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EFL Teachers' Narrative Pedagogy to Cultivate EFL Learners' Critical Thinking Skills and Narrative Writing Development

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies often overlook the role of EFL teachers in fostering learners' critical thinking and narrative writing development. This case study attempted to explore more comprehensively how teacher's narrative pedagogy promoted students' critical thinking and narrative writing development. Research participants involved an experienced narrative teacher as a local novelist (male 53) from a reputable public university in Indonesia and six junior high school students (3 males and 3 females, aged between 16.1–16.8) who participated in a semester narrative writing project to preserve the existence local narrative writers. The first data were collected from classroom observations and interviews based on teachers' frequently prompt students (analysis of characters' motives, inference of plot developments, and evaluate narrative texts) which helps them develop their critical thinking skills. Additionally, the second data were collected from students' narrative writing development and interviews. The results indicate that the teachers often assigned the students to discuss the motives and actions of the story from multiple perspectives, compare traditional beliefs to contemporary perspectives of the story, problem solving, and create a space for debate toward the moral and social values of the story. Teachers' narrative pedagogy also was also reflected in the students' narrative writing through expanding the themes, altering the setting and ending of the story, exploring the character's complexity, connecting the themes into personal and societal issues, incorporating morals into new views, and language selection.

Keywords: Narrative Pedagogy; Critical Thinking; Creative Narrative Writing; Narrative Project

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1. Introduction

Narrative pedagogy is defined as an instructional approach that utilizes stories or storytelling as a central element in a second or foreign language learning and teaching[1]. It involves the integration of narrative texts into the instructional program to facilitate learners in meaningful language practices. Through the interpretation and analysis of narrative texts (storytelling), learners can actively participate in the construction of meaning, and develop their critical thinking and narrative writing abilities[2, 3]. In this research, the authors use the terms stories, narrative, or storytelling as similar terms and meanings.

It has been widely acknowledged that the utilization of narratives or storytelling supports the development of literacy in the field of ESL/EFL[4]. The desire to read, understand the story, and write, for example, can be nurtured by the teacher's or storyteller's ways of animating stories; and the students' reading comprehension and abilities in retelling and writing the stories[5]. In the same vein, the genre of the stories is considered the most suitable for students in learning English because of its emphasis on action, events, settings, performance, and common themes[6, 7]. Narrative texts also offer critical and dynamic interaction with the author's perspectives, language, character functions, implicit and explicit concepts, and inferences about the plot of the story[1, 8]. Therefore, narrative text is the best media to develop students' critical thinking as narratives let on the flow of various viewpoints and understandings, elucidating that narrative challenges the reader to make many interpretations, explanations, and arguments.

However, a systematic review of previous research on narrative pedagogy in the EFL/ESL context suggests three issues. First, many studies have examined the impact of narrative pedagogy on EFL/ESL learners' critical thinking using survey and experimental approaches[6, 7], and classroom action research (CAR)[9, 10]. These categories commonly report the efficacy of narrative pedagogy from EFL teachers and students' perception, pre-test, and post-test score improvement, but they cannot explain the dynamic aspect of learners' critical learning development. Second, some qualitative studies using ethnography often separate critical thinking skill variables from learners' narrative writing development[5]. This situation causes a missing link between the two variables and readers cannot learn how learners' crit-

ical thinking is manifested in their narrative writing. Third, most previous qualitative findings do not explain teachers' background knowledge regarding their mastery of narrative pedagogy and narrative writing. Previous studies have indicated that there is a positive correlation between learners' ability to write stories and teachers' experience in writing and teaching narratives[11].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Narrative Pedagogy, Critical Thinking and Writing Development

