# Pedagogical Strategies to Cope with the Post-Truth Phenomenon in UK University English Language Classrooms

*Yi Sang*
*University College London, UK*
*Corresponding author's email: dtnv032@ucl.ac.uk*

**Abstract**

The rise of post-truth has transformed the landscape of education, particularly in higher education, where a strong emphasis on free expression can sometimes overshadow the pursuit of deeper understandings. One area where this is especially true is language teaching, where culturally loaded subjective opinions often trump objective facts. This is particularly evident in language learning courses that seek to improve both language proficiency and critical thinking. However, limited research within the language-teaching field has focused on this emerging issue, leaving gaps in our understanding of language teachers' perceptions and coping strategies on how to deal with the impact of a post-truth world. Accordingly, this study employs thematic analysis to shed light on the impact of post-truth on language education from the perspectives of two in-service English language teachers at universities in the UK. Through in-depth interviews with the teachers, the research provides insights into how they respond to the challenges posed by post-truth in their classrooms. The findings highlight the teachers' roles when helping students navigate the complexities of truths and perspectives in the post-truth era. Findings also emphasize the importance of fostering critical thinking skills while striking a balance between evaluating information and respecting diverse viewpoints. Overall, this research explores some practical strategies used by UK university English language teachers when addressing post-truth challenges, and thus contributes to the growing body of knowledge in English language education in the post-truth era,

especially those works that seek to equip educators with ways to navigate this evolving educational landscape.

**Keywords:** post-truth education, critical pedagogy, language teachers' perspectives, cross-cultural teaching strategies, EFL/ESL challenges, Socratic learning method

In the current era of social media driven discourse and political polarization, people are increasingly driven to form biased opinions to fit in with certain groups. In other words, it seems that only ideas close to their group's ideology and thinking are accepted, while those that are not so close are simply discarded (O' Neil, 2018). As this false sense of truth has become widespread in society, and the ability to discern fact from fiction has diminished, the notion of the post-truth era emerged (Chávez, 2018). Moving beyond a simple departure from facts, post-truth also influences issues like discrimination and bias, shaping how individuals and groups perceive the world. In the following sections, I explore connections between the post-truth phenomenon and these elements, examining how distorted narratives promote and sustain discriminatory practices and biased perspectives in different parts of society.

Discrimination remains a persistent issue in education, influencing how students perceive facts and evidence. Indeed, Peters (2017) suggests that established educational concepts have either been discarded or constrained, replaced by rigid standards and utilitarian, state-mandated teaching methods. This shift raises concerns about democratic freedoms in higher education that were initially intended to enhance human dignity (Macfarlane, 2016). However, since the emergence of post-truthist ideas and orientations, little is known about what has happened to free speech, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, or higher education cultures (Oleksiyenko & Jackson, 2021). Additionally, the political economy of the state is currently undermining the importance of higher education, and as Coetzee (2013) criticized, universities are being pressured to transform into institutions that give students the skills they need to succeed in the modern workforce. As a result, educators

must acknowledge the importance of education in forming cultures (Giroux, 2018).

In the realm of language education, teachers bear the important task of guiding students to grasp and mirror the expressive patterns of the language they are learning. This endeavor is geared towards facilitating learners' comprehension of how native speakers of the target language perceive and convey thoughts (Kramsch, 2009). The connection between discursive behavior and culture is pivotal; a profound understanding of the cultural backdrop is indispensable for accurately deciphering and embracing the linguistic subtleties and communicative conventions inherent in the language. Within higher education, language educators occupy a distinctive position in the spectrum of educators in this regard. Fundamentally, they play a crucial role in assisting students in honing critical thinking abilities and shaping well-informed perspectives, particularly when navigating the intricate landscape of the post-truth era.

Considering the prevailing discussion on the post-truth era, there is a notable dearth of academic research and guidance on second language instruction. This study seeks to address this gap by delving into the widespread influence of post-truth on language education. Specifically, through insights gleaned from in-depth interviews with two English language teachers at UK universities, I explore the strategies these educators employ in response to the challenges posed by the post-truth phenomenon. Rather than just exploration, this study hopes to enhance our comprehension of the evolving educational landscape. Importantly, it endeavors to provide a foundational understanding for English language teachers contending with the impact of post-truth in their classrooms. Moreover, in emphasizing the broader significance of this exploration, it becomes apparent that unraveling the influence of post-truth on language education holds the key to advancing the realms of applied linguistics and language education, fostering a more informed and adaptive pedagogical approach in an era dominated by evolving communication landscapes.

