Research Article

Critical Thinking Instruction

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate EFL learners` attitudes towards critical thinking (CT) instruction. To this end, based on the result of an Oxford Placement Test, thirty intermediate EFL learners were selected from among 90 participants to take part in this study at a language institute. A repeated measure design was utilized by the researchers based on which the same group of participants took part in the control and experimental phases of the study. At the end of the experiment, the participating EFL learners answered an open-ended researcher-made questionnaire the items of which were based on existing literature in order to explore the participants` views and attitudes towards the type of instruction offered to promote their CT skills. It was found that more than two-third of the participants were interested in using CT skills at class. The findings have some implications for course designers, material developers, and teachers to introduce and foster CT skills in classrooms for students.

1. Introduction

One of the most effective instruments anyone can have is the ability to think. In fact, critical thinking (CT) skills are strategies people use to consider new opinions It refers to a kind of skill that can influence various aspects of a person's academic

career, and personal life. It helps us to understand written text more deeply, write more influentially, and become more successful test-takers. CT also helps us make better decisions and develop our own ideas. Through the use of critical activities, students can also learn how to reach conclusions and self-assess their performance in class.

Different definitions of CT have been suggested by several educators although there is not much difference among these definitions. According to Elder and Paul (1994), CT refers to the skill of individuals to control their own thinking and build up suitable criteria and standards for examining their own thinking. As Maiorana (1992) stated, CT intends for achieving understanding, evaluating, and finding the answers for the problems.

Nowadays numerous EFL instructors emphasize the requirements for teaching CT in EFL university composition classes; this idea has been described by several researchers and educators. The appearance of these various descriptions is a result of its cognitive characteristic in which CT is considered as an "ongoing activity" and learner writers are anticipated to achieve the skill to think critically as they go through process-directed activity. Beyer (1995, p. 8), for instance, explained CT as "…making reasoned judgments," that may imply applying CT to assess the quality of something, from "cooking to a conclusion of a research paper" .The aim of this study was to explore the attitudes of EFL learners towards CT instruction.

Significance of Critical Thinking

There are various concepts of CT. As Paul (1995) explained, the concept of CT is best understood as to the context and aim it is applied. The purpose of educating for critical, democratic citizenship has lately been developed with the title called 'critical thinking'. In the 1980s, there was an outbreak of attention in CT. In several studies and policy reports in the USA it was mentioned that a higher-order thinking skill was missing among learners and that democratic society needed learners to think critically (Glaser, 1985; National Education Goals Panel, 1992). The common concentration on CT as a pedagogical aim does not modify the fact that CT is an intricate construct, changing from a politically directed pedagogical end .

The significance being given to CT is at present an extensive event. In education reports of countries like Australia, the United States, and United Kingdom, CT has been recorded as an important domain to be improved and estimated in higher education (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2005; Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002; Higher Education Quality Council, 1996). Beside Western countries, late educational improvements in Asian countries like Hong Kong (Education Bureau,

2003) and Japan (Atkinson, 1997) have as well supported the progress of CT so that learners can take part in a liberal society. In spite of the agreement of educators and scholars on the importance of cultivating learners to become critical thinkers, training for CT has not been an easy task.

Teaching for Critical Thinking

There are numerous approaches to training learners to practice critical thought; two separate philosophies present how education is best viewed. Some educators and professionals approve the imbedded approach based on which the course structure and educator enhance higher-order thinking without direct training in the language and practice of CT abilities (Case, 2002). Others supported explicit instruction, where particular abilities are taught; these are total cognitive skills that converged different academic and real-life conditions. There is considerable study to advocate both methods but little is understood about their relative effectiveness. The former has the clear benefit of not needing an extra course in the school study program although a defect is that imbedded instruction is dependent on teacher and may or may not be exercised at class . This is a demanding subject because little consideration has been given to CT education for scholars and may not be a chief interest in a pedagogical condition that concentrates on 'content-matter' control (Paul, Elder, & Bartell, 1997). However, in courses that CT has long been connected, it is acceptable that thinking about content does not happen reflectively.

Critical Thinker

Critical thinker claimed that an essential part of the thinking skill is thinking about thinking. The thinker should be able to look at his/her thinking and judges it to his/her former task. S/he should also have the ability to look at the thinking that other people apply for themselves. Paul and Elder (2004) indicated that a good critical thinker has some characteristics as the following:

S/he asks important questions and troubles, forming them evidently and efficiently; s/he obtains and evaluates related information, using abstract concepts to measure it effectively; s/he gets logical results and solutions, testing them against related criteria and rules; s/he communicates efficiently with others for understanding solutions to complicated problems.

According to Paul and Elder (2009), there are three important types of thinkers: The native critical thinker, the selfish critical thinker, and the fair-minded critical thinker. The first one, the native critical thinker, is the person who is not concerned about, or does not have awareness of, his/her thinking. The second one, the selfish critical thinker, is the one who is good at thinking, but in fact not fair to others. The third one, the fair-minded critical thinker, is the one who is good at thinking and also fair to others.

King (1995) believed that the clear characteristic of a critical thinker is having an investigative mind; good critical thinkers are those who are expert at asking good questions. Paul et al. (1997) mentioned that self-assessment is a vital factor to CT, and just those learners who learn to evaluate their own thinking are critical thinkers. A critical thinker can reflect, discover, analyze, and can select to think in these complex ways.