The term narrative pedagogy is originally derived from narrative theory as it emphasizes the utilization of storytelling and narrative structures as foundational elements in the teaching and learning process[12]. The core of narrative pedagogy commonly views learning as a process of sense-making where learners construct their understanding of knowledge through the interpretation and creation of stories[6]. Narrative Pedagogy is receiving much attention as a discipline-specific pedagogy that overcomes the shortcomings of the use of a single pedagogy to teach critical thinking[1]. By integrating narratives into educational practices, teachers can facilitate deeper engagement and comprehension among learners because stories resonate with learners' experiences and emotions[3, 13]. This approach not only facilitates the acquisition of knowledge but also encourages critical thinking skills by prompting learners to question, interpret, and analyze the stories presented to them[14, 15]. Through these prompts and learning activities, learners develop their ability to critically evaluate the content of a story from multiple perspectives and construct well-reasoned arguments as one crucial element of critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking, a key component of learning, involves learners' ability to analyze, question, evaluate, and synthesize various perspectives and contexts embedded within the stories[1]. Through these processes, teachers encourage learners to construct their critical and logical arguments. When we combine with narrative pedagogy, critical thinking becomes intertwined with the interpretation and creation of stories, allowing learners to engage with complex ideas and perspectives in a meaningful way. Furthermore, narrative pedagogy also provides a platform for learners to construct their narratives[2]. In the context of EFL teaching and learn-

ing, this approach not only cultivates EFL learners' critical thinking skills by prompting them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize narrative content but also enhances the quality of their narrative writing as they develop a deeper understanding of narrative structures, linguistic conventions, and creative expression[16]. Furthering the research on narrative pedagogy and its positive influence on developing learners' critical thinking skills in EFL/ESL domain, the present study attempts to explore how learners' critical thinking and narrative writing construction can be extended when teachers use narrative pedagogy in their instructional practices. By explicating the elements of narrative pedagogy this study will provide new understandings for reforming and extending teaching critical thinking and narrative writing in the EFL/ESL context.

2.2. Research of Narrative Pedagogy, Critical Thinking and Narrative Writing

Within a decade, research on narrative pedagogy, critical thinking, and narrative writing are classified into three main issues: methodological issues, the focus of investigation, and narrative teachers' background. Regarding methodological issues, most of the research findings explore a non-dynamic aspect of students' narrative writing and the effectiveness of the strategy through classroom action research (CAR) and experimental designs. There is also a missing link between narrative pedagogy and narrative as most researchers overlooked the interaction process between teacher and students in promoting critical thinking during classroom teaching learning activities. Finally, many previous studies do not provide information regarding teachers' experience in writing and teaching narratives. Therefore, readers cannot understand how they transfer their writing experience to their students during narrative writing construction.

The first issue mostly discusses narrative pedagogy and students' narrative writing development utilizing action research, experimental, and survey designs[9, 10, 17]. In the Indonesian EFL context, for example, two studies by[9] reported that the implementation of storytelling as narrative pedagogy can enhance students' writing skills. These two researchers applied different data analyses. The first study employed classroom action research design (CAR) using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis, but the second study used pre-test and post-test analysis. In her study,

Damayanti[10] applied two cycles using different stories as mentor texts with four lesson sequences: oral story sharing, detailed reading, joint writing, and individual narrative writing. The results indicate that narrative pedagogy applying those four phases could enhance students' story writing, coherence, and language accuracy. Similarly, Megawati and Anugerahwati[9] also utilized two cycles CAR, applying comic strips to foster students' engagement and narrative writing development. The findings indicated that the implementation of comic strips using a genre-based approach could enhance students' learning engagement and narrative writing. Those two studies have attempted to examine the impact of narrative pedagogy using quantitative studies which commonly cannot understand the dynamic aspect of students' narrative writing development.

The second issue overviews narrative pedagogy as instructional practice, but it often separates students' narrative writing development and critical reading (critical thinking) in promoting students' critical thinking during story interaction in the classroom[14, 15, 18]. In order to connect reading and writing, Corden[18] applied collaborative research to enhance elementary students narrative writing development. The results revealed that a collaborative problem-solving approach during reading activities can enhance students' narrative writing development. Similarly, Fang and Tsvetkova[14] endeavored to connect between reading, creativity, and writing skills. They found that reading containing creative texts can enhance students writing and social skills. However, these studies do not explain teachers' narrative writing experience during teaching practices. Therefore, readers cannot understand how they transfer their narrative writing experience to their students during narrative writing construction. Based on the above issues, this study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers promote EFL students' critical thinking through narrative reading?