## Literature Review

### *What Is Post-Truth?*

The post-truth phenomenon was discussed well before the advent of Covid-19, as noted by McIntyre (2018) who described it as "the rejection of empiricism and the triumph of scientific consensus when citizens acknowledge and embrace the induced uncertainty surrounding validated issues" (p. 31). In this age of post-truthism, society's general sentiment and the definition of reality determine public opinion. Simultaneously, because post-truth thrives on the power of social media, new information, and communication technologies, one opinion can go viral and be shared by millions of people. Consequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that post-truth has come under criticism in scholarly discussions ever since the Oxford Dictionary declared it the word of the year in 2016.

The notion of post-truth has its roots in Nietzsche's relativism and permeability concerning "truth", as well as poststructuralist discourse analysis, which highlights the intimate connection between power and knowledge (Derrida, 2016). In 2004, Keyes coined the term post-truth era, where "the boundaries blur between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, and fiction and non-fiction. Deceiving others becomes a challenge, a game, and ultimately a habit …" (Keyes, 2004, p. 8). Keyes further claims that the media's promotion of fiction and misinformation, as well as its emphasis on deception, has caused people to let truth give way to emotion and bias, which has resulted in the formation of biased groups. As a result, Keyes asserted that the reasons for the emergence of post-truth are closely related to the existence of fake news in the media for the sake of profit.

Three aspects of this phenomenon's characteristics merit observation. First, post-truth culture is a movement of total relativization. This includes the hypothesis or "scientization of the self". This tendency manifests itself in the absence of firm beliefs or basic guarantees and leads to establishing the existence of individuals. As Spaemann (1993, p, 1079) states, it results in a dissolution of "all guarantees into assumptions" that leads to a weakening of absolute epistemological

and practical commitments. Second, the post-truth movement lies not in the death of personally constructed intentionality and linguistic content, but in the loss of its semantic dimension (Zárate, 2019). Third, given that postmodern youth is a distinct feature of this era, the act of choice derived from free will gives legitimacy to the decisions made: "all choice is equally valuable because it is the fruit of freedom of choice, and that it is choice that gives value." (Taylor, 2016, p. 49)

### *Post-truth and Language Education*

How to distinguish between fact and evidence has become a pressing issue at all levels of education. In 2015, and in response to the performance of critical thinking in language proficiency, Ouellette-Schramm (2015) conducted an interpretive case study based on Kegan's (2018) constructive-developmental theory. Through analyzing developmental interviews, summative assessments, and participant surveys of six English language learners, he derived the insight that critical thinking should be explicitly taught and integrated into instruction.

In 2017, according to Peters (2017), criticality had been rejected or restricted in education, replaced by narrow elements of state-mandated instrumental and utilitarian standards and pedagogy. Moreover, now that education has undergone a digital transformation, with big data systems in administration, teaching, and research capturing a wealth of information, Zárate (2019) proposed a dual approach to teaching education in the post-truth era. The first step is to perceive the will in one's own experience as an initial desire to alleviate its lack; the second step is to develop the rational, permanent, and stable foundation that will be implicit in the educational habit. This is in combination with the doctrine of objective values proposed by Lewis (2012), who stated, "it is true that many things are true about what the universe is and what we are, and other attitudes are really false" (p. 8). In this sense, human feelings and emotions must be adjusted with the help of educational activities to promote a willingness to learn.

Interestingly, Lapsley and Chaloner (2020) give advice on how to cope with post-truth at the level of epistemology. They concluded that science education takes place within the context of virtue education

by focusing on Aristotelian virtue pedagogy, metacognitive virtue strategies, and the creation of scientific identity. Building on this notion, and in the face of changing information systems, Chinn et al. (2021) suggested that effective professional development using educational materials could support teachers in bridging the gap from existent to expanded approaches. For example, teachers could bring confusing data and problematic information to their classrooms, or teachers could have explicit discussions about core intellectual virtues related to their planned classroom activities. Chinn et al. (2021) also called for research to develop approaches that engage a wide range of stakeholders and sustain systemic change.

However, as can be seen from the above, academic discussions on education in the post-truth era have mostly remained at the level of theoretical-conceptual concerns. Furthermore, as Lapsley and Chaloner (2020) argue, the idea of how post-truth can be overcome more generally is limited to the individual level. However, such cognitive individualism is biased, as Longino (2002) showed, and fails to recognize the crucial contribution social forces make to the preservation of knowledge with a foundation in reason. The educational setting in which a person finds himself or herself has a significant impact on how that person develops their ideological character. Therefore, the teacher's position to the students is essential in a typical educational setting—in addition to imparting knowledge, he or she also directs and molds the development of the students' consciousness.

