

The Importance of Critical Thinking to the Process of Acquiring Fluent English Language Skills

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Abstract - In order to raise people's levels of knowledge in India, critical thinking has been actively pushed on a big scale. This is because the activities that take place in the classroom do not provide pupils the opportunity to put their abilities in critical thinking to use. Some modern educators still favour the time-honored, more conventional approach to instructing, in which case the pupils may not be given the opportunity to think critically. As a consequence of this, teaching critical thinking in schools would result in people who are both more creative and better equipped to put their abilities to use in the future. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of critical thinking in language learning and how it contributes to the development of English language skills among ESL students. We adopted a qualitative approach, and a semistructured interview format was used to acquire the necessary data. In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which students might improve their critical thinking while studying English, the sample consisted of thirty postgraduate students from the state of Selangor. A qualitative method known as content analysis was utilised to assess the data. The outcomes of the study showed that students were able to learn more effectively when they engaged in critical thinking, which resulted in an improvement in their command of the English language. In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that the students were able to engage in self-reflection and independent thought in order to find solutions to challenges that arose in the context of their educational pursuits through the use of critical thinking.

Keywords - Critical, Thinking, English, Language

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INTRODUCTION

The roots of critical thinking in education may be traced back to an American philosopher named John Dewey (2020). Dewey asserts that the primary goal of education is to educate pupils how to think critically. According to Dewey (2020), pupils were not "blank slates" when they entered the classroom. The student was already "already intensely active" by the time he entered the classroom, and the topic of education is the matter of taking hold of the student's actions and giving them direction. When used in a classroom setting, one's educational philosophy serves as the criterion for identifying the objective of the curriculum as well as its organisation and delivery. The philosophical view known as progressivism asserts that humans learn best by interacting with nature and participating in activities that are relevant to their everyday lives. The movement known as progressivism may largely be attributed to Dewey's influence. Teaching and talking to kids about subjects that would be valuable to them both now and in the future is one way to encourage critical thinking since it helps pupils prepare for the real world. Based on a

constructivist lesson that encourages critical thinking by being founded in an authentic context that relies upon the students' actual-world experience as a source of inspiration, the lesson was constructed. Teaching in the classroom can benefit from the use of constructivist concepts, which can be done with or without the assistance of the internet. The Internet is one of the most effective and satisfying teaching tools that are available to you as a teacher and as someone who is committed to lifelong learning. A whole culture or nation located thousands of miles away can appear on your computer screen in a matter of seconds. Higher education institutions also place a premium on students' ability to think critically. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2011) conducted a poll among its member institutions and found that students evaluated critical thinking as one of the most crucial intellectual abilities for them to possess. This conclusion was reached after receiving feedback from 95% of the chief academic officers working at 433 different universities. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which critical thinking is helpful to students in the process of learning English

Language. The study focuses on the students' application of critical thinking and the influence that application has on improving English Language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking may be defined as the process of thinking that involves questioning ideas and can be used as a method to determine whether or not a claim is true, untrue, or partly true. "It is a self-guided, self-disciplined thinking that attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way" (Mathews & Lowe, 2011). "It is a self-disciplined thinking that attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way." The ability to think critically does not develop on its own; rather, instructors need to take on a more directorial role so that they may begin and drive students' critical thinking. Critical thinking may be utilised as a medium in language lessons, and it is particularly ideal for these settings due to the depth of the subject and the participatory techniques that are used. According to Butler (2012), critical thinking also plays a significant part in improving the English language and in consistently applying it to circumstances that occur in the real world. An technique that encourages critical thinking among students poses questions to their minds and gives them opportunities to use the knowledge they are gaining. Students are able to accomplish the objectives and learning outcomes that their teachers have set for them if those goals and results are attainable. Students are encouraged to employ language in the readings, questions, and activities that make up the lesson in order to figure out the answers. Students and instructors must collaborate in order to comprehend, examine, and assess the material presented in the lesson in order to arrive at the outcomes that have been outlined. The cognitive domain encompasses skills such as knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about a certain subject matter. When students are presented with learning goals, they are able to engage in critical thinking about the material presented to them and meaningfully generate their own responses.

