International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)
DOI: : 10.48047/intjecse/v13 i1.211335 ISSN: 1308-5581 Vol 13, Issue 01 2021

Fostering Critical Thinking in Higher Education: A Multidimensional Pedagogical Framework for English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Critical Thinking (CT) is no longer a trivial academic objective, it is a vital tool for survival in the 21st century and the most needed competency in today's workplace. In spite of its significance, the traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Second Language (L2) classroom often resorts to rote memorization, teacher-centered instruction and the mechanical application of templates. This paper suggests a holistic and multidimensional pedagogical approach that supports the development of CT in higher education. This paper is the result of a synthesis of empirical studies of the Dialogue Method, Content Based Instruction (CBI), and Blended Learning (BL) using Learning Management Systems (LMS) that shows how teachers can shift students from being mere consumers of information to active, critical thinkers. In addition, it seeks to elucidate the role of positive academic emotions, namely Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), and to fill a gap between the university curricula and needs of the labour market.

Key words: Critical Thinking, Dialogue Method, Content Based Instruction, Blended Learning, Foreign Language Enjoyment, Higher Education.

2. Introduction

In today's knowledge-based society, people must develop extraordinary mental capabilities and thinking skills to cope with complex and rapidly changing environments. The thinking of philosophers of education and modern labour organizations suggest that CT is the very purpose of learning, and that learning is not a once-off but a continuous process of finding out, questioning and re-stating hypotheses. CT is critical in the context of English language teaching because it facilitates learners to analyze, evaluate and synthesize information from a wider perspective besides providing them with language competence.

In higher education, however, higher-order cognitive processing is not stimulated because of current pedagogical practices. For example, in the field of college English writing, most of the

teaching is still teacher-centred, and the teaching content is too much, focusing on the surface form of language (grammar and vocabulary), while paying too little attention to the assessment of critical thinking. The survey of 194 undergraduate students showed that 147 students are in a heavy dependence on the "universal writing template" instead of drawing the meaning of the topics, which is superficial. For this reason, teachers need to overcome the concept of stereotyped teaching, and to use innovative, student-centred teaching methods.

Students learn best when learning is scaffolded through social interaction with peers, as within Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Mercer goes further than that, defining "exploratory talk" as an example of co-reasoning in which learners share knowledge, review evidence and challenge ideas in a fair way. According to the Rational-Emotive Theory and Academic Emotions (Ellis, 1991), the theory states that one's emotions do not vary directly with his/her surroundings, but rather with his/her cognitive beliefs and thoughts. People who have high CT tend to think rationally about their emotions and are open-minded.

Studies have shown that when learners have positive feelings (Foreign Language Enjoyment, FLE) as they overcome the difficulties of the language they are less likely to feel tired and more likely to be involved in academic activities with greater intensity. Based on the empirical results, it is found that critical thinking indirectly has a positive effect on learning engagement by improving a student's enjoyment of the language learning process with the indirect effect of 77.6% of the variance in learning engagement.

2. Pedagogical strategies for developing critical thinking

Traditional teacher-pupil interaction is mainly authority/calculation (an ‘I/it' relationship) that aims at finding predetermined ‘right answers'. The classrooms need to be transformed to dialogic teaching (I/you relationship) that is exploratory, reflective, and cooperative enquiry. A good conversation is not a battle for ideas, but is a space to question and change ideas without fear of being cut out.

2.1 A multi-step plan to implement the Dialogue Method:

1. Orientation and Formation: Students are instructed in the rules of dialogue and put in closed circles, so that they feel oneness and equality.

2. 5-7 minute introduction round to eliminate hesitation and establish a community of trust.

3. Actual Dialogue: Students exchange views, beliefs, and experiences about a given topic (such as global warming, traffic rules) in the presence of the teacher who is a facilitator.

4. Drawing Reflections: Students combine all the different perspectives shared, question their own previous views and rectify misconceptions.

This technique is based on "productive questioning" or "directed questioning. Pupils need to be taught to challenge information for accuracy, its source for credibility, and its assumptions for validity.

2.2 Content-Based Instruction (CBI): Novels and Disciplinary Texts CBI is the language teaching that combines content and language, based on authentic texts and driven by the contents. One of the most effective mediums in which to capture the entirety of mental characteristics that would be essential to critical thinking is literature, particularly the novel. Students will engage in the skills of explanation, analysis, synthesis, argument and interpretation when analyzing novels. The pre-service English teachers participated in structured CBI in a 14-week study based on William Golding's Lord of the Flies. They examined the post-WWII historical context, broke down character motivations by using the star diagrams and assessed the themes of surviving and social control in the novel. This method resulted in large gains across the CAAP Critical Thinking Test in the areas of analysis (9.40 to 11.94) and evaluation (9.07 to 12.24) of arguments. The qualitative interviews verified that students were able to "read between the lines" and understand the hidden messages, going beyond literal translation.