Recognizing the potentiality of language as a somewhat limitless meaning-making system, Hedges (2009) states, "the emptiness of language is a gift to demagogues and the corporations that saturate the landscape with manipulated images and the idiom of mass culture" (p. 1). In the age of fake news, a new paradigm of illiteracy is on the rise, and it is not simply because educational institutions have failed to produce citizens who are critical and active, but also because the post-truth movement has persistently attacked the honesty and ethical imagination (Giroux, 2018). Consequently, the current role of higher education is being undermined by the political economy, despite the truth that educators require a new language to meet the evolving circumstances

and problems facing the world. For example, Coetzee (2013) criticized the current collapse of education "as governments retreat from their traditional duty to foster the common good … universities have been coming under pressure to turn themselves into training schools, equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy" (p. 1). Under this circumstance, in order to combat the various threats to the ideals of justice and democracy, as well as to fight for public spheres, ideals, values, and policies that offer alternative models of identity, thinking, social relations, and politics, educators need to be aware of the power of education in forming culture (Giroux, 2018).

In alignment with the above perspective, it has been established that identities reflect the knowledge, beliefs, memories, goals, and worldviews that people have gained via their participation in a particular cultural group. Aspects of identity that emerge through encounters with native and non-native speakers arise because of discourse's building, continuation, or disruption of established cultures (Baynham, 2015). This is because culture can be used to explain differences or similarities experienced, perceived, or manufactured by social actors through an interpretive, reflexive, historically grounded, and politically sensitive perspective (Kramsch & Hua, 2016). One of the responsibilities of the language teacher is to help students recognize and apply discourse behaviors in their target language to understand the thinking patterns of the target language speakers, as well as their values and worldviews (Kramsch, 2009). Language teachers, therefore, play an important role in molding students' critical thinking and discriminating worldviews in the post-truth era by guiding them in the construction of new discourses in their minds.

### Post-Truth in the United Kingdom

In the UK, discussions about post-truth have shifted from politicians and the upper class to social media since the UK's Brexit referendum in 2016. It has been stated that understanding this new movement (Sampson et al., 2018) is key to understanding the effects of Brexit because of its illogical, sensory, emotional, viral, and contagious nature (Walkerdine, 2020). Subsequently, preparation for competent

and responsible investigation has become increasingly necessary in an age when a single 140-character remark can be as influential as a thoroughly researched in-depth piece or broadcast news. According to Bowell (2017), the greater the usage of social media as a key source of news and information about current events and sociopolitical issues, the less likely we are to be able to identify the truth.

This shift has given rise to a new kind of illiteracy that is the result of the post-truth movement's unrelenting assault on truth, honesty, and the moral imagination as well as the failure of educational institutions to produce critical and engaged citizens (Giroux, 2018). Coetzee (2013) criticizes the current collapse of literacy and education, "as governments retreat from their traditional duty to foster the common good … universities have been coming under pressure to turn themselves into training schools, equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy" (p. 1). Given such a view, educators need to recognize the role of education in creating formative cultures. These cultures present alternative models of identity, thought, interaction, and politics, and fight against public policies, rules, and regulations that combat various threats to the ideals of freedom and equality (Giroux, 2018). Moreover, one of the duties of a language teacher is to teach non-native speakers to recognize and adopt the discursive behaviors of the language they are learning, so that they end up learning how speakers of the target language think, what their values are, and how they perceive the world (Kramsch, 2009). Ultimately, in the post-truth era, language teachers can help students acquire critical thinking skills and identifiable worldviews by supporting them in constructing new mental discourses.

The above review leads to the conclusion that although researchers hold varying perspectives and suggest pedagogical approaches for the impact of the post-truth phenomenon on language education, more research is required to provide an understanding of the perceptions and coping mechanisms of in-service English language teachers in higher education. Consequently, given the significance of English around the world, a qualitative study of this topic involving UK education teachers could be a beneficial resource for pertinent research in other nations. Combining acknowledged academic gaps with relevant, ongoing

academic research, the following research question is addressed: How do UK university English language teachers perceive and cope with the post-truth phenomenon in their classrooms?

## Method

### *Participants*

The recruitment process involved reaching out to potential participants through university official information channels. The researcher, while not personally acquainted with the participants, was known to them through their shared academic field. Steps were taken via emails to ensure a transparent and unbiased interaction between the participants and the researcher. In my dealings with them and their data, I was careful to avoid potential biases and strived to maintain objectivity in my interpretations.

Both participants were purposefully selected for their extensive professional experience. Jane, a Greek national, has over 10 years of experience teaching English at a UK university, specializing in courses related to contemporary issues in language education. She started full-time teaching in 1987, thus she possesses a great wealth of experience of teaching English in diverse backgrounds. Smith, a British national, has been teaching for more than 15 years and working in the education sector since 2001. Both participants have been actively involved in adapting pedagogical strategies to address modern challenges in English language education. Jane, for example, has an interest in the intersection of language education and societal issues, while Smith's expertise lies in the application of linguistics principles to language teaching.

### *Interview Protocol*

The interview guide (Appendix A) underwent a meticulous development process, involving an extensive review of existing literature on post-truth in language education such as Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2010). A pilot study with a Spanish participant in a situation similar to the study's context also played a pivotal role in the development of the

interview guide, where insights gained from the Spanish participant were used to refine the guide, addressing potential challenges, and enhancing its effectiveness for the study's interviews.

