as problem solving, logical thinking, perspective and perception of ideas, analysis and decision making. In this regard, Guzmán & Sánchez (2006) describe it as "an intentional process of thinking that is oriented to the achievement of a goal" (p. 5), inferring that this type of thinking is the product of the volitional action of the human being to achieve what is proposed, through a series of cognitive tools ranging from recognition and reflection, to decision making for problem solving. Thus, "critical thinking is a human phenomenon that permeates everything and has purpose" (Facione, 2016, p. 8).

Along the same defining line, Curiche (2015) explains that critical thinking (CP) is a self-regulated judgment, being then able to be conceived as a product that is directly linked to interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference. For the development of these skills, it is necessary to take into account conceptual, methodological, criteriological or contextual considerations, where judgment plays an important role. The latter is reaffirmed by Cubas (n.d.) when he defines critical thinking as the ability to reason efficiently, make judgments about it and, based on these, make decisions for the resolution of situations or the achievement of some goal.

Under this line of thought, for the purposes of this study, critical thinking will be assumed both as a complex process that integrates, on the one hand, a range of cognitive skills aimed at the reflection that the person makes on what he/she knows or tries to know, analysis, interpretation, formulation of judgments, synthesis and search for solutions; on the other hand, it will be approached as a product, never finished, since it is developed progressively, deriving from the integrative linkage of these cognitive skills in a whole that instruments the person to undertake actions towards the achievement of purposes set out in a given context.

As a process, Cambers et al. (as cited in Guzmán and Sánchez, 2006) state that the development of critical thinking in the academic setting has two student-centered components. The first has to do with the student's need to develop cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, inference and self-regulation, among others; the second component is represented by the student's motivation to develop a critical disposition that implies being open to multiple approaches to learning. In this sense, critical thinking is

a process that includes skills, dispositions and metacognition, since the person is concerned with understanding how he or she thinks and working to develop that thinking.

Regarding the first component, the skills for the development of critical thinking are defined by Cangalaya (2020) as those specific abilities, constantly stimulated, that can be sufficiently enhanced until they become a true skill. In this sense, for Facione (2016) when referring to cognitive skills, he alludes to those that have to do with interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation; given that the purpose of CP is to generate reflective judgment, this is based on a core of development of the aforementioned skills, which are shown described below in Table 1.

Table 1. Critical thinking skills

Critical Thinking Skills	Description	Activities for its development
Interpretation	Understanding and expressing the meaning of experience, situations, events, judgments, beliefs, rules, procedures	Categorization Decoding of meanings Clarification of concepts
Analysis	Identification of inference relationships between statements, questions, concepts, expressions.	Examination of ideas Detection and observation of arguments
Evaluation	Assessment of established or other representations such as descriptions of people, perceptions, experiences, judgments, beliefs and opinions. Evaluation of inference relationships between statements, questions, concepts, expressions.	Credibility assessment Assessment of claims and quality of arguments. Induction or deduction of reasoning.
Inference	Identification and assurance of the elements required to create reasonable conclusions, form conjectures and hypotheses, consider relevant information and deduce consequences from data, evidence, beliefs, judgments, opinions, concepts, descriptions.	Evidence consultation Conjecture of alternatives Conclusion generation
Explanation	Consistent representation of results	Description of methods and results. Justification of procedures, objectives and conceptual explanations. Argumentation
Self-regulation	Self-aware monitoring employing analysis and evaluation skills.	Self-reflection. Self-correction

Note: critical thinking skills, their description and inherent activities are shown. Taken from Facione (2016).

The table above shows the activities or actions that promote the development of critical thinking skills, where the practice and application of critical thinking in specific situations is required, among which specific competencies such as information search, inventiveness and creativity, as well as communication, stand out. By delving into each of them, it can be inferred that the search for information, associated with the collection of data and facts related with significance to a defined thematic or situation (Alles, 2017), and which requires a source of information, any object or subject

that generates, contains, supplies or transfers another source of information, is vital for the development of CP skills. For the aforementioned author, the development of critical thinking makes use of this competence that conditions the generation and management of knowledge, enabling the formalization of the latter, as it allows him/her to turn to news, research reports, objects or others that allow documenting and accessing information.