2. How is EFL students' critical thinking manifested in their narrative writing?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Design

This study aims to understand how narrative pedagogy promotes students' critical thinking ability and how their

critical thinking is reflected in their narrative writing. To address those research objectives, a case study approach was employed to understand the uniqueness of narrative pedagogy instruction as one of the exemplary writing programs from one public university in Indonesia which has already produced many local novelists and story writers.

3.2. Participants and Context

Participants of the study involve two categories: one EFL teacher and six junior high school students who participated in the 'narrative writing program' collaboration between one EFL teacher from a public university. This program has been implemented for more than two years in collaboration between the university and junior high school as a laboratory school of the university. This program was designed to introduce narrative writing to the students at the junior high school. The EFL university teacher BD (male 53),

was a local novelist who has released many storytelling and novel books in Indonesia. He was a professor in narrative writing and critical thinking and published several research articles on critical thinking and narrative writing in scholarly international journals.

Additionally, the second participants were ten EFL students from a public junior high school who participated in the writing program. From the ten students, six students were selected based on their availability to participate in this study and also from the recommendation of the EFL teacher because of the quality of their narrative writing. The six students were in the eighth grade and were attending the writing course. They learned a writing course for one semester involving the theory of narrative writing for half a semester and practiced writing a narrative for another half a semester. The demographic information of the two EFL teachers and students is presented in **Tables 1** and **2**.

Table 1. Demographic Information of EFL Teachers.

EFL Teachers	Gender	Age	Academic	Experience
Teacher BD	Male	53	Professor	University teacher and Researcher

Table 2. Demographic Information of EFL Students.

EFL Students	Gender	Age	TOEIC	CEFR Equivalence
Student A	Male	16.3	515	B1 pre-intermediate
Student B	Male	16.2	515	B1 pre-intermediate
Student C	Male	16.8	520	B1 pre-intermediate
Student D	Female	16.7	515	B1 pre-intermediate
Student E	Female	16.1	530	B1 pre-intermediate
Student F	Female	16.5	520	B1 pre-intermediate

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection for the first research question was accomplished using an in-depth interview and classroom observation of the two EFL teachers. The in-depth interview stage consisted of two cycles. In the first cycle, the researcher conducted interviews with approximately one-hour sessions based on the recorded video and classroom observation. The session focused on teachers' endeavors in applying narrative pedagogy to promote students' critical thinking skills such as how they facilitate students' narrative text interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. All interview sessions were conducted in *Bahasa* for better understanding and comprehension. The interview was administered six times (three at

the half semester for the theory of narratives and the rest for narrative writing practices).

During the interview session, the researchers showed the recorded videos to the teachers and discussed with them how their narrative pedagogy could facilitate students' critical thinking skills. For example, when the teachers gave questions to the students, the researchers asked, "In the video, it seemed that you were trying hard to help your students interpret the content of the story (interpretation), what did you do actually?", or "It also seemed that the students tried to raise their argument (evaluation), how do you guide them to find an acceptable argument from the students' answers?". Then, the second interview was applied for verification if the researcher felt that there was a misunderstanding in in-

terpreting the first interview session (15 min).

Next, classroom observation was also conducted six times: focus on narrative pedagogy theory (first half semester) and focus on narrative writing practices (the second half of the semester). All classroom observation was video-recorded since the approval from the school and research ethics board was obtained. The first classroom observation emphasized how teachers' narrative pedagogy (pre-, whilst-, and post-teaching) was able to promote students' critical thinking skills and the second classroom observation focused on students' writing activities.

Data collection for the second research question was administered using in-depth interviews and document analysis. During the interview session, the researcher read students' writing and asked them how they developed their narrative writing and how they connected their writing to teachers' narrative pedagogy.

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze how EFL teachers facilitate students' critical thinking through narrative pedagogy, the present inquiry focuses on the instructional strategies and activities during narrative reading sessions. Data collected from classroom observations and teacher interviews were transcribed and classified based on teachers' frequent prompts for students to analyze characters' motives, infer plot developments, analyze, and evaluate narrative texts, which helps in developing their critical thinking skills. Incorporating Content-Based Instruction (CBI) principles was also conducted through extended thematic reading and discussion[19].