The interview guide aimed to delve into the experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding the post-truth phenomenon in language education. Key themes and potential areas of exploration were identified, and valuable insights from discussions with a more experienced colleague contributed to iterative refinements. Specific objectives included understanding their strategies, challenges, and perceptions related to post-truth. The guide was organized to cover key themes, including the impact of post-truth on language education, pedagogical strategies employed, and participants' reflections. Sections included questions on experiences, challenges, and approaches, ensuring a comprehensive exploration.

Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling exploration of unexpected themes or follow-ups based on participant responses. Opening statements focused on establishing rapport, emphasized the study's purpose, and ensured participant comfort. Closing statements included expressions of gratitude, reiteration of confidentiality, and an invitation for additional comments if desired. Probing techniques were incorporated to encourage participants to elaborate on responses and provide detailed insights. Follow-up questions were prepared to explore emerging themes and ensure a rich data set.

Acknowledging the researcher's positionality, efforts were also made to mitigate biases or preconceptions that might influence the guide. Reflecting on potential influences, the guide aimed for neutrality and openness to diverse perspectives.

### Data Collection

I conducted both interviews in English and via the Zoom video platform in June 2023. Both interviews lasted for approximately 50 minutes. Both interviews were conducted in English, and with participants' permission, recorded for subsequent data transcription and analysis. The interviews were audiovisual, capturing nonverbal cues such as mood, pauses, laughter, and tone changes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim,

ensuring the anonymity of the participants during the transcription process. The inclusion of nonverbal content in the transcription aimed to provide a comprehensive dataset for analysis.

## *Data analysis*

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which falls under the broad umbrella of qualitative research and allows researchers to code, compare similar and dissimilar categories, identify themes, develop relationships, and build theories from their data (Miles et al., 2014).

To analyze the interview data, I began by coding the transcripts, using descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual annotations. Each code, represented in distinct colors, was strategically underlined to enhance visibility. The coded transcripts were then dissected into themes aligned with the research questions, involving a comprehensive analysis of patterns and relationships between codes. This process ensured that each theme adequately captured essential elements of the participants' experiences. To refine the analysis, each statement within the themes underwent examination, and their interrelationships were scrutinized before being systematically grouped. This coding and comparison process, applied to the interview data from both participants, culminated in the identification of overarching themes.

## Findings

### *Cultural Influence and Education Systems*

In the interviews, both participants, Jane and Smith, shared insights into the challenges they face in the context of post-truth education. A recurring theme was the impact of students' backgrounds on their approach to information. Jane highlighted concerns related to students from traditional educational backgrounds, noting a tendency for them to accept information uncritically. According to her experiences, navigating the landscape of misinformation proved to be a particular challenge. On a related note, Smith delved into the influence of cultural norms on students' attitudes towards authority and independent thought. His perspective shed light on how cultural factors play a pivotal role

in shaping students' approaches to questioning information and engaging with diverse perspectives. These initial insights paved the way for a more in-depth exploration of the challenges associated with traditional educational backgrounds and cultural influences on students' critical thinking in the post-truth era.

Throughout her interview, Jane underscored the existence of diverse cultural views on schooling, noting how societies where hierarchical structures and reverence for authority are deeply ingrained, students may find critical thinking a challenging endeavor:

> The essence lies not in providing definitive answers, but in guiding them towards a journey of exploration and self-discovery. (Jane)

Conversely, Smith emphasized the contrast between societies that prioritize independent inquiry and those where authority figures exert more influence:

> There is a balance to be struck between fostering skepticism and promoting critical analysis, but environments where there is not a great deal of evidence hold the potential pitfalls of opinions that can flourish. (Smith)

The two participants' perspectives illuminate the interplay between cultural values and the educational system. The contrast in cultural attitudes towards authority and critical thinking becomes a crucial lens through which we can understand the challenges educators like Jane and Smith encounter in nurturing students' abilities to navigate the complexities of the post-truth era.

### Navigating Post-Truth Challenges

One of the challenges faced by both participants in their classrooms was students' inclination to accept information without rigorous evaluation. They noted that students often unquestioningly embraced information, especially when it was widely disseminated or prominently displayed. This phenomenon underscores a broader issue in education today: students may not naturally engage in critical questioning of the information

they encounter. Additionally, Smith highlighted the struggle many students face in distinguishing between reliable academic sources and less credible ones.