The didactics of critical thinking requires active learning for the construction of knowledge. For a student to learn a concept, he/she must first internalize it, make it his/her own in order to be able to then apply it and observe the value of the concept acquired in a given scenario; likewise, the constant assessment of his/her work is necessary, a self-evaluation as an integral part (Núñez, Ávila, & Olivares, 2017). For these authors, the development of critical thinking derives from the gestation of a critical spirit, starting with the awakening of curiosity and the promotion of mental acuity, which leads to reasoning.

In this regard, López (2012) states that the critical spirit is reflected both inside and outside the classroom, where the student stands out and looks curious about different topics and situations, is concerned about the search for relevant information, demonstrates skills in reasoning and argumentation, as well as a willingness and flexibility to be open to new points of view. These characteristics, for Minte & Ibagón (2017) "would prepare people to face a world in permanent change and uncertainty" (p. 189), as it requires a broad, reflective and propositional mind, a creative spirit that foresees the transformations that are required and works accordingly.

Some researchers point to other characteristics that define people with critical thinking, in terms of their approach to specific topics, questions or problems. In this sense, Facione (2016) comments that a person with critical thinking, or propensity to it, can be determined because he or she demonstrates clarity in the approach to questions or concerns, discipline to work with complex issues or situations, thoroughness in the search for relevant information, wisdom in the selection and application of criteria, care in focusing attention on the closest concern, as well as persistence in the face of difficulties.

Metacognition

This term refers to a person's knowledge about his or her own cognitive processes, the results of these processes and any aspect related to them. On the other hand, metacognition is a key word when talking about teaching strategies as it implies thinking about thoughts. This includes the ability to evaluate a task in order to be able to determine the best way to perform it, as well as how to follow up on the work done. Metacognitive strategies seek the integration of new material with previous knowledge (Monereo & Clariana, 1993).

On the basis of the above ideas, it can be inferred that metacognition requires self-awareness and self-knowledge, both of personal abilities and of the characteristics of the task and the strategy. In relation to the personal variables, the subject's awareness and knowledge of himself/herself and of his/her cognitive abilities and limitations. For Monereo & Clariana (ob. cit.), it is developed from the perceptions and understandings that the person has, as a subject who learns and thinks. In this sense, metacognitive procedures refer to the planning, control and evaluation by students of their own cognition; they are a

set of strategies that allow the knowledge of mental processes, as well as the control and regulation of these to achieve certain learning goals.

Zone of Proximal Development

For the development of a dimension of critical thinking and the skills to enhance it, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) was proposed by the Belarusian psychologist Lev Vygotski when he proposed the social character of learning, based on a study of the formation of concepts and different thoughts in the educational context. In this context, Vygotski (2009) used the term zo ped to refer to the place where a child's spontaneous concepts, empirically abundant, however, disorganized, meet the systematization and logic of adult thinking-reasoning. As a result, the weakness of spontaneous thinking-reasoning is compensated by the strength of scientific logic.

In reviewing these approaches, three concepts are proposed as essential points of this theory: activity, mediation and internalization. From Vygotski's point of view (ob. cit.), when we speak of activity we refer to action, understood as social action, in terms of shared social interactions. This has to do with the perspective of meaningful learning, which is rooted in social activity, in shared external experience, in action as something inseparable from representation and vice versa. Hence, this learning theorist is more concerned about the meaning of words than their meaning, because meaning incorporates the meaning of representation and activity together (Vygotski, 2009).

Meaningful Learning

Authentic learning is that which carries a meaning, a sense; any other learning can become purely mechanical, memoristic, which will only allow passing an exam to pass the subject. In this sense, meaningful learning supports the development of critical thinking skills because it is relational, that is, it favors the linking of new knowledge with previous knowledge, with everyday situations, with one's own experience and with real situations in a socialized manner.

Within this framework of ideas, Díaz-Barriga & Hernández (2010) refer that the most outstanding characteristics of meaningful learning are: a) the substantive incorporation of new knowledge in the student's cognitive structure; b) the student's constant effort to relate new knowledge; c) the student learns what is meaningful to him; d) the student is the one who learns and can receive help in his learning difficulties, if he is encouraged to discover the outside world and to incorporate his needs and interests.