Krashen (1988) held the belief that the most effective method for learning a second language is not via the repetition of words and grammar but rather through spontaneous dialogue. According to the findings of research conducted by Behar-Horenstein and Niu (2011) as well as Fahim and Masouleh (2012), the academics are of the opinion that critical thinking abilities can be taught. Different approaches to instructing students in critical thinking abilities have been utilised over time, which has resulted in the development of new approaches. Online tutorials based on subjects were employed in the research that was conducted by Marin and Halpern (2011), and it was necessary of the students that they react. The research conducted by Marin and Halpern shown that students' levels of critical thinking were significantly improved as a result of receiving formal education in critical thinking.

According to the findings of Abrami (2008), critical thinking ought to be clearly taught, and it would be beneficial to include it within the subject matter of academic coursework. On the other side, Ramsay (2019) discusses how integrating critical thinking into reading and writing classes may have a significant influence on students from a variety of academic fields. Because critical thinking requires analysis, a student has to be able to assess and defend whatever issue is now under consideration. In this sense, it is typically linked to activities involving the resolution of problems and communication. In addition, in order for students to be able to practise critical thinking, they need to be able to imagine and assess many possibilities (Chabrak & Craig, 2013). Teachers should encourage student reflection on their coursework so that pupils may acquire a deeper comprehension of the material being taught to them. According to the findings of a study conducted by Yang, Gamble, and Jeffrey (2013) on learners in an experimental group, the experimental group demonstrated a significantly higher level of English competence than the control group. According to the findings of the study, students are unable to improve their education or their language skills if they do not engage in imaginative thought over the assignments they are given. When it comes to coming up with creative solutions using language, they have to keep their expertise front of mind and be attentive of it. When this kind of reflective thinking takes place, it will likely result in shifts in the ways that people think about and approach problems. Students acquire the skills necessary to learn independently while also learning how to ask probing questions.

Using the Moodle platform, Yang (2014) demonstrates the influence of applying critical thinking in the process of language acquisition. The empirical findings demonstrated that critical thinking improved adaptive English literacy education, which in turn improved both the students' critical thinking and their English literacy. It demonstrates that pupils are able to study more effectively when they are given the opportunity to explore different ways of learning. Two aspects of learning independently with the use of critical thinking include taking responsibility for one's own educational activities and having the ability to exercise choice in one's educational pursuits.

Students who were given explicit teaching fared better on the Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment than those who were given embedded education, as demonstrated by the research of Marin and Halpern (2011). This was determined by comparing the two groups' scores. According to findings from studies pertaining to education, we are aware that students are able to adopt a complete learning strategy that calls for a critical knowledge of the subject matter. When students become active participants in their own education, it allows them to design their own learning. Bean (2011) connected deep learning strategies with the concept of "affective involvement," which is facilitated through interaction.

As was observed, the concepts of constructivism engage students in the classroom through effective interaction, the use of scaffolding, and fostering critical thinking among students. Students not only gain knowledge but also demonstrate an ability to apply that knowledge to situations that they could encounter in the workplace or in society. As a result, it is clear that the questions that are posed and the answers that are provided both reflect on the thinker and encourage higher-level cognition. Employers in this day and age consider past experience to be a fundamental trait for professionals, and they hunt for candidates who have it. According to this, many businesses believe that recent college graduates are not ready to enter the profession and are unable to use their knowledge and abilities, such as critical thinking and communication, in a context that is representative of the outside world (Klebnikov, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the ways in which critical thinking is helpful to students in the process of learning English Language. The study focuses on the students' application of critical thinking and the influence that application has on improving English Language. Purposive sampling was used, and the sample consisted of thirty Indian students studying English as a second language at UNITAR International University. These individuals were post-graduate students enrolled in an English Language class. Triangulation and data collection were accomplished through the use of an essay writing assignment, a semi-structured interview, and an open-ended questionnaire. The questions focused on an individual's critical thinking abilities as well as the efficacy of such abilities. In order to acquire more in-depth information, the researchers conducted individual interviews with each of the participants. The researchers made audio recordings of the interviews and transcribed those recordings afterwards. The participants in the class at UNITAR International University were given the questionnaires with open-ended questions to fill out. If any of the questions were ambiguous or unclear, the participants were given the opportunity to request assistance from the researchers in order to have their questions clarified. In addition, adequate time was provided to the participants so that they could answer all of the questions attentively. The final study instrument consisted of asking the participants to compose an essay on a predetermined subject that demonstrated their ability to think critically about the subject matter.