Delving deeper into the underlying factors that contributed to these challenges, the two participants offered distinct perspectives. The discussion with Jane on traditional, teacher-centered Chinese classrooms hints at the potential ineffectiveness of traditional teaching methods in fostering critical thinking. This dimension highlights the profound impact of teaching paradigms on students' ability to grapple with post-truth challenges. Thus, her pedagogical approach pushes students beyond merely questioning information and encourages them to delve into the underlying foundations of knowledge construction:

> In fact, I use eliciting questions all the time in my teaching. We will discuss critical thinking and the step-by-step process one needs to follow. (Jane)

This perspective aligns with a broader philosophical exploration into the construction and validation of knowledge. Jane's implicit reference to Socratic teaching methods triggers contemplation on the pivotal role educators have in nurturing critical thinking. Specifically, how to adjust teaching approaches to confront the challenges presented by the post-truth landscape. Her emphasis on steering students toward self-discovery reflects a pedagogical philosophy that encourages active participation and inquiry.

The discourse on an unstated Socratic teaching method extended beyond the confines of the classroom, prompting inquiries into how societies in the digital age can adeptly navigate and leverage information. Jane's insights, grounded in pedagogical strategies, thus emerge as a valuable starting point for reflecting not only on the educational terrain but also on the societal ramifications of cultivating critical thinking skills amidst the intricacies of the post-truth era.

On the other hand, Smith introduced a different layer of understanding by emphasizing the influence of online social contexts. In online communities where knowledge is often accepted without

questioning authority, students may face difficulties in approaching information critically:

> Additionally, the echo chamber effect can cause students to gravitate toward sources of information that align with their beliefs, thus limiting their ability to critically engage with opposing viewpoints. (Smith)

Smith's comment introduces a social media aspect to the challenges of teaching critical thinking and discernment. Specifically, the online media community dimension adds complexity by urging an exploration of the epistemological underpinnings of different social groups that exist outside the physical. It raises questions about how newly formed cultural norms and traditions online shape individual perceptions of knowledge, authority, and critical thinking. His comment also suggests that knowledge is not merely received but actively constructed through interaction and dialogue. Hence, as per Jane, Smith assumes a kind of Socratic view on teaching that extends beyond the individual to the social level. In this context, "truth" evolves into a collective construct forged through dialogue and shared understanding, akin to the collaborative and dialogical nature inherent in the Socratic Learning Method (Delić & Bećirović, 2016). The notion that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction and dialogue resonates with the Socratic emphasis on cooperative inquiry and shared exploration of ideas.

### Effective Teaching Approaches for Dealing with Post-Truth

Both participants underscored the importance of fostering open dialogues, posing thought-provoking questions, and emphasizing research and source evaluation. They employed various methods, including interactive exercises, research resources, and questions rooted in critical reading, to nurture their students' critical thinking skills. Their strong emphasis on critical thinking aligns with constructivism, as they are guiding students to actively engage with knowledge, compare viewpoints, and evaluate evidence to construct their own understanding.

Within a student-centered environment where learning is a collaborative process driven by inquiry, discovery, and peer interaction,

Jane's use of questions combines with a focus on students' interests to exemplify her approach to combating post-truth:

> I aim to guide students toward active critical thinking by employing a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions ... Moreover, I believe in granting students the autonomy to explore subjects that captivate their curiosity, allowing them to research and present their findings. (Jane)

Similarly, Smith focuses more on fostering students' full engagement in classes and guiding them in exploring the most reliable resources:

> My goal is to facilitate learning and foster students' engagement in their education, allowing them to shape their learning experience actively ... By empowering them to critically assess sources, I equip them to navigate an intricate and evolving information landscape effectively. (Smith)

These approaches fit into the broader discourse surrounding media literacy and information literacy education. Fundamentally, by encouraging students to critically analyze their sources, educators like these two participants contribute to creating a generation less susceptible to deception and manipulation. This aligns with the societal need to equip people with the skills to navigate a world inundated with knowledge of varying quality.

### *Fostering Critical Thinking and Inquiry*
Jane and Smith share a commitment to cultivating critical thinking abilities among their students. They emphasized the significance of equipping students with the skills to critically assess, analyze, and evaluate information in the post-truth era where false information and biased narratives are widespread. Moreover, the concept of critical thinking as a form of intellectual self-defense strongly resonates with Jane's emphasis on guiding students through the process of questioning, researching, cross-referencing, and locating evidence. She equips students with the tools they need to become discerning consumers of

information by teaching them to seek supporting evidence and approach material with a healthy degree of skepticism:

> I focus on questioning, researching, evaluating, and then using that evaluation to judge the logic behind it all. Then I guide them to look at different sources and consider the arguments being presented. (Jane)

This approach, which seemingly focuses on encouraging self-evaluation, asserts that students should be capable of independent reasoning and making decisions based on a thorough analysis of available facts.