For Ausubel, Novak & Hanesian (1983), the fundamental aspect of meaningful learning is that thoughts expressed symbolically in a non-arbitrary way are linked to the person's existing knowledge.

Problem-based learning (PBL)

This learning strategy for the development of cognitive skills consists, according to Núñez, Ávila & Olivares (2017), in the construction of solutions to problematic situations similar to those that occur in everyday life, with the purpose of activating previous knowledge; at the same time, it generates a dialogic relationship that allows to critically evaluate alternatives. In PBL, the teacher is a facilitator of knowledge who guides learning towards the development of reflective thinking during the process of knowledge acquisition. Based on the constructivist theory, it focuses on the student and promotes

learning by doing and experiencing, modifying the mental structure progressively in such a way that critical thinking increases as cognitive skills are developed (Heredia & Sánchez, 2013).

This strategy is based on the proposal of a problem situation, where the teacher establishes dynamics of participation that allow students to become actively involved and thus generate, first, the analysis of the objectives required to find an alternative solution.

The learning of English as a foreign language in teachers in training.

English has become a language of indisputable relevance, as expressed by Chávez, Saltos & Saltos (2017), since through it countless commercial activities, political relations and agreements, alliances and academic studies are developed; likewise, both scientific and technological advances are shared, while actions are generated for culture and entertainment. The aforementioned authors state that one of the main causes can be attributed to globalization, "to the point of being considered today as the universal language of business" (p. 761).

Thus, learning English as a foreign language is for the daily life of a student at any educational level another of the indispensable areas of their training, in response by government agencies in their educational plans to the need for this language for the development of a future professional in any of the areas of knowledge. In this regard, Chávez et al. (2017) state that its learning is a priority from the primary levels of education, developing continuously in subsequent grades up to higher education, a level at which it is estimated that both knowledge and other sensory, cognitive and expressive features should be greater, since the student is in imminent exit to the labor market.

In this sense, since research is an indispensable competence for all students, even more so at the university level, knowing how to express oneself orally and in writing in English is, according to Rivera, Arango, Torres, Salgado, García and Caña (2012), a valuable tool for the development of research and communication skills. The knowledge and mastery of English makes it possible to access the inexhaustible literature and information that exists in that language both physically and digitally, while allowing interaction and socialization through discussion forums, presentations and papers among other academic and scientific events. Therefore, developing communication skills in English as a foreign language is essential for a working world increasingly mediated by Information and Communication Technologies, social networks and academic socialization.

Communicative competence in learning English as a foreign language.

The term communicative competence was coined by Chomsky (1965), making a distinction between grammatical competence and performance. The former refers to the ideal linguistic knowledge of the native speaker's language, and the latter to the practical use of that language in concrete situations. For his part, Hymes (1966) pointed out that Chomsky's linguistic competence lacked the most important linguistic skill: being able to produce and understand utterances that are appropriate in a given context; that is, knowing what to say, where to say it and how to say it. In the literature review, it was possible to verify that, in the acquisition of a foreign language, there are different ways of developing communicative competencies; thus, various authors emphasize their structure and others emphasize the macro skills involved.

Didactic mediators in the English as a foreign language class for the development of critical thinking skills in the teacher trainee.

Currently, English teachers have a variety of pedagogical and didactic mediators that constitute tools to facilitate the learning of this language. In this sense, Camilo, Izquierdo, Pardo, & Izquierdo (2018), explain that a didactic resource is any instrumental means that helps or facilitates learning and makes it possible to achieve the intended learning objectives. Thus, they constitute means by which the educational process is facilitated; therefore, it can be stated that there is a wide variety of elements available to develop teaching materials, as there are also others that are already previously developed to be used by teachers.

In this regard, Madrid (2001) comments that the didactic material constitutes an indispensable element for the proper development of the educational process since, among other determining characteristics for its selection or design, it should bring students closer to the reality of what is to be taught, motivate teaching and learning by using it appropriately and adequately. At the same time, it should facilitate the learning of concepts, the development of procedures and strategies, and the formation of attitudes and values related to what is taught and learned, represent and illustrate what is explained verbally to facilitate teaching and learning, and contribute to a better fixation of learning.

