

<b>Dissertation Title</b>	Developing English Reading Materials to Promote Critical Thinking Skills for Myanmar Upper Secondary Students: Researchers' and Practitioners' Collaboration
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### ABSTRACT

Critical thinking (CT) has been widely recognized as a crucial aspect of 21st-century education policies. Recognizing its significance, Myanmar's recent educational reforms emphasized the integration of CT into its new education system, K+12, with its explicit statement in the National Education Law (2014), and the National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021). However, the current state of CT in the extant English coursebooks remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, this study adopted Research and Development (R&D) (1) to investigate the current state of CT (2) to develop a critical thinking program for EFL upper secondary school students through researcher-practitioner collaboration and (3) to study the affordances and challenges of implementing the critical thinking program. Guided by Macalister and Nation's (2020) framework for Language Curriculum Design, this three-phased study revealed that the reading materials of the extant English coursebooks were dominated by lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) over higher-order thinking skills, encouraging rote learning practice, and providing limited opportunities for CT development. Despite the modest increase in CT in the selected post-reform books, the alignment between the policy and the practice remains partial. The three collaborative workshops with five in-service EFL teachers generated a critical thinking program consisting of five components: (1) contextual, (2) conceptual, (3) material, (4) pedagogical, and (5) task-related ones. Instead of adding only CT-based questions, the program embedded CT within institutional feasibility, shared conceptual understanding, cognitively accessible materials, scaffolded progression from LOTS to HOTS, and revised task structures

aligned with textbook formats, showing that critical thinking integration needs a systemic and contextual alignment rather than task modification only. The final phase reported that the affordances are high usability and practicality of the developed materials, the enhancement of students' engagement and motivation, and the promotion of critical thinking skills of students. Despite the affordances, challenges such as the language barrier and minor students' initial resistance to the critical thinking-based tasks were exposed. The findings of this study extend the existing literature, showing that developing critical thinking is not an immediate pedagogical outcome but a gradual, scaffolded process requiring learners' adjustment and sustained pedagogical support of teachers. Students' resistance represents a cognitive transition rather than a failure of reform. The study therefore contributes theoretically by proposing a bottom-up, researcher-practitioner collaborative model for critical thinking material development in centralized and institutionally constrained contexts. In addition, it also provides the empirical evidence that collaborative design can bridge not only the gap between policy and practice but also the gap between research and practice, empowering teachers as co-researchers and co-designers and active agents of sustainable educational reform rather than passive implementors.

**Keywords:** Critical Thinking, Education Reforms, Materials Development, PAR, Researchers' and Practitioners' Collaboration