In contrast to Jane's more co/self-regulatory approach, Smith takes a more other-regulatory stance in cultivating critical thinking skills by using the utilitarian CRAAP framework (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose). This systematic guide facilitates the assessment of information reliability and quality. By integrating the CRAAP framework, Smith not only underscores critical thinking's importance but also equips readers with a practical toolkit for effective information evaluation in today's complex and information-rich landscape:

> By instilling these skills and values, students not only navigate the post-truth era but also develop lifelong analytical abilities essential for today's information-rich environment. (Smith)

In essence, Smith's approach equips students with a practical skill set to discern between reliable and unreliable sources.

Overall, the teaching philosophies of these two participants go beyond the role of knowledge transmission; they are helping to shape individuals who can analyze, evaluate, and synthesize complex material. This aligns with modern educational approaches that prioritize critical thinking as a key learning objective, fostering individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of critically engaging with the world around them.

### *Evaluating Information and Evidence*

Both teachers concurred that analyzing information is a nuanced process reliant on effective discernment rather than mere utilization of tools. Critical thinking is inherently a mental activity that demands systematic engagement, and Jane's emphasis on guiding students through a process of questioning, assessing, and drawing conclusions aligns with this fundamental concept. However, Smith noted how students struggle to differentiate between their own beliefs and those supported by factual evidence, which underscores the challenges involved in cultivating effective analytical skills.

More specifically, the participants' focus on helping students evaluate the effectiveness of information highlights the importance of nurturing cognitive agility. Jane, for example, advises students to evaluate other ideas without immediate rejection, which suggests that effective evaluation necessitates a willingness to consider multiple viewpoints:

> It's about equipping students with the tools to navigate complex narratives and helping them develop a discerning mindset that places evidence and credibility at the forefront of their information assessment process. (Jane)

Jane's remark supports the idea that critical evaluation should encompass in-depth analysis, equipping students to efficiently sift through and navigate the deluge of information.

The importance of efficiently evaluating information becomes even more appealing from a theoretical standpoint. It implies that in a world inundated with information, students must possess the capability to determine the reliability and relevancy of sources. This need points to an underlying skill set that combines cognitive efficiency, analytical depth, and information literacy, all of which extend beyond the mere application of evaluation tools. The notion of efficiency in information evaluation also underscores the significance of metacognition, or an awareness and understanding of one's own cognitive processes. Smith's method, which involves encouraging students to assess external sources, underscores the importance of metacognitive reflection in enhancing

evaluation effectiveness. This suggests that evaluating information entails not only examining external sources but also scrutinizing internal cognitive processes.

### *Complexity of Truth and Perspective*

Lastly, the responses from both participants shed light on the complexity of truth and perspectives in the post-truth era. Jane's remarks on student receptiveness to knowledge, and Smith's observations regarding students' difficulties in distinguishing fact from misinformation, collectively highlight a broader challenge: How can individuals navigate competing narratives and determine what is true.

Jane's answer to this question is to equip students through research and source evaluation, which reflects an understanding that the concept of truth is not monolithic but rather requires evidence-based validation:

> I think students need to apply more criteria to assess sources beyond the initial information they encounter, and they need to dig deeper to ensure they are not relying on potentially misleading information. (Jane)

Her emphasis on critically analyzing information and challenging sources aligns with the postmodern notion that contradictory truths can coexist with sufficient evidence.

In contrast, Smith's discussion of the challenges in teaching about climate change and the diversity of viewpoints in academia highlight the concept of truth:

> It is very difficult to present any evidence to change the minds of those who are convinced whether climate change is real but not caused by humans. Even some reasonable people have a hard time believing it's true. So you're dealing with a very murky situation where it's difficult to see the evidence immediately. (Smith)

This concept, popularized by Stephen Colbert (Faina, 2013), argues that people often base their beliefs on emotional resonance rather than objective facts, which is particularly relevant when discussing topics

with equivocal data. The Socratic Learning Method, which posits that knowledge is constructed through active engagement and interaction with information, thus seems to resonate most strongly with Jane's methodology. This is particularly significant in the post-truth era, as developing an understanding of truth now necessitates critical evaluation of information.

**Discussion**

In examining the insights provided by the participants, Jane and Smith, several significant themes emerged. Both educators emphasize the critical importance of cultivating skills such as critical thinking, information literacy, and cultural awareness in navigating the evolving educational landscape. This aligns with broader educational trends, where concerns about the erosion of critical thinking skills and language learners' vulnerability to misinformation have been noted. Nevertheless, both participants also exhibited differences in how they approached post-truth teaching. Jane highlighted the challenges posed by students from traditional educational backgrounds, emphasizing the need to guide them towards a journey of exploration and self-discovery rather than providing definite answers. Smith, meanwhile, emphasized the balance required between fostering skepticism and promoting critical analysis, acknowledging potential pitfalls in environments with limited evidence. Overall, these participants offer subtly different yet valuable insights into the complex dynamics of post-truth challenges in the UK university English language-teaching context, contributing to a deeper understanding of how educators perceive and cope with the post-truth phenomenon in their classrooms.