During the data reduction, the researcher and research team coded the excerpts from interviews and observation into: (Int. T1 interpretation), analysis (Int. T1 analysis), and evaluation (Int. T1 evaluation) and (Obs. T1 interpretation), (Obs. T1 analysis), and (Obs. T1 evaluation). Meanwhile, the data from the students' narrative writing and interviews were also categorized based on their ability to construct coherent arguments (Int. S1/S2/S3/S4/S5/S6. coherence), evidence to support their interpretation (Int. S1/S2/S3/S4/S5/S6. interpretation) and evaluation from different perspectives (Int. S1/S2/S3/S4/S5/S6. evaluation).

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings for the two research questions, triangulation was employed by combining multiple data sources and methods. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and analysis of student narrative writings. Observations provided insights into how teachers facilitated critical thinking during narrative reading activities, while interviews with both teachers and students captured their perceptions and experiences related to the development and application of critical thinking skills. Additionally, students' written narratives were analyzed to identify the presence and characteristics of critical thinking elements. This methodological triangulation allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how critical thinking was promoted and expressed, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in diverse and corroborating evidence.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Question (1): How Did EFL Teacher's Narrative Pedagogy Promote Students' Critical Thinking Ability?

During three months of classroom teaching and learning, the teachers usually employed four categories of activities in their narrative lessons to promote students' critical thinking abilities: teacher explanation of the narrative text, group presentation, small group discussion, and sharing session. The narrative reading activities were divided into two arrangements: literal reading and critical reading. In this case, the author only emphasized how the teachers facilitated students' critical reading in the narrative reading class. For critical narrative reading, the teachers had the students discuss motives and actions from various angles, compare traditional beliefs to contemporary perspectives, problem-solving and create a space for debate. When students finish group discussions, the teachers often invited them to share in front and conduct a critical dialogue with them. To understand how the teacher promoted critical thinking in their narrative reading instruction, the author selected several excerpts from classroom teaching activities and interviews.

The first excerpts took place in the second week that the teacher first introduced to their students what critical reading is and why it is important. In this excerpt, he presented an example of a famous Sundanese story *Sangkuriang*, to describe multiple perspectives to narrative reading. The teacher began with a series of simple questions, such as 'Have you ever heard *Sangkuriang* story before?', and he gradually contin-

ued to give more complicated questions, such as analyzing complex themes: 'Why *Dayang Sumbi* decided to deceive *Sangkuriang* about their relationship?', 'Do you agree with her choice?', 'Do you think there was another solution she could handle the situation?'. (Interview T1).

The above excerpts indicated how the teacher facilitated students' critical thinking using complex themes analysis and sometimes he utilized debate-like sessions to deepen students' understanding. The findings confirm that the implementation of debate-like sessions through analyzing characters, plot, themes, and underlying messages from different perspectives could facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of the story[20]. By arguing character motivation through different perspectives, students substantiate their arguments or claims with evidence. This approach fosters collaborative learning, as students discuss and interact with each other's

interpretations, building a more layered understanding of the message of the story and facilitating valuable communication skills[20].

The second excerpt illustrated below is another example of how the teacher tried to problematize the narrative text to raise students' critical thinking through group presentation. The excerpts were taken from the third week. The teacher mentioned that during group discussions, he provided a picture of *Sangkuriang* and *Dayang Sumbi*. He then asked his students to reflect cultural values of Sundanese society at the time and how they differ from today's society (Interview 2). The questions seemed very challenging for the students. Therefore, the teacher provided a clue by classifying the cultural values into: the relationship between parent and child, the unfinished boat transforming into *Tangkuban Perahu* Mount, disobedience, and hubris (Interview 2).

Excerpt 1. Introducing Critical Reading through Analyzing Complex Themes (Observation 1/T1).