Numerous classifications have been made of didactic mediators. About it Camilo et. al ((2018) comment that from the sensory point of view these tools can be visual, auditory and audio-visual, requiring for their selection a previous assessment of the teacher on the sensory preferences of their students for learning. Likewise, the referenced authors present another classification for didactic media, namely:

- Conventional or traditional didactic media:

- Printed (texts): books, photocopies, newspapers, documents.

- Blackboard, posters, among others.

- Laboratory materials, equipment and instruments.

- Audiovisual media:

- Projectable fixed images: slides, photographs.

- Sound media: cassettes, records, radio programs.

- Visual media: audiovisual montages, films, videos, television programs.

- Based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT):

- Video games, multimedia presentations, virtual or digital encyclopedias or libraries, virtual laboratories, animations, videos and interactive simulations.

- Telematic services: web pages, blogs or virtual notebooks, virtual visits, webquests, didactic units and on-line courses.

Similarly, Madrid (2001) states that the efficiency of academic activities (Table 2) that contribute to the development of English language learning through the use of critical thinking skills has been proven (Table 2).

Table 2. Most frequent academic tasks and the skills that students should progressively develop

Activities	Capabilities and Skills
Master class	Oral comprehension of the content, understanding of the technical terms of each subject area, identification of the markers of oral discourse, ability to take notes on the most important aspects.
Seminars	In addition to the above skills, they require formulating and answering questions, reflecting, comparing, analyzing and expressing ideas and points of view.
Practical exercises oral and written	Understanding instructions, analyzing and comparing activities, problem solving, critiquing approaches, relating theory and practice, theoretical problem solving, critiquing approaches, relating theory and practice, theoretical foundation of practical exercises
Reading of articles and books: summary, critique, presentations	Comprehension of general and specific ideas, understanding of vocabulary, discursive competence: ability to grasp the structure of texts, elements of cohesion and coherence.
Writing essays and reports	Construction of sentences and paragraphs, use of cohesion elements between sentences and paragraphs, coherence between the ideas expressed: introduction, statement of the problem, description of the objectives, control instruments used, results and discussion, conclusions obtained.

Note: the activities that students can perform are shown together with the capacities and skills related to critical thinking that can be developed through these activities. Taken from Madrid (2001).

When analyzing the above table, the significance of this type of activities for English practice is evident; this requires the use of skills such as reflection, analysis, interpretation and decision making to propose, together with self-knowledge that allows students to recognize their own abilities and weaknesses in the context of their academic performance with that language, all of them skills linked to critical thinking.

According to Dalis (2007), didactic materials for foreign language learning should be selected in the educational environment, either because they are visually attractive or because they present a list of relevant topics for those who choose them; in this case, it should be the students according to their interests and preferences in the need to be motivators and drivers of new learning. Likewise, it should contain an appropriate agenda always referring to the learning of the four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discursive and the four macro skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading, all with a focus on communicative efficiency in a given context.

Additionally, it should be assessed whether the didactic material is adequate for the student's profile and the programs should be monitored for their suitability for learning the foreign language. For an adequate program, the student's profile, the number of hours available, the teacher's profile, the articulation between what is seen in each school group should be taken into account; therefore,

designing a program should be conceived as a flexible resource that favors the learning of the foreign language (Dalis, 2007).

On the other hand, there are the so-called computer mediators for learning English, which if well used can be easily linked to critical thinking skills. These constitute novel materials for students today as they are part of a society that is increasingly computerized and open to communications. According to Camilo et al. (2018), the introduction of new technologies in educational institutions is one of the factors of change that is taking place in the teaching and learning process, which is why vital importance is being given to the use of this resource from primary to university education.

The English classroom environment as an element to propitiate the development of critical thinking skills of teachers in training.

 The design of the English classroom environment should be planned to stimulate the development of critical thinking and with it the learning of communicative competence in its components and macro skills. Thus, the planning should propose constant integration in the classroom, through activities of permanent interaction that lead to reflection, analysis, evaluation and decision making, among other thought processes. Activities focused on reading and writing, listening and speaking that encourage dialogue among students and between students and teachers, promoting the learning of English as a foreign language.