Comparing my findings with existing literature (Arede, et al., 2019), the study demonstrates a noteworthy alignment with prevailing academic discourse. The emphasis on critical thinking echoes broader concerns about the state of these skills in contemporary education (Lai, 2011), while the focus on language learners' susceptibility to misinformation aligns with existing second language teaching literature (Zuengler, 2006). Furthermore, the integration of socio-constructivist

perspectives from the participants reflects the broader cultural movement's emphasis on the significance of information literacy.

However, it is essential to consider alternative explanations for these findings. The unique teaching contexts of Jane and Smith, influenced by individual philosophies and cultural dynamics, may contribute to their diverse approaches in addressing post-truth challenges. Jane, for example, operates within a social constructivist framework that emphasizes a dialogical approach to teaching and learning, which is seemingly rooted in Socratic philosophy. This method encourages open-ended discussion and collaborative knowledge construction. On the other hand, Smith incorporates elements of critical pedagogy, adopting a more facilitative style that empowers students to question and critically analyze course material. These subtle differences may stem from the individual philosophies and pedagogical approaches that each instructor embraces, as well as the cultural dynamics inherent in their respective classrooms. Moreover, while my interpretation of these findings comes from a focus on pedagogical approaches in the specific context of English education, Lapsley and Chaloner (2020) and Chinn et al. (2021) point out the importance of addressing post-truth challenges at the epistemological level of science education. In other words, while my study highlights how personal philosophies and cultural dynamics influence teaching strategies, providing an exploration of teacher-student relationships in the context of English education, other scholars emphasize the broader need for professional development and systemic change in education to meet the challenges of the post-truth era. These subtle differences underline the multifaceted nature of addressing "post-truth" issues from different levels of the education system.

Nevertheless, by analyzing how Jane and Smith approach teaching, the findings clearly reveal a connection with Socratic philosophy. Jane's emphasis on open discussions and guiding students through exploration aligns with the Socratic approach, valuing inquiry over definitive answers. Similarly, Smith's focus on critical review and the collective construction of truth aligns with the Socratic idea of truth as a shared understanding formed through interaction. This suggests a Socratic-inspired methodology valuing active engagement, critical

inquiry, and collaborative knowledge construction is useful of pot-truth educators. Linking these teaching approaches to Socratic principles emphasizes their compatibility and the lasting relevance of Socratic teaching methods (Brickhouse & Smith, 2009) in contemporary education. Fundamentally, connecting modern teaching practices to Socratic philosophy highlights the ongoing evolution of pedagogical approaches, especially in addressing the challenges of the post-truth era. In other words, it is clear that Socratic teaching methods provide a timeless and effective strategy for fostering critical thinking, collaborative learning, and a deeper understanding of truth in education. This alignment with Socratic principles holds implications for educators looking for impactful strategies in navigating post-truth challenges in the classroom. Integrating Socratic-inspired approaches can create environments that encourage active student engagement, promote critical inquiry, and facilitate collaborative knowledge construction (Walters, 2022). Consequently, educators can use Socratic teaching methods to empower students as critical thinkers, preparing them to navigate the complexities of the post-truth era effectively.

This convergence of old (Socratic philosophy) and new (social constructivism) carries significant implications for educators facing post-truth challenges. The application of Socratic-inspired methods offers a timeless approach to empower students as critical thinkers, fostering environments that promote active dialogue and a collective understanding of truth. By adopting such an approach, educators not only adhere to enduring Socratic principles but also address contemporary concerns about the decline in critical thinking skills and the necessity of navigating information in the digital age (Tyner, 2014). By drawing on social constructivism, language teachers also pay homage to an increasingly diverse range of students and the experiences they bring with them, especially when it comes to cultural experiences and societal expectations in a globalized world.

However, while both participants reflected upon their teaching approaches, neither made explicit reference to any specific theoretical approach to teaching. Nevertheless, it was evident from their remarks that they both drew upon facets of SLM, which emphasizes the importance

of fostering critical thinking not only at the individual level but also within the broader social and cultural context (Zare & Mukundan, 2015). Indeed, the Socratic emphasis on active engagement, reflection, and questioning complements Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play in second language education (Montiel-Overall, 2005). Such an integrated perspective underscores the need for educators to adapt and innovate, equipping students with the skills needed to navigate linguistic, cultural, and epistemological challenges in the post-truth era. Consequently, in moving forward beyond the post-truth era, perhaps we should look back to the past while also drawing on the present for inspiration on how to deal with post-truthism in education.

