

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of critical thinking in language learning, examining its role in enhancing language proficiency, fostering intercultural competence, and preparing learners for success in an increasingly globalized world.

Key words critical thinking, language education, educational resources, integrating, practices

Introduction

Language learning is not merely about acquiring vocabulary and grammar; it is also about developing critical thinking skills that enable learners to comprehend, analyze, and communicate effectively in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, it elucidates the multifaceted benefits of integrating critical thinking into language education and offers practical recommendations for educators to effectively cultivate critical thinking skills among language learners.

As language learning goes beyond rote memorization of words and phrases; it entails the cultivation of critical thinking skills that enable learners to engage deeply with language, culture, and communication. This section introduces the concept of critical thinking in the context of language learning and outlines the objectives and structure of the paper.

Materials and Discussions

The application of critical thinking in the field of education, particularly in teaching English as a foreign language, has been for a long time a topic for discussion. Theoretically speaking, much literature is devoted to the different aspects related to it. As a matter of fact, many writers have urged that learners should be introduced to elements of critical thinking for optimal outcomes. On the other hand, different opposing reasons were brought by other education specialists against



such a social practice. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to further investigate the interrelation between critical thinking and other education practices, mainly in English as a foreign language setting.

According to the roots of critical thinking many historians believe that critical thinking was the product of Greek philosophers, and is rooted in Socrates' teaching practice and vision 2.500 years ago. For Socrates, one cannot have sound knowledge and insights by depending on those in authority because confusion and irrational thinking can also relate to those in a high position with great power. He added that it is significant to keep asking deep questions that probe profoundly into thinking before we accept ideas as worthy of belief. This method is known as "Socratic Questioning" and is notably known as "critical thinking teaching Strategy" (Paul, Elder & Bartell, 1997). Paul et al also explain that Socrates' practice was followed by the critical thinking of Plato, Aristotle and, the Greek skeptics. They went on emphasizing the need to look deeply into the reality of things rather than getting deceived with their delusive appearances. It is, therefore, from this ancient Greek tradition that emerged the need to think systematically, and to trace implications broadly and deeply.

As we get back in history to the middle ages, many other thinkers (e.g. Thomas Aquinas) left their fingerprints to foster the idea of critical thinking. He is known for being apt to systematically and thoroughly answer the criticism of his ideas. "Aquinas heightened our awareness not only of the potential power of reasoning but also of the needed reasoning to be systematically cultivated and cross examined" (Paul, et al,1997).

According to Chatfield (2018), it is generally perceived that being critical is not the friendliest of terms. People tend to associate the word 'critical' with a lack of support because they do not like being criticized. He, in return, defines critical thinking as "setting out actively to understand what is going on by using reasoning, evaluating evidence and thinking carefully about the process of thinking itself" (p.8). As opposed to critical thinking, uncritical thinking is about receiving, then believing what is read or told without pausing to reflect and check the reliability of it. Further explained, critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/ or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. It is based on universal



intellectual values that excel subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth breadth and fairness. (Scriven & Richard, 1987, para.2)

The main aim in language education is to produce successful communicators, that is, pupils who understand linguistic conventions and are capable of delivering them to suit particular situations and contexts (Butt et al., 2000). Such learners are effective language learners and users. Most language educationists today would agree that a focus on the forms of language, for example by emphasizing pattern drilling, is inadequate. Grammar learning and translation are not sufficient for successful communication. In the English teaching context, when learners express their ideas or feelings through English (exercise their critical thinking skills), they need to consider lexico-grammatical and a myriad of socio-cultural aspects. In recent decades, TESOL educators have implemented the communicative approach to language learning and teaching. The communicative language learning movement focuses more on language in use than on rigid pattern drilling, and it is less teacher-centred than was previously the case. The main purpose of using this approach is to equip learners with a competence to communicate. In CLT, learners are invited to exercise their thinking ability, for when they use the language they have to take into account factors such as the audience and the setting when they communicate.

The communicative approach invites learners to be more critical when they learn and when they use the language for communication.

Critical thinking skills are essential for comprehending, analyzing, and producing language effectively. This section discusses how critical thinking enhances language proficiency by promoting active engagement with linguistic content, facilitating meaningful communication, and fostering autonomy and metacognitive awareness among language learners.

Critical thinkers usually do not take things for granted. They base their decisions on objective criteria and recognize their own bias and prejudice. They often rely on scientific inquiry, another form of critical thinking. According to Lipman, people's efforts to improve their quality of thinking are probably coextensive with human history itself [1]. It should be mentioned here that this study positions itself with



utilitarianism, and a belief that critical thinking is neutral. Logically, a clever or smart person does not have to be a moral one.

Even though there are numerous ways of talking about critical thinking, there are some common threads in evidence. First, many definitions focus on human cognitive ability; that is, the ability to make sense of the data or information, and appropriately use reasoning to do so. Secondly, most prefer individuals to be active rather than passive thinkers when it comes to inquiring. In other words, there is a dispositional aspect to critical thinking. Thirdly, in terms of education, most scholars agree that critical thinking can be acquired, through formal as well as informal learning. Finally, every definition relies heavily on language, verbal and non-verbal, to provide the main evidence of the presence of critical thinking.

Most studies define critical thinking as the basic dispositions and skills that a person has and uses to help make better decisions or better solve problems. In this study a model of critical thinking in language learning is proposed, specifically for ELT situations. Critical thinking in this context has three components: communication, reason and self-reflection. Critical language learners communicate and use reason to form their ideas.

There have been many debates on what critical thinking means and how best it should be taught. The debates make it evident that there are differences of opinion, but they also show there is significant agreement on one thing: critical thinking is important for language students. The remaining questions are primarily regarding how it should be taught and learnt.

References

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