In this context, English classes present relevant opportunities for the development of critical thinking since they must confront the student with scenarios of cultural diversity in its maximum exponent, a variety of discourses typical of this diversity, as well as reading and writing processes that seek the student to assume a critical posture to operate with English in genuine situations of use. In addition, understanding, analyzing and accepting different perspectives and perceptions of the world, together with the conscious valuation of differences (Widdowson, 1990).

In that sense, the learning environment "must be complemented with all the elements that are part of this process, from the physical-material to the needs of the students" (López, Domínguez, & Romero, 2017, p. 5).

Authors such as Brandani, Califa, & Magno (2020), reaffirm that the critical use of language involves operations that develop critical thinking given that it implies performing operations of analysis and synthesis on what a subject says in relation to the social group in which he/she performs. It also requires constant evaluation of how a certain word is written or spoken in a given context, linking the role of the speaker in different scenarios. For Kampylis, Punie & Devine (2016), foreign language classes, as well as in native language classes, should become an optimal environment for the development of critical thinking, in that they enable the implementation of the processes of reflection and self-regulation characteristic of thinking in a systematic way, since in the context of these classes the student is taught to think better and to regulate his or her thinking.

In this way, English becomes a tool for students in their lives, not only to communicate, but to do so efficiently through thinking skills that contribute to learning. Teachers, on the other hand, become a sort of cultural mediators from their didactic perspective; hence, the need to be in constant creative

activity through planning, considering criteria of innovation and relevance when implementing and linking strategies, mediators and optimal environments that promote critical thinking skills in terms of learning the communicative competence of English as a foreign language.

Critical Thinking: Ability to reason efficiently, make judgments and decisions, as well as solve problems (Minte & Ibagon, 2017).

Critical Thinking Skills: Specific abilities constantly stimulated that can be sufficiently enhanced until they become a true skill (Cangalaya, 2020). Cognitive skills that have to do with interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, decision making and search for solutions, as well as self-regulation, whose purpose is to generate a reflective judgment on a given situation (Facione, 2016).

Learning English as a foreign language: learning English contributes to the development of thinking processes and critical analysis, as well as socio-academic interaction among students and also with professionals within a communicative context (Vizmanos, Guerrero, & Hunot, 2010).

Communicative competence: ability to share experiences, exchange ideas or opinions, act appropriately in each communicative context or situation; knowing what to say and how, at the right time and place, to whom or whom, why and what for; possessing communicative competence means being able to follow a strategy taking into account the necessary competence dimension(s) and the details concerning the language used for communication (Berenguer, Roca, & Torres, 2016).

Article 2 of the Law creating the University establishes that the legal nature, administrative organization and academic structure or programs of study and research of the faculties, institutes, schools and departments of the Universidad Popular del Cesar will be the same as those of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in accordance with Law 65 of 1963 and other legal provisions, except for its Higher University Council. Currently, the UPC has six faculties and twenty-four programs in different areas of knowledge (see Table 3), which are shown below:

Table 3. Faculties and programs of the Universidad Popular del Cesar

Powers	Programs
Administrative, Accounting and Economic	Business Administration Tourism and Hotel Business Administration Public Accounting International Commerce Economics
Law, Political and Social Sciences	Law Psychology Sociology
Technological Engineering	Agroindustrial Engineering Systems Engineering Electronics Engineering Environmental and Sanitary Engineering
Fine Arts	Bachelor's Degree in Art, Folklore and Culture Music Bachelor of Arts
Health Sciences	Nursing Surgical Instrumentation Microbiology

Basic and Educational Sciences	Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports Bachelor's Degree in Natural Sciences and Environmental Education Bachelor's Degree in Spanish and English Bachelor's Degree in Spanish and English Bachelor's Degree in Literature and Spanish Language Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Physics Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics

Source: Universidad Popular del Cesar (2017).