**Conclusion**

      In conclusion, this study provided an exploration of two language educators' experiences and coping strategies within the contemporary post-truth era. The identified themes unravel connections between education, teachers' perspectives, and reality in the current information landscape. Within the realm of second language education, this research highlighted the intricate interplay between cultural influences and pedagogical strategies, revealing the multifaceted nature of learning an additional language. In essence, language educators are tasked with skillfully cultivating critical thinking skills in response to the complexities of the post-truth era. Empirically, the study aligns with scholarly concerns about equipping learners with the necessary tools to evaluate information. Academically, it enriches discussions and evaluations of the post-truth phenomenon, providing empirical references for language teaching practices. Practically, the findings underscore the imperative for language teachers to construct effective strategies, offering guidance on navigating the post-truth phenomenon in the classroom, where adaptability, understanding diversity, and engaging students in meaningful dialogues are important aspects to consider.

      Despite the valuable insights obtained from the two participants, the study recognizes limitations stemming from its small sample size, which may constrain the broader applicability of the findings to a

larger group of English language teachers. Specifically, Jane and Smith's experiences may not fully capture the diversity of challenges faced by language educators globally. Future research with a more extensive and diverse participant pool could enhance the generalizability of the identified themes. Moreover, qualitative research is susceptible to biases, given the subjective nature of participant responses. Therefore, a mixed-method approach that incorporates quantitative and qualitative measures may lead to understandings that are more robust. Ultimately, the dynamic nature of the post-truth phenomenon poses a challenge to capturing evolving experiences accurately. Nevertheless, despite such constraints, the insights gained provide valuable perspectives within the specific context and timeframe of the study.

Future research could also explore how cultural dynamics and teaching methods interact to address challenges related to post-truth in the broader educational context. Examining the impact of technology and social media on students' perceptions of truth provides another important avenue for investigation. Moreover, exploring the effectiveness of new teaching approaches in promoting critical thinking and information literacy within the context of the post-truth era would offer valuable insights for both educators and researchers. In the realm of teaching English, potential research topics could be how culture and learning preferences affect students' abilities to navigate a changing information landscape. To achieve this, researchers could conduct in-depth case studies, explore the role of technology, compare different teaching approaches, conduct long-term studies, and assess the effectiveness of teacher training programs in addressing post-truth challenges.

In summary, this study emphasizes the crucial role of language educators in preparing learners to navigate the challenges of the post-truth era. It highlights the need for second language pedagogy to adapt and promote critical literacy that draws on past and present epistemologies. While this study contributes valuable insights from two educators, it acknowledges the broader landscape of second language education and encourages further research to build on these foundations.

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**Appendix A**

*Interview Guide*
1. Can you provide a brief overview of your teaching experience?
    a) How long have you been teaching English language courses?
    b) What kinds of courses have you taught?
2. Can you tell me about your current role?
    a) How long have you been in this role?
    b) What kind of courses do you teach?
    c) What has it been like for you?
3. Have you noticed any changes in the teaching environment over the years? If so, could you elaborate on those changes?
4. What comes to mind when you hear the term "post-truth"?
    a) How would you define "post-truth"?
    b) What does "post-truth" mean to you personally?
    c) How do you distinguish "post-truth" from concepts like "misinformation", "propaganda", "fake news"?
5. If we acknowledge that we may be living in a "post-truth" environment, could you describe what it's like to teach language in such an environment?
6. Do you think it's important for teachers to balance between academic freedom and provide accurate information to your students? If yes, how do you do that?
7. Do you think English teachers could help students differentiate between facts and misinformation?
   Prompts: please explain how would you deal with the issue of students who tend to accept false material that supports their biases or preconceived notions?
8. What is your teaching approach like? Has it changed in response to the post-truth phenomenon? How?
   Prompts: How do you encourage students to be more skeptical and discerning when evaluating information?
9. What impact do you believe post-truth is having on students' perceptions of higher education? Can you provide an example to illustrate this?

10. What impact do you believe post-truth is having on students' perceptions of academic research? Can you provide an example to illustrate this?
    Prompts: What impact do you think post-truth is having on students' capacity to analyze material critically and participate in reasoned debate?

11. Can you tell me a story about a specific instance where you noticed the impact of the post-truth phenomenon in your language teaching classroom?
    Prompts: What topic? What kind of misinformation was presented? How did you and your students react to it?

12. How does the prevalence of the post-truth phenomenon impact discussions on controversial topics in an English language classroom? Can you provide an example?
    Prompts: How do you respond to students who bring up rumors or conspiracies in class? How do you facilitate productive and respectful debate and discussion?

13. Can you tell me about a time when you felt that your students struggled to differentiate between fact and misinformation? How you addressed this challenge?
    Prompts: How did you teach your students the distinction between reliable sources and dubious sources?

14. Can you tell me about a time when you felt that you were able to successfully address the challenges posed by the post-truth phenomenon in the classroom? What have you learned from that experience?
    Prompts: How did you teach them to think critically and to be discriminating information consumers? What methods or strategies proved particularly effective in this regard?