

CRITICAL THINKING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: This article deal with critical thinking in English language teaching. There are many different methods to discuss and analyze.

Key words: critical thinking, FLT, language proficiency, communication ability, classroom engagement.

The promotion of critical thinking into the FLT classrooms is of high significance for several reasons. Firstly, if language learners can take charge of their own thinking, they can monitor and evaluate their own ways of learning more successfully. Second, critical thinking expands the learning experience of the learners and makes the language more meaningful for them. Thirdly, critical thinking has a high degree of correlation with the learners’ achievements (Rafi, n.d.). Different studies have confirmed the role of critical thinking in improving ESL writing ability language proficiency; and oral communication ability. The learners may become proficient language users if they have motivation and are taught the ways of displaying critical thinking in foreign language usage, which signifies that the learners must have reflection on their production of ideas, and they may critically support those ideas with logical details (Rafi, n.d.). Language development and thinking are closely related and the teaching of higher-order thinking skills should be an integral part of an L2 curriculum. Educators have emphasized the importance of developing higher-order thinking skills in foreign language classrooms and empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking skills along with the foreign language. In fact, language learners who have developed critical thinking skills are capable of doing activities of which other students may not be capable. Implied in the study by Mahyuddin (2004) is that language learners with critical thinking ability are capable of thinking critically and creatively in order to achieve the goals of the curriculum; capable of making decisions and solving problems; capable of using their thinking skills, and of understanding language or its contents; capable of treating thinking skills as lifelong learning; and finally intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually well-balanced.

However, in spite of the fact that there is little argument among theorists and educators about the importance of thinking skills in language development, in typical school settings, language learning and thinking skills are often treated as independent processes. In other words, as Pica (2000) states, in the tradition of English language

teaching methodology, the integration of language and thinking skills has been peripheral. It is argued (e.g. Kabilan, 2000) that even communicative language teaching, which emphasizes the use of language as a communication tool, does not really help students to become proficient in the target language. He suggests that for learners to be proficient in a language, they need to be able to think creatively and critically when using the target language. So, it is implied that even communicative approaches to language teaching do not develop critical thinking among learners.

Due to the advantages mentioned for enhancing critical thinking in language learners and also little practice in this regards in FLT settings, as Brown (2004) asserts, in an ideal academic language program, the objectives of the curriculum should go beyond linguistic factors to develop critical thinking among learners. In fact, the effectiveness of language teaching will depend upon what is being taught, in addition to language, which learners can consider as a purposeful and relevant extension of their horizons.

Language teachers are among practitioners who can greatly influence the type of learning by language learners. Therefore, one of their responsibilities is to help learners develop critical thinking abilities. Maybe even more than L1 teachers, L2 teachers have reasons to introduce their students to aspects of critical thinking. As Lipman (2003) says, teachers are responsible for promoting critical thinking in the learners other than helping them to go from one educational level to the next. The responsibility of foreign language teachers is to help their learners acquire critical thinking skills while learning the language. As Mahyuddin et al (2004) assert there is plenty of room for improvement in incorporating the thinking skills into our curricula.

“Critical thinking enables individuals to use standards of argumentation, rules of logic, standards of practical deliberation, standards governing inquiry and justification in specialized areas of study, standards for judging intellectual products, etc.”. Paul and Elder (2007) conceptualized critical thinking as the art of analysis and evaluation, considering the point that it can be improved since a quality life needs the quality of thinking. Facione (2011) noted that happiness cannot be guaranteed even if good judgment is practiced and critical thinking is enhanced; however, it undoubtedly offers more opportunities for this goal to be achieved. It has been stressed that autonomy can be shaped through critical thinking ability and one’s learning process can critically be evaluated.

According to a study conducted by Marin and Pava (2017), English as a foreign language (EFL) critical thinker has the following characteristics: they are active, continuously asking questions, and seeking information which helps them build associations between L2 learning and other features of everyday life. They describe as people, having the capability to analyze and organize thoughts that can be expressed through speaking and writing. They almost always tries to put what has learned before

into practice. Beyond doubt, in order to enhance critical thinking skill in EFL learners, teachers should consider the point that teaching is not just about grammar and vocabulary; instead, it concentrates on enhancing teaching, encouraging to be creative, encourage to learn independently, strategies for making decisions and evaluating himself. Similarly, opportunities must be provided by the educators to provide a learning environment in which autonomous learning, active engagement, reflection on learners’ learning process, and L2 advancement are emphasized, for instance, task-based activities. Thus, this study is different from other studies since the focus is placed on teachers’ critical thinking ability to help students thrive rather than students’ critical thinking ability.

The reason is that differentiates it from the previous studies is that providing students with opportunities, in which thinking differently is appreciated, would be absolutely rewarding and it is the skill that should be much more highlighted in the studies. Therefore, critical thinking is a skill through which students’ confidence can be raised, leading to their active engagement in the classroom and their being successful since they can see the issues from a different point of view and novel solutions to those problems can be proposed. In the current study, first of all, both teachers’ critical thinking ability and students’ classroom engagement have been discussed. Given that, the association between these two variables has been dealt with. Then, the implications and restrictions of the study as well as some recommendations for further studies have been proposed.

Classroom Engagement: Engagement is an inseparable part of the learning process and a multifold phenomenon. Classroom engagement refers to the amount of participation that students take in the class to be actively involved in the activities and whether the mental and physical activities have a goal.

Engagement itself is a context-oriented phrase which relies on cultures, families, school activities, and peers. It has been categorized into different groups: Behavioral engagement such as the amount to which students participate actively in the class; emotional engagement pertains to high levels of enthusiasm which is linked to high levels of boredom and anxiety; cognitive engagement such as the usage of learning strategy and self-regulation; agentic engagement such as the amount of conscious effort so that the learning experience would be enriched. Amongst the aforementioned categories, the one which is strongly important in the learning process is behavioral engagement in that it is relevant to the actual recognition of an individual’s learning talents. Another possibility that can be viewed is to consider engagement from two other aspects, internal and external.

The former implies how much time and effort is allocated to the process of the learning. The latter entails the measures that are taken at the institutional level so that the resources would be dealt with along with other options of learning and services for

support, encouraging the involvement in activities leading to the possible outcomes such as consistency and satisfaction.

Much attention is deserved to be paid to engagement since it is perceived as a behavioral means with which students’ motivation can be realized and as a result, development through the learning process can occur. Active involvement should be strengthened in L2 classes to prevent disruptive behaviors and diminish the valence of emotions that are negative such as feeling anxious, frustrated, and bored.

Regarding “classroom engagement,” its opposite word “disengagement” can play a significant role in not engaging the students in the class, leading to them feeling bored and demotivated in the class, so from this aspect, it would be worth considering this phrase as well. It has been claimed by some authors (Skinner, 2016) that disengagement itself does not happen frequently in educational settings due largely to the fact that it is related to extreme behaviors, and it is when another phrase disaffection can be considered significant. Disaffection is characterized by disinterest, aversion, resignation, and reduced effort. Therefore, our perception of boredom as a complex emotion can be enhanced, and it can be dealt with more systematically if boredom is viewed through the following factors, disengagement, and disaffection. As Elder and Paul (2004) mentioned, students should be taught to actively make questions- that is a good emblem of engagement- which is a radical part of critical thinking. The more the students can question, the more they can learn. Some students get accustomed to memorizing the facts and have never been faced with the outcomes of the poor decisions they made since there is always someone to back them and they had better be challenged, being questioned by their teachers.

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