T1	:	Have you ever heard about the story of *Sangkuriang* before? In the story, we understand that finally *Dayang Sumbi* recognized that *Sangkuriang* was actually her lost son (after she looked at the scar on his son's head from the spoon hit that still remains now). On this occasion, we will try to analyze the complex themes of the story. So, can you tell me: 'Why *Dayang Sumbi* decided to deceive *Sangkuriang* about their relationship?', 'Do you agree with her choice?', 'Do you think there was another solution she could handle the situation?'
S1	:	Yes, I agree. Because she found her son and it is impossible for a son to marry his mother.
S2	:	Yes, I also agree as she wanted to avoid the taboo of marrying her own son.
S3	:	Yes, I do agree. Because marrying her own son is forbidden and it will be seen as morally wrong and socially unacceptable.
S4	:	I do not entirely agree with her decision because deception will lead to greater tragedy. It will create a cycle of mistrust and misunderstanding.
T1	:	In reality, it is not as easy as we imagine when you fall in love and finally you cannot marry your love. So, what is the possible solution for the situation?
S3	:	She could gently explain the reality to her son early on. It will help him understand the impossible relationship. Good communication will resolve the issue without escalating the conflict.
T1	:	Nice reason. I do agree with your idea that we have to accept reality through good communication. Telling the truth is also the key to good communication and resolving the situation better.

The third excerpts described below indicate how the teacher resumed the whole-class sharing session on the story of *Sangkuriang*. At the end of the teaching session, the teacher usually summarizes the key points from students' answers or responses. The findings indicated that summarizing key points from students' responses during narrative teaching is important because it can help consolidate learning and clarify any misconceptions[21]. Through this approach, teachers can draw attention to important insights, ensuring that all students grasp the core aspects of the narrative well. It allows students to hear their thoughts synthesized, which reinforces

understanding. Summarizing is also a form of feedback, validating students' contributions and making them feel valued, which can encourage more active participation[22].

Additionally, teacher 1 often highlighted important ideas from students' perspectives discussed by different groups. If there was a misconception, he might follow-up questions to encourage deeper clarification. Then, he concluded the discussion session with a cohesive understanding of narrative concepts and critical thinking at the same time. The following excerpt was taken from the fourth week and it indicates how the EFL teacher resumed his classroom teach-

ing session.

Excerpt 2. Introducing Critical Thinking through Group Discussion (Observation 2/T1).

T1	:	T2 helps T1 distribute a worksheet to each group. It contains a picture of *Sangkuriang* and *Dayang Sumbi*, along with a question. T1 asks students to discuss the cultural values of Sundanese society at the time and how they differ from today's society.
T1	:	[After visiting each group to check for difficulty.] What do you think of Sundanese cultural values regarding the relationship between parent and child, supernatural beliefs (e.g., the unfinished boat transforming into a mountain), and disobedience and hubris as shown in the story?
S2	:	So, we discuss how Sundanese culture relates to those three issues, right?
T1	:	Yes, you got it. Let's start now, and I will walk around to see the progress of your discussion.
S1	:	[Group presentation] The story indicated the importance of respecting parents. According to Sundanese cultural values, the desire to marry his own mother violates religious and local norms. The story reflects the value of familial piety where a son is expected to honor his mother.
S3	:	Sundanese culture at the time still held strong beliefs in fate and supernatural influences, such as the folk story of a boat transforming into Mount *Tangkuban Perahu*.
S2	:	Recently, Sundanese culture has transformed toward logical reasoning, although traditional folk stories like *Sangkuriang* are still valued.

In the following week, the teacher introduced a different story entitled 'The Cinderella' as he wanted the students to understand both local and overseas stories. In teaching critical the *Cinderella* story, the teacher also asked his students to analyze the traditional roles of characters, such as why Cinderella is portrayed as passive and the stepmother as evil (interview 3/T1). He also asked them to interpret the social and cultural values embedded in the story, such as the emphasis on beauty, wealth, and marriage. Students can also explore how different adaptations of the tale reflect changing societal norms. Interpreting social and cultural values embedded in a story is a crucial approach to teaching critical narrative because it allows students to understand the broader context and significance behind characters' motivation, conflicts, actions, and themes[23].

By exploring these elements, students gain insight into the beliefs, traditions, and moral values that influence the story. This process enhances their empathy and cultural awareness[3]. It also enhances students' critical thinking skills, as they learn how to analyze social and cultural values and their impacts on human behavior and the story. Consequently, this interactive activity helps students connect literature to real-world contexts, deepening their understanding of the narrative's relevance beyond its fictional setting[12].

Excerpt 3: teacher resumed the whole-class sharing (Observation 3/T1).