To be a critical thinker is actually stating the intellect with the feelings, views, and disposition. Furthermore, Carroll (2004) claimed that critical thinkers chiefly benefit from two crucial advantages: Self-assurance, and sense of authority over their life. Paul and Elder (2002) indicated that emerging CT is a developmental process which needs hard work, and becoming a good thinker is not possible by only taking a beginning course. So, the essential features of a critical thinker demand a long-lasting time of progress. To this end, there are six steps to go through to progress as thinkers:

Step 1- The unreflective thinker: The person is not aware of important problems in his/her thinking.

Step 2- The challenged thinker: The person gets awareness of problems in his/her thinking.

Step 3- The beginning thinker: The person tries to make himself/herself better, but without systematic practice.

Step 4- The practicing thinker: The person identifies the necessity of systematic practice.

Step 5- The advanced thinker: The person develops in accordance with his/her practice.

Step 6- The master thinker: Skilled and careful thinking becomes second nature.

2. Literature Review

Different researches have been done concerning CT influences on several aspects of foreign language learning and most of them belong to the past decade. Most of these studies are in favor of this theory and proved that the participants in the related studies improved in terms of their knowledge in the experimental groups in various fields. Some studies are presented in this section chronologically.

One of the first effective methods of tactful growth in university learners was the work of Perry (1970). Perry performed open-ended interviews with learners at Harvard in the 1960s and applied these

observations to present a stage theory of tactful growth throughout the university years. Learners do not unchangingly move through in a linear order, as it was assumed that there are pausing and backward movements as well as forward movement. of those words using inferencing strategies. The results of the study revealed that those students with high CT ability outperformed the ones with low CT ability in lexical inferencing. In another study by Kamali and Fahim (2011), the relationship between CT ability, resilience, and reading comprehension of texts containing unknown vocabulary items was examined. The results of the study showed that (a) the levels of CT had significant effect on the scores of the participants on the resilience scale; (b) the levels of CT had significant effect on the participants` comprehension of texts with unfamiliar vocabulary items, and (c) the levels of resilience had significant effect on the participants` comprehension of texts with unfamiliar vocabulary items.

They were also some studies which cast doubt on the effect of CT on the related items . The disposition scores` of the sophomore II students were the least in comparison with the mean scores of the junior and senior learners. In addition, R.Brayton (2003) investigated the CT levels of students majoring in science and social sciences at Hucettepe University English Preparatory school. To carry out this study, Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal test, the information from and the English proficiency exam were administered to 193 students. The results revealed that there was no significant relationship between CT levels and English proficiency levels, but there was a significant low relationship between reading and writing skills and the CT skills of the participants. Myers and Dyers (2006) also investigated the effect of students` learning style on CT skill. The results of the study indicated that there were no differences between the CT skills of male and female students. However, students with deeply embedded abstract sequential learning style preferences showed significantly higher CT scores. No differences in CT ability existed between students of other learning styles. In another study by Cindy W.T, it was attempted to explore whether cooperative writing enhanced CT in EFL learners. The findings of the study showed that students` CT scores at the time of their entrance in the university were not satisfactory and their rank in the university exams was not related to these skills. It was concluded that it is necessary to consider teaching and promoting CT skills in the university educational planning. Based on the literature, the following research questions was proposed to be answered through the present study:

 What are the EFL learners' attitudes towards Critical Thinking instruction in language classes?

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in the Cognitive Domain

LEVEL KNOWLEDGE	QUESTION WORD	LEARNING STRATEGIES
(rote memory, recall of specifies)	define, describe, enumerate, identify, label, list	Rehearsal strategies: Highlight key vocabulary from text or lecture notes, generate flash cards, devise mnemonic devices.
COMPREHENSION (basic understanding, putting an idea into your own words)	discuss, explain, restates, traces	Explain a concept to a classmate; associate material with prior knowledge; summarize key concepts from lecture notes and compare to a "model."
APPLICATION (applying a general principle to a new and concrete situation)	illustrate, classify, compute, predict, relate, solve, utilize	General original examples; design and complete classification systems; solve and analyze new problems; predict test questions

ANALYSIS (breaking the information into component parts in	contrast, generalize, illustrate, diagram, differentiate, outline	General comparison and contrast lists and use these to predict test questions; identify themes
order to examine it and develop divergent conclusions)		or trends from text or case studies; organize material in more than one way
SYNTHESIS (creatively or divergently applying prior knowledge and skills to produce a new or original whole)	categorize, contrast, design, formulate, generate, design a model, reconstruct	Predict test questions and outline the answers; locate evidence to support a thesis; generate a thesis to support certain evidence
EVALUATION (judging the value of material based on informed personal values/opinions resulting in an end product without a distinct right or wrong answer	appraise, conclude, justify, criticize, defend, support	List supporting evidence; listing refuting evidence, generate concept maps, debate; find weaknesses in other arguments.

stified time and energy should be allocated to the provision of students with tasks that guide them to controlled production of activity accompanied with the instructors` feedback and support.

There were some limitations in this study. The first limitation of the present study was due to the number of students; since language institutes did not cooperate with the researcher well, the researcher was forced to select a limited number of participants. In addition, only one group took part in study based on repeated measure design.

First and foremost, this study can be replicated to find out whether the same results would be obtained or not. Other studies could be performed in order to investigate the possible relationship between CT and specific language learning skills and with language learning styles. A further study can be designed in which the data are collected from other settings like university with learners at various levels, e.g., freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors and public education system. It seems very useful to carry out the same research on other proficiency levels as well. It is hoped that the results obtained from the present study would open new avenues for helping language learners to promote their critical thinking skills.

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