RESULTS

The goal of this research was to investigate the influence that having strong critical thinking abilities can have on improving one's command of the English language. The students felt that developing abilities in critical thinking was necessary and beneficial for improving their English language skills. In addition, the perspective that they take on the learning environment has a direct bearing on the overall rate at which they

are able to acquire the target language. According to the findings of this research, critical thinking may be defined as the capacity to assess a given circumstance and arrive at appropriate conclusions. The results of this study were utilised to inform the use of critical thinking in the construction of knowledge. Curiosity is the engine that propels learning in a constructivist model of education, and constructivism is the theory that explains how an individual makes progress towards acquiring new information. It is believed that constructivist learning is an authentic assessment technique that does not just depend on memorization and recall (Gronlund and Waugh, 2019). On the other hand, it is believed that constructivist learning is a framework that enables students to engage in activities and they may actively develop their knowledge. Research has been conducted on social constructivist ways of thinking and theories on the role that learning plays in realistic classroom settings. Learners work together in this kind of setting, and teachers provide feedback on their progress during exercises, which both encourages them and pushes them further (Skinner, 2010). According to research, incorporating thinking into specific topics leads to greater results; yet, thinking requires attention not just at the heart of the subject matter, but also in all parts of the topic (Burks, 2017). Students have offered the following insights regarding critical thinking: "It is a combination of old and new knowledge whereby critical thinking can enable one to act independently." (Student. 12) "Critical thinking involves more reading and students have a better idea in constructing their own knowledge on the project involved." (Student. 6) "It enables one to think out of the box as they construct their thoughts and understanding of a given subject." (Student. 8) "Critical thinking promotes higher

The students were in agreement that they need to have strong critical thinking abilities since those skills enable them to find solutions to challenges. In other words, they demonstrated their agreement that the ability to think critically is beneficial to their learning. When students are actively involved in their classroom environment, they have a tendency to think in a manner that is more logical and structured than when they are not. This was demonstrated in a research conducted by Pascarella (2013). According to Vygotsky (1934), the genesis of cognitive growth may be traced back to social interactions and learning that takes place in an environment that is conducive to proximal development. This occurs when students and their partners collaborate on the construction of knowledge. The participation of students in the classroom setting may be linked to the transformational learning theory, and these two aspects of learning theory are consistent with one another. According to Paul and Elder (2014), critical thinking is defined as "the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with the goal of improving it." Students make progress and mature into autonomous learners as a result of transformational learning, which has gained popularity over the past several years. This theory was presented by Jack

Mezirow and discusses the ways in which learning that includes critical reflection may produce modifications in the minds of learners (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). As the extracts from the respondents' interviews demonstrated, critical thinking helped enhance the respondents' learning and problem-solving in the classroom, as indicated by the response from the respondents: "Critical thinking is important for effective learning and understanding." "They are able to understand a subject better and find solutions that are unique." (Students 23) "Students are able to use critical thinking and derive their own meaning from their studies." (Student 3) "Students become independent learners whereby they create their own knowledge." (Student 14) According to the findings of a study conducted by Elder and Paul (2006), critical thinking is claimed to be an important factor in the acquisition of language skills, particularly writing and reading. Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with varying levels of ability can benefit from engaging in activities that encourage critical thinking since it will help them move beyond what they have learned from the text. Students are better able to make decisions as a result of engaging in critical thinking since it challenges them. According to Waters (2006), this fosters an environment in the classroom that is conducive to cooperation, the acceptance of various points of view, and the expression of one's own convictions. Research has been done on how critical thinking may be used to the teaching and learning of languages, and this research is supported by an understanding of critical language issues. In addition, Lin and Mackary (2004) found that their findings supported the hypothesis that thinking abilities might make learning a language easier. In addition, research has demonstrated that students who develop their critical thinking skills are better able to discover new avenues through which to draw conclusions, evaluate, and find solutions to issues. According to Liaw (2017), this paves the path for individuals to acquire a deeper comprehension of the English language and to make more effective use of it in their daily lives. "When a student reads with a critical mind, it involves active participation and communication which assist in language enhancement." (Student 21) "When critical thinking is applied in language learning, students acquire better presentation skills and also improve their communication skills." (Student 18) "Students are able to relate better with exam questions." (Student 6) "Critical thinking motivates and gets a student more involved in learning as they speak and learn vocabulary." The postgraduate students have expressed their belief that the ability to think critically has been beneficial to them in their day-to-day lives. According to McArthur, the quality of a person's thoughts has a direct influence on the quality of their lives. This demonstrates that students may benefit from critical thinking in their day-to-day lives, such as in their academic and professional endeavours. It is a reflection of how individuals engage in society as well as their capacity to use skills related to critical thinking. Writing ability is one indicator of a person's level of language acquisition. Writing, intellectual engagement, criticality, and emotion are all proven to have linkages