T1	:	Alright, let's wrap up our discussion on critical questions we have explored. As every group mentioned it is important to go beyond the plot. In this, case we need to analyze the implied meaning behind the characters' motivation and actions. We should also look at how the setting impacts the content of the story and consider the author's and reader's perspectives. Some of you have raised nice points about how narrative texts often reflect cultural or social issues. By addressing those elements, we can understand dan develop a more insightful story for readers.

4.2. Research Question (2): How Did EFL Students' Critical Thinking Abilities Reflecte into Their Narrative Writing

The findings indicated that the participants reflected their critical thinking in their narrative writing in six ways, namely: expanding the themes, altering the setting and ending of the story, exploring the character's complexity, connecting the themes into personal and societal issues, incorporating moral into new views, and language selection. In this case, the students were assigned to write critical narratives stemming from the three main stories they had learned before such as *Sangkuriang*, *Cinderella*, and *Malinkundang*. The first participant (S1), for example, tried to rewrite the

Sangkuriang-like story of his own version by analyzing the existing themes such as justice, love, and consequences and reflected these three themes into their own narratives. The following quotes were taken from S1's narrative entitled 'The Forbidden Temple'.

In S1's narrative, the students expanded the *Sangkurian* theme as a forbidden love and familial loyalty into a lesson about sacrifice and the difficult choices that love sometimes demands. In this case, she interpreted the original theme and added a new layer, highlighting that preserving family bonds may mean putting off all personal desires, describ-

ing a more complex understanding of love and duty. The findings indicated that the students wrote their stories by expanding the themes. This strategy is essential because it allows the students to explore ideas more deeply and it also adds new layers of meaning to their new story. This process also enables students to connect their new story to current events or personal experiences which may attract readers' attention [6, 7]. Additionally, expanding themes can spark their creativity, encouraging them to experiment with conflicts, character motivations, and resolutions that contribute to creative story construction [22, 24].

Category 1: Expanding the themes.

Narrative 1 (S1)	:	"Princess Amelia grew up in a small hermitage of her father on the coast which was prohibited for anyone to came there. One day a sailor namely Arion who got lost, came to that place and met Princess Amelia. He was interested in her story and secret about the History of the Temple that was cursed. Since that time the Princess got closer with Arion. She had feelings for him but her father warned her to avoid Arion. Actually, Arion was her sibling who lost and lived years far away to break the old curse. Finally, she was aware that the relationship was prohibited. Then She choose to close the temple forever and realized that true loyalty meant sacrificing wishes to save beloved people".

The second way the student's creativity in writing their narratives was reflected altering the setting and also the ending of the story they made. By altering the setting, context, and ending of the story, students could demonstrate their ability to think more flexibly and consider how different contexts impact the change of a narrative's message. The following

writing scripts from the second student (S2) indicated her bright idea to modernize a folktale setting to a contemporary city from the existing *Cinderella* story. She also gave new relevance to her new narratives. Consequently, the ending of the story also changed to reflect personal beliefs or cultural perspectives.

Category 2: Altering the setting and ending of the story.

Narrative 2 (S2)	:	"Jakarta city was noisy, with many lamps and high buildings, Elis works for hours every day in a startup company. She always spends her spare time designing innovative applications and hopefully success in the future. One day, a famous entrepreneur holds a competition for an exhibition on technology. Ellis tries to send her creation without identity. It is an interesting innovative application so that the entrepreneur invites innovators to big events downtown. Finally, Ellis reveals her identity and tells her idea confidently. Then He offers cooperation to her. She realizes that she does not need a fairy godmother or prince, only her own talent and effort to reach success".

In the above narrative findings, the student amended the setting of the story to a contemporary city and substituted the term "prince" (from the story of Cinderella) with a business opportunity (new setting). The new ending emphasized a theme of self-empowerment, where Ellis' success is not from a magical intervention, but from her hard work. The ending of the story also showed a more independent and realistic conclusion different from the old version. In supporting this finding, Porter and McGurl [1, 8] stated that altering the setting and ending of a story can foster students' critical thinking by prompting students to consider how different contexts

and outcomes influence the interpretation and significance of narrative events. To our best understanding, there is no available studies have been addressing this strategy.

The third way, the students' critical thinking was reflected in their narrative writing through exploring the complexity of characters such as internal conflicts and motivation from the previous stories, and putting it into their new narratives. They also tried to look at the complexity of character as multidimensional whose actions were rooted in psychological, personal, and social aspects. The following story excerpts depicted their reflection on critical thinking skills.