Delimitation of the Research

Thus, the research is circumscribed to the context of the Universidad Popular del Cesar (UPC), located in the city of Valledupar, capital of the department of Cesar, Colombia. Its intention is oriented towards the Bachelor's Degree Program in Spanish and English, which determines its professional profile:

The graduate in Spanish and English graduated from the Universidad Popular del Cesar will be a professional with broad communicative competence in the Spanish and English languages, with solid knowledge in the disciplinary knowledge convergent with the teaching, learning and evaluation of languages and the pedagogical use of digital environments for the society of the XXI century, which contribute to the transformation of education in the region and the country." (Cesar, 2019)

In this sense, the research is specifically oriented towards the learning of English as a foreign language in the area of university vocational training at that university, whose curricular characteristics are presented in Table 4, below.

Table 4. Characteristics of the Bachelor's Degree Program in English and Spanish

Name of the Program:	BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH
Type of Resolution:	Qualified Registration
Approval Resolution No:	01993 (See Resolution)
Date of resolution:	13/02/2018
SNIES Program Code:	106693
Internal rule of creation:	AGREEMENT
Creation standard number:	010
Date of creation of the standard:	15/05/2017
Instance issuing the standard:	Superior Council
Methodology	On-site
Duration	10 Semesters
Title Awarded	Bachelor's Degree in Spanish and English
Type of training	University Professional
Credits	160
Departments and Municipalities Where Offered	Valledupar - Cesar
Incorporation of ICT:	20 %
Initial Number of Students:	40
Periodicity of admission	Semiannual
Address:	University Campus
Program	Faculty of Basic Sciences and Education
Program Start Date	2017

Source: UPC (2019)

Thus, the social actors considered by the research are students and teachers of the first three semesters of the course, in the subject English; namely: Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Advanced level, a subject that is part of the Component of specific and disciplinary knowledge (UPC, 2019).

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

The selection of a paradigm implies, according to Flores (2004), working under a system of beliefs about reality, a vision of the world and recognizing the place that both the person and society occupy in it, considering the various relationships that are woven within it, on what is considered to exist. Taking into consideration the above, the post-positivist paradigm was selected for the particular research work because, according to the aforementioned author, it determines that reality exists, however, it cannot be completely apprehended because it will always depend on the context and the social actors. In this sense, it can only be understood incompletely, since it involves the imperfection of the intellectual and perceptive mechanisms of the human being, limiting the control over all the categories that may be present in a situation.

The main characteristics of the post-positivist paradigm, provided by Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2014) coincide with what was stated by Flores (2004), when they affirm that from the post-positivist paradigm reality can be known imperfectly, considering that the researcher can be part of the phenomenon of interest, the object of study influences the researcher and vice versa, the theory that supports the research influences the development of the research, and the researcher must be aware that his values or tendencies can influence his research.

It should be noted that the interpretative paradigm corresponds to a qualitative approach to the study of reality, which is defined by Martínez (2013) as that which "basically tries to identify the deep nature of realities, their dynamic structure, that which gives full reason for their behavior and manifestations (p.66). That is, from post-positivism, the qualitative approach with descriptive characteristics was used,

Thus, the research under the post-positivist paradigm is framed in the qualitative nature, a tradition that, from the contextualization of the facts, seeks the depth of meanings, the breadth of the search through various sources of data, thus enabling the interpretative richness (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014) In this sense, the research was located in the interpretative post-positivist paradigm within the qualitative tradition, with the aim of understanding and interpreting social reality from the perspective of the actors, in the manner of Taylor & Bogdan (1994). In this sense, we sought to understand the importance of the development of critical thinking skills for the learning of English as a foreign language in teacher training programs in languages at the Universidad Popular del Cesar, all from the viewpoint of the social actors involved in this educational process.

Type of research

Framed in the qualitative tradition of research, under the interpretative post-positivist paradigm, its interest "focuses on the study of the meanings of human actions and social life" (Barrantes, 2014, p. 82), for this reason this inquiry can be defined as descriptive-interpretative, since it did not only seek to describe in order to know, but it had the need to understand through dialogic dialogues with social actors: teachers and students, to interpret the significance that they give to the critical thinking skills for learning English as a foreign language in teacher training programs in languages at the Universidad Popular del Cesar.

From this interpretative post-positivist vision, the study was inscribed in a type of phenomenological research, whose fundamental value resides "in its ability to access the deep understanding of the human experience investigated from various disciplinary fields" (Ayala, 2008, p. 410). Specifically in the educational scenario "its interest is oriented to the determination of the meaning and pedagogical importance of the educational phenomena experienced on a daily basis" (p. 411).