with one another through the work of Morrell (2008), who developed a critical writing pedagogy. He explains how a process of imagination may be enhanced by the act of writing, which in turn encourages a significant piece of written work. Students are able to analyse, critically evaluate, and assess their own capacities to do so when they are engaged in activities that promote critical thinking through the process of engaging students in activities that promote critical thinking. Problem-based learning is one approach that may be taken to foster critical thinking among students. Students' levels of critical thinking have been demonstrated to improve as a direct result of their participation in problem-based learning, according to research conducted by Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak (2017). Students are better able to focus on the problem's purpose and the people to whom it is aimed when the problem is presented to them in an atmosphere where it is not a teacher-driven assignment. Students are better able to develop collaborative projects that demonstrate unity and maturity in thought when they work in groups. This is because working in groups helps students to generate ideas that might potentially lead to such projects. "Critical thinking enables one to find solutions in one's career and academic pursuits. Also, it enables one to compare and contrast an idea, which brings about a strategic solution." (Student 7) "Using critical thinking assist students in their studies with less supervision." (Student 15) "Critical thinking has been helpful for me as a student as I am able to study without much supervision from the teacher." (Student 3) "It prepares students to in their presentation skills as learning would not be confined to only syllabus." (Student 11) "Critical The data also demonstrated that critical thinking is an important contributor to the individuals' overall academic achievement. Students who have developed their capacity for critical thinking are better able to advance in their studies and are also better able to proofread and revise their own work. Scholars of critical thinking are in agreement and have verified the significance of having students involved in authentic practises (Kim & Furlong, 2013; Zapatero, 2012). having students interested in authentic practises is important. In addition to this, it gives pupils with relevant situations that will improve their capacity to apply what they have learned. This is demonstrated by Vygotsky's theory (1934), which underlines the basic significance of social interaction in the formation of cognition. Vygotsky's theory demonstrates this point. This fact is strongly supported by the fact that community plays an important role in the process of "making meaning." "Through critical thinking, we are able to find information needed in order to complete our assignments." (Students 16) "As students, we are able to search for relevant information related to the topic of our studies." (Student 24) "As a student, critical thinking assist academic performance as active learning takes place." (Student 5) "Students in high school are able to search for relevant They do this by employing critical thinking as a way for assessing the information that has been gathered

and for obtaining responses. "Students in advance level can combine their own opinions with added knowledge," said Student 7. Problem-based learning, which has been demonstrated by studies to assist the development of students' critical thinking (Hornyak, 2017), is another technique to foster critical thinking. "Students in advance level can combine their own opinions with added knowledge." In addition, students are more likely to learn effectively through critical thinking since it encourages the creation of mutual understanding as well as the sharing of ideas among the students. Students are given the chance to work together on tasks that are connected to the subject matter in order to deepen their comprehension and to apply the knowledge that has been obtained. Collaborative learning is an effective educational approach that offers students with this opportunity. (Alkeaid, 2017) This is made much simpler with the use of the computer, which enables students to share their thoughts with one another for the purpose of improving their education. It was revealed by Tsivitanidou, Zacharia, and Hovardas (2011) that learning activities that are done through peers can boost good learning attitudes in students. This information was found in the study that they conducted. "In the process of using critical thinking, students compare and contrast different ideas," said another student (9). "Critical thinking is an important tool in enhancing their writing skill as they plan and thus allow the students to express further," said another student (18). "It is an effective learning tool and used for problem solving task," said another student (12). "Students can learn independently in group projects and critical thinking aids in effective learning." "Technology tools are used to achieve a common goal or objective and helps them to see their level of understanding." (Student 7) "Critical thinking tools are relevant and should be used to assist learners." (Student 5) "Collaborative tools and IT application enable students to get immediate response and prompt answer." (Student 9) "Use of group task for discussion and with the help of technology, students can work in the flexibility of their own time." (Student 27) "Only