Category 3: Exploring character complexity.

Narrative 1 (S3)	:	"In a beautiful city and calm, living a handsome man is namely Bernama Nadir. He is a potter who lives a simple life under the guidance of mentor Zara. Actually, she is his mother who hides the truth and protects him from the family's curse. One day, Nadir falls in love with a beautiful mysterious wanderer who reminds his last memory. Zara is worried and reveals her identity and the curse that destroyed her family. Nadir is undecided between his mom and his love; he faces a difficult decision. It is not easy to release his last memory or keep his love but gives him sadness. Finally, he chooses alone and feel peacefulness in himself, it is worthy than love that risking everything".

In the above excerpts, the students adapted and explored the complexity of the character from a previous story they had learned before. In this process, the student presented the internal conflict of the main character between love and loyalty. This finding highlighted the theme of self-discovery and the courage needed to accept challenging truths, reflecting their in-depth understanding of the complexity of the character. This finding corroborates with [20] and [9] who conducted an experimental study of the effect of the complexity of a story impact the quality of students' narrative development, but this present study is not under the experimental study which emphasizes the dynamic aspects of learners' narrative development.

The fourth way, the students' critical thinking was reflected in their narrative writing through connecting the content of the story to personal and societal issues such as family expectations, social justice, or identity. This approach revealed their criticality to real-life situations. Consequently, the students' stories were more interesting, relatable, and insightful for readers. The following narratives illustrated how S4 tried to address personal and societal issues in the story adapted from *Malinkundang's* story.

Category 4: Connecting the content of the story to personal and societal issues.

Narrative 3 (S4)	:	"Growing up as the son of fisherman, Parman always dreams become a CEO in rich company. Finally, He decides to go city and work in a big company of fish canning in Indonesia. Not for a long time, his wishes come true. He works hard day night until he becomes a famous CEO and rich. One day, He decides to back home but his family does not recognize him because of his different appearance. Mother welcomes him well and hopes he helps the poor fishermen in neighborhoods. He sees his mother as hard worker woman and helpful to other neighbors, these inherit to him. Parman realizes true greatness is not measured from successful and wealth but from loyalty to community that shape him. "

The above finding indicated that the student tried to connect the content of the story to modern themes of family expectations and societal issues. By showing Parman's journey, the student reflected on his story on issues of identity and the pressures of success. This adaptation illustrated the importance of using one's success to uplift other people, showing critical thinking about both personal and societal values incorporated in the story. Incorporating personal and societal issues in the content of the story is essential because it attracts readers' emotions, empathy, intellect, and awareness of diverse perspectives [3, 13].

Additionally, the students' critical thinking was reflected in their narrative writing through expressing moral values in a new perspective. The students often suggested alternative moral values or lessons or offered different views. They often invited readers to refresh their viewpoints such as offering a different concept of "right" or "wrong" in their new stories.

Category 5: expressing morals using a new perspective.

Narrative 3 (S5)	:	"When Alifa stepped her foot back to village her land of birth, after worked success as entrepreneur in overseas. She felt as stranger at her own house. When her family asked help to build dock for fishermen work daily. She was doubly to help. She was afraid if she backed to suffer life before. But She saw their struggle with family. She realized that successful meaningful if help other people and gave changing. Alifia learn successful with respect and raise other people who help her success. "

The above finding indicated that the student reinterpreted the traditional moral value by emphasizing that success is not about severing ties with past experience, but about hard work and contribution to the community's development. In this case, the student offered a new perspective on *Malin Kundang's* story, indicating that success and identity are mutually related to loyalty and giving back to others (self-acceptance and social responsibility). Responding to this issue, Schwab[25] explains the importance of introducing moral values in narrative writing using a new perspective. He asserts that presenting moral values through unique settings may invite readers to re-evaluate their own beliefs, encouraging deeper reflection and empathy.

Finally, the students' critical thinking was reflected in their narrative writing by carefully selecting the appropriate words to convey precise meanings, tone, and emotions in their stories. They commonly selected words tone and detailed attributes that emphasized the key elements of the story. They were also aware of how the language they used could influence the interpretation and mood of their story to engage readers' attention. The following excerpts indicated how the student wrote her Cinderella-like story using appropriate language and emotions in her new story.