Under this vision, the procedure followed in this research was defined, adapting the research work proposed by Albert (2007) for the phenomenological method, being fundamental within the method the descriptive-interpretative process. These actions, translated into research stages, have as their purpose the search for the essences and meanings that people give to their experiences in a given context, from which "the important thing is to apprehend the process of interpretation by which people define their world and act accordingly" (p. 211), in order to understand the phenomenon under study.

Research design

In view of these considerations, the study was oriented through the achievement of six defined and interrelated phases: description of the phenomenon; search for multiple perspectives; search for essence and structure; constitution of significance; suspension of judgment; interpretation of the phenomenon. These phases, proposed by Albert (2007), are described below and, subsequently, will be detailed in relation to their achievement for the attainment of the purposes of this research.

Description of the phenomenon. Initiated from the experiences lived about the event under study from the dialogue with the people, it concentrates the detailed description of these experiences, to the extent that these people are able to express themselves freely. This requires the researcher to detach himself from initial assumptions and/or categorizations, for which "he must abandon his own meanings to enter the world of the person interviewed" (Albert, 2007, p. 211).

In this phase, the researcher leaves aside any preconceptions he may have related to the event he is studying, seeking to avoid any type of premature analysis or explanatory constructs. According to Martínez (2004), it is necessary to set aside as far as possible those starting points, considering their influence on the research, since the description should be a tool that:

reflects the reality lived by each subject, his world and his situation, in the most authentic way. A good description is a conditio sine qua non to be able to carry out a research worthy of respect, to achieve

valid knowledge and not to embark on a path of illusion, deception and disappointment (Martínez M., 2004, p. 141).

This phase includes what Husserl (2012) called epojé or phenomenological reduction, which implies the conduction of the descriptive process from what is experienced by the social actors to the essences of the event under study, avoiding interference of the researcher's prejudices in that description. A search for the original, which must necessarily involve the ordering of the data collected, allowing "a verification of the coherences between the contents that opens the way to the writing of the descriptive text" (De Tezanos, 2002, p. 131). It is then a matter of describing the experiences as they were shared by the social actors with the researcher.

Search for multiple perspectives. Based on the data collected from the voices of the social actors, the researcher begins a process of reflection on the situation under study, resorting to various sources of information; in this way, he/she relies on input theories and preliminary research in areas similar to the event. This procedure will allow him to look at the situation from various points of view and thus broaden his space for reflection.

It should be noted that, according to Albert (2007), this breadth of vision will depend on a selection of participants based on value criteria of belonging and direct relationship with the context under study. In addition, it is important to determine the techniques for the collection of information, depending on the type and source of information to be used. In the case of individuals, it is crucial to establish an interpersonal relationship with the key informants, also known as rapport, whose meaning is associated with the establishment of empathic relationships with others, in order to achieve fluid and spontaneous communication during the meetings. This requires the management of a context of personal interaction, being key the direct and permanent contact with the social actors, creating bonds of trust, respect and communication.

Search for essence and structure. This phase involves for the researcher a process of detailed reading of the information collected, re-reading continuously to understand the structure of the event under study, to determine the relationships that underlie it and configure it, to lead to a process of identification of "the units of significance and determine which are the most important for their research" (Albert, 2007, p. 212).

Constitution of significance: In this phase, the researcher is concerned with deepening the analysis of the information emphasizing, according to Albert (2007), the search for the relational significance structure of the event under study, paying greater attention to the reading of the information, which will make it possible to analyze the facts in greater detail, in a back and forth to the data collected from the voices of the participants themselves in the research. For Álvarez (2009) this phase is of utmost importance for the process of qualitative data analysis, with a first coding phase, starting with open coding to move on to axial coding and conclude with selective coding.

This is a laborious process, which must be done rigorously, taking care that the information is used according to the purposes of the research, all analyzed under the criterion of reliability. Authors such as Taylor and Bogdan (1994), warn that this analysis of the information should be done in a reflexive

manner, refining what is found to discover the richness of the data. For the aforementioned authors, in this phase of the research there are three differentiated sub-phases that give continuity and depth to the study: discovery in progress, identification of themes, development of concepts and propositions; codification and refinement of data, determination of similar aspects among informants, refinement of the information for the third sub-phase, in which the researcher orients his work towards the understanding of the data in the context in which they were collected.