2.3 Technological Integration: Blended Learning and LMS – Educational technology has progressed rapidly, and blended learning is a growing trend in the education sector, which integrates the best of face-to-face and online learning using Learning Management Systems. The review of English reading modules shows that the use of learning management systems such as Moodle, Blackboard and digital reflective log (ROLLs) are very effective in scaffolding metacognitive engagement. LMS integration was used in a study of 56 non-EFL undergraduate students, who took an "English for History" course, to facilitate the use of interactive quizzes, tasks for annotation and structured essay writing on complex historical documents such as the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence. The results obtained in reading comprehension

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showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre test and post test mean scores; the pre test mean score was 54.80 and the post test mean score was 78.25.

3. LMS integration also comes with its challenges:

Handling Complex Texts: Although students can use LMS tools to analyze simple arguments, they find it difficult to analyze highly dense or conflicting historical narratives without the ability to interactively scaffold the text in real time or to have a discussion with peers.The themes above are echoed in the students' responses to the evaluation and synthesis: The students felt overwhelmed with the amount of digital sources they were reading and had to have explicit strategies to prioritize information and synthesize multiple historical sources into a coherent argument.

Critical thinking and the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) appear to be a synergy as evidenced by research. High achieving language learners are not solely based on their aptitude, but are active and creative learners, using specialised cognitive, meta-cognitive and social strategies to engage in the learning process. Empirical studies with Chinese university students showed that there was a positive, significant relationship between explicit critical thinking training (in EAP courses) and increased LLS usage. Thus, the ability to analyze and evaluate directly contributes to the foreign language autonomous learning ability and strategic competence of students.

Bridging the Gap: Higher Education vs. Labor Market: One of the major issues in the modern education is the gap between critical thinking taught in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and problem solving skills demanded by the Labor Market Organizations (LMOs). The Think4Jobs project across the world identified a number of differences:

Teaching Focus: In HEI lessons, focus will be very much on the students who engage as 'doers' in specific, well-structured CT activities such as debate, moral dilemmas, and case studies. On the other hand, LMO training tends to be more generalized, lecturer centered, focusing on practical knowledge and self-learning.

1. Assessment: HEIs pay attention to writing content (such as writing an argumentative research essay); they assess the quality of a student's reasoning and logic. The labor

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market, however, is far more dependent on ready-made test materials and on the hands-on application, and sometimes goes without the academic structure altogether.

2. Authentic Literature: Although a wide concept of authentic literature is followed in universities (academic research articles, fiction, in order to develop abstract evaluation), the trainers in the labor market are interested in texts which are suitable for the immediate, real situation, for immediate problem solving.
3. To make up for this, universities need to include "transversal competencies" (digital, media and information literacy) and, above all, collaborative problem-solving in their teaching; this will enable them to better equip students for a world of work that is unpredictable and constantly changing.

4. Actionable strategies for critical thinking in an English language teaching context:

1. Teachers need to abandon the stereotyped approach of exam-oriented grammar-translation teaching and the universal patterns. Continuous professional development of teachers to understand CT pedagogy and change from authority to activity guide.
2. Optimize Learning Resources: Use current "hot issues" in society instead of topics in the textbooks, or use authentic novels or primary historical documents. The scenarios are obviously real-life situations that raise students' awareness of thinking critically.
3. Use Scaffolded Instruction Models: Apply a sequence of models such as the 5E Model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate) and/or the W-A, S-Q, R-P (Watch-Annotate, Summarize-Question, Reflect-Project) to ensure systematic progression from lower-level understanding to higher-level synthesis.
4. Implementing Integrated Digital Assessment Systems: Beyond One Test One Teacher. Use formative online assessments through LMS system that involve peer revision, automated system evaluation and self-assessment logs, specifically assessing logical reasoning and evidence synthesis.

Conclusion

It is an intricate but essential task to foster critical thinking in higher education institutions. The Dialogue Method, Content Based Instruction and Blended Learning will provide educators with a dynamic, interactive ecosystem that will respect the complex relationship between language and logic. An increase in the learners' skills to analyse, evaluate and infer leads to a higher Foreign Language Enjoyment which in turn leads to greater academic involvement.

Finally, educators can equip passive learners of the language with interactive scaffolding tools and link the curriculum to real-world problem-solving needs to make them active, well-rounded learners who are critical thinkers for the 21st century.

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