In the adaptation of language use, the student tended

Category 6: Select appropriate language and emotions in the story.

Narrative 1 (S6)	:	"When Alisia walks pass performing arts space, with her old sneakers and she always wears when performs. She fells burden fade from glamorous life friends who humiliates her. It is because of her talent. Twinkling lights above are like shining stars that shine only for her with their every round. Old dress that she wears does not reduce her confident to perform tonight. She is sure that she deserves to get the award. When she looks at the cup that get closer to her, her smile shines like sunlight that pierce rain for years."

to select emotional words like "worn sneakers," "twinkling lights", and "sunlight breaking through years of rain" to create an emotional atmosphere that highlights Alicia's inner feelings. The language emphasizes the sense of wonder and newfound self-worth, revealing the student's ability to use descriptive language to evoke emotions and create an immersive, heartfelt moment in the story. This finding is similar to [2, 16] which emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate language and its emotion in a story. They argue that the choices of words and emotional tone can create an atmosphere that aligns with the story's context and they also help clarify the emotional depth of characters and the gravity of situations, making the story more relatable and impactful.

Students' affective responses play a significant role in the development of critical thinking and narrative writing, as emotions can influence motivation, engagement, and cognitive processing. When students feel emotionally connected to a narrative, they are more likely to engage deeply with the text, question underlying meanings, and reflect critically on the characters' actions and themes[26]. Positive emotions such as interest, curiosity, and empathy can enhance students' willingness to explore multiple perspectives and express nuanced ideas in their writing, while negative emotions like anxiety or frustration may hinder their ability to think critically or articulate thoughts clearly[26, 27]. Therefore, fostering a supportive and emotionally engaging learning environment can promote students' affective involvement, which in turn supports their critical thinking and the richness of their narrative composition.

5. Conclusions

The present study seeks to address how EFL teachers' narrative pedagogy facilitates students' critical thinking and narrative writing development. EFL teachers' narrative pedagogy often manifested into discussion, problem-solving, and presentation to analyze theme, setting, character complexity, personal and social issues of the story. Through these instructional approaches, students are able to develop their narrative writing more creatively by expanding the themes, altering the setting and end of the story, exploring the character's complexity, connecting the themes to a personal and societal issues, incorporating morals into new views, and language selection. This approach promotes students' critical thinking skills and empathy, encouraging them to incorporate diverse perspectives and moral considerations into their narratives. Additionally, it enhances language selection skills, allowing students to make stylistic choices that improve the effectiveness of their writing.

Given that teachers play a pivotal role in fostering EFL

students' critical thinking through narrative reading, it is essential that teacher training programs emphasize strategies such as questioning techniques, facilitating text-based discussions, and guiding students to make inferences and connections across texts. Professional development should also equip teachers with tools to recognize and assess critical thinking in students' responses. In terms of curriculum design, incorporating diverse and thematically rich narratives can stimulate critical engagement, while writing tasks should encourage reflection, argumentation, and creative interpretation to allow students to express their critical thinking. Integrating these elements into both instruction and assessment practices can create a more cohesive approach to cultivating and showcasing critical thinking in EFL learners.

This present study, however, has some potential limitations. The research participants may not be representative enough to generalize the findings to all EFL contexts. Additionally, the study primarily relies on qualitative interviews and observations which lacks quantitative measures of students' critical thinking and narrative writing development over time. The data of the present study was just collected within six times interviews and observations may potentially threaten the accuracy of findings. Consequently, future studies should consider expanding the sample size using longitudinal studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of narrative pedagogy on students' critical thinking and narrative writing development. Additionally, providing a teacher training program on narrative pedagogy and assessing its impact across educational contexts could strengthen the findings and support broader practices in EFL education.

Author Contributions

The individual contributions to this work are as follows: Conceptualization was carried out by N.F.; methodology was developed by S.A. and H.A.N.; validation was performed by N.F. and S.A.; formal analysis was conducted by N.F.; investigation was undertaken by S.A.; resources were provided by N.F.; data curation was handled by N.F. and S.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Confict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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