Technology is an important instrument for conducting research, and it is also necessary for finishing assignments and projects. It is possible to acquire the necessary resources for learning from a variety of websites, in the event that extra knowledge is required for the process. It has offered significant promise to increase education and also the virtual interaction among learners (Wu & Yu, 2019). This potential was brought about by the online student-generated question technology that was used in this study. According to Vygotsky (1934), the Zone of Proximal Development is the region in which an individual should get the greatest amount of supervision or teaching. Because of this, the students are able to build abilities that they will eventually be able to utilise on their own to develop higher order thinking. Students are able to study more effectively as a result of the use of ICT (information and communications technology) in critical thinking, which catches their attention. Students

are implementing a new paradigm that is based on constructivism, in which students take on the role of active learners rather than passive learners. Because of this strategy or shift in emphasis, instructors now have the ability to be more flexible in their delivery, and students now have the opportunity to experience creative methods of learning. An investigation that was carried out by Howlett, Ferreira, and Blomfield (2016) shown that true transformational learning is capable of taking place within a constructivist informed educational approach. The investigation also demonstrated how students are able to retain what they have learnt. The findings are straightforward, and one may reasonably infer conclusions from them. Peer support is another component of effective learning, in which individuals share their ideas and views with one another. This adds value to education, and it gives students the chance to not only learn the detailed instructions supplied by the instructor, but also to learn from their peers' work as they play the role of a critic (XM Wang, Hwang, Liang, and HY Wang, 2017). This gives students the opportunity to learn both the comprehensive instructions provided by the teacher, as well as to learn from their peers' work. According to Hovardas, Tsivitanidou, and Zacharia (2014), students who engage in collaborative work have the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills and provide recommendations and criticism to their classmates. According to the findings of a study conducted by McLoughlina and Mynardb (2019), there was evidence of higher-order thinking in online debates; nevertheless, it was more prevalent during the exploratory phase of the discussion. According to Costa and Kallick (2019), the learning process of a student shifts from one in which the student receives knowledge in an active but passive manner to one in which the student actively produces knowledge by engaging in reflective thinking practise. The function of the instructor in this scenario is that of a facilitator, providing assistance to students with the intention of cultivating critical thinking in those students. The process of acquiring knowledge in supervised settings is not the best approach to education. According to Pavlidis (2010), one of the desired results of education is the ability to think critically, and as a result, education helps strengthen the fundamental human skills. It also depends on the individual's propensity to ponder on the internal questions and responses that follow and, at the same time, to develop alternate options within a particular circumstance (Celuch, 2010). The development of learning may be pursued through the use of integrated teaching techniques, in which students engage in critical thinking and learn through experiences that mimic natural learning as methods that encourage learning. Students take an active part in the development of their own learning, which is consistent with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasises the importance of learning contexts. It is possible for teachers to direct pupils in order to make learning easier, and the experience may become mutually beneficial for both the students and the instructor. According to the findings of this research, the application of critical thinking improves learning, and

students develop into autonomous learners as a result.

CONCLUSION

The level of engagement that students have with the material may be increased through the integration of learning and critical thinking. Exploratory tasks are utilised throughout the process of commencing critical thinking. These tasks have a tight link with reflection since they allow students to think independently (Bean, 2011). In addition, an argument is made in a research conducted by Zemsky (2019) that the emphasis should not be placed on content coverage but rather on high-priority material that concurrently encourages critical thinking. In addition, researchers need to focus greater attention on the concept of critical thinking so that more recommendations may be made available to the general population. It is imperative that the significance of critical thinking be brought to light, and the government should provide room for such activities to take place inside the educational system. It is to everyone's advantage to include critical thinking into the classroom since it deals with real-life scenarios. In general, kids should begin developing their critical thinking skills at an early age. This would provide them the opportunity to nurture both creative and critical thinking as they progress through their academic careers. Students would be able to put their analytical skills to use in the real world once they graduate and enter the workforce. Students will be engaged in active learning that will assist them in developing an awareness of, and an appreciation for, a variety of points of view. This will be accomplished via the use of critical thinking and organised controversy, which will pique the students' interest in looking for answers to the problem. In addition to this, it demands pupils to engage in sophisticated reasoning and critical thinking. As a consequence of this, students are presented with a wider variety of views, which will assist them in developing original answers and fresh conclusions to the contentious issue that they are examining. As a consequence, it elevates the degree of thinking that kids are capable of, which in turn fosters improved academic performance.

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