During this phase, the researcher is faced with the task of reading and re-reading the information collected to reach a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, in order to "capture the structures of the fact, activity or phenomenon under study and the relationships between and within the structures. It identifies all the units of significance and determines which are the most important for its investigation" (Albert, 2007, p. 212).

Suspension of judgment. In the sense of giving validity to the research, the researcher must exclude his opinions and opinions, letting the data speak for themselves, this will allow him to know in order to understand, freely observing the information he is collecting, making it possible for the relationships between the units of meaning to emerge and the underlying structure to be understood.

Interpretation of the phenomenon. In this phase, the aim is to identify "the fundamental structure of the phenomenon" (Albert, 2007, p. 212). (Albert, 2007, p. 212), with the aim that the meanings of the event emerge from the analysis, based on the interpretation of the information collected during the process. At this point, Schettini and Cortazzo (2015) state that there is no convention for writing about the results in qualitative research, although it should be a procedure similar to literary writing, therefore, "we have to be aware that in writing we are presenting our point of view regarding the research and also the relationship of the researcher with the subject" (p. 63).

CONCLUSIONS

The research oriented towards the understanding of Critical Thinking Skills for learning English as a foreign language in Language Teacher Training Programs at the Universidad Popular del Cesar, allowed the researcher, through the analysis of the findings resulting from the dialogue with the social actors and the documentary review, to generate a series of conclusions considering the proposed objectives. From these particular inferences, derived from the whole of the investigative procedure guided by the phenomenological research, within the interpretation phase of the phenomenon (Albers, 2007), recommendations were derived addressed to teachers, student teachers in training and university authorities in order to contribute to the improvement of the university educational process of foreign language learning.

It can be concluded that critical thinking, as a cognitive, procedural and attitudinal process, provides people with a series of skills for reflection, analysis and synthesis, interpretation and logical argumentation of their own ideas, as well as the assessment of the environment for decision making and position fixing. As a product, critical thinking allows to evidence a maturity in the person, a capacity to interact with competence in the face of problems or situations presented to the person, contributing reflexively.

The observations of the pedagogical work of English teachers in the classroom allow us to affirm that even when the importance of critical thinking and the development of the skills it entails is assumed, at certain times these positions remain in intention, they do not transcend to the planning as a product of the conscious reflection of how to do it. From a thoughtful organization of the contents, strategies, resources and classroom environment in relation to the expected learning, the English teacher can have a daily work tool that will allow him/her to approach not only the grammar and phonetics of English, but also to lead his/her students to a reasoned, interactive, meaningful and motivating learning to discover, by themselves, the structures of the contents while building their own inferences, questioning themselves about what and how they learn, that is to say, to metacognition.

The use of presentations as strategies for learning should be used by teachers to activate reflection, the assumption of positions, interpretation and evaluation of the subject matter, both in the presenter and in those who are participants, through organized interaction and feedback of ideas, which will motivate the search and research, driving critical thinking and knowledge for a new encounter. This also promotes a critical spirit, reflective and conscious learning, not memoristic and passive, which leads to conformism and mental laziness, which should not occur in a university context where new teachers are trained.

Consequently, the phenomenological method of inquiry enabled the researcher to understand the importance of the development of critical thinking skills for learning English as a foreign language in teacher training programs in languages at the Universidad Popular del Cesar; in this sense, the relevance of this type of thinking for learning a foreign language such as English was evidenced, by internalizing that it is not only about learning to speak or write in a new language. Rather, it is about learning to think in that language, to reason, argue, establish positions and propose, with which critical thinking skills oriented to analysis, interpretation, reasoning, critical judgment and decision making, among others, are invaluable tools for learning and appropriation of a new language.

In general, it can be concluded that despite the great importance of critical thinking for the learning of English as a foreign language, its work in pedagogical practice is not being considered significantly and is remaining in the knowledge and intentionality, without being effectively applied through teaching for the learning of teachers in training.

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