Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching English Language Receptive skills

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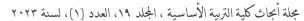
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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is not only mastering vocabulary and grammar rules. It is important that students know how to give opinions, give sound reasons for those opinions, and evaluate and judge on specific situation. This is possible by integrating critical thinking skills into teaching English language receptive skills. It explains how to enrich and develop students' thinking and implementing it in the educational process and lifelong learning. The basic aim of the current research is to provide suggestions for integrating critical thinking skills into teaching English language receptive skills. The current research ends with the conclusion that it is suggested to integrate critical thinking skills in teaching English language receptive skills for its valuable effect on developing students thinking, interaction and awareness as well as making them more interactive in the learning process.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Critical Thinking Skills, English Language Receptive Skills, English Language Teaching, EFL.

دمج مهارات التفكير النقدي في تدريس مهارات تقبّل اللغة الإنجليزية

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المستخلص

إن تعلم لغة أجنبية هو ليس فقط إتقان المفردات والقواعد. من المهم أن يعرف الطلبة كيفية إبداء آرائهم وإعطاء أسباب وجيهة لتلك الآراء وتقييم موقف معين والحكم عليه، حيث يمكن ذلك من خلال دمج مهارات التفكير الناقد في تدريس المهارات الاستقبالية للغة الإنكليزية. حيث أنها توضح كيفية تطوير وإثراء تفكير الطلاب وتطبيقها في العملية التعليمية والاحتفاظ بالتعلم. لذلك، إن الهدف الأساسي من البحث الحالي هو تقديم مقترحات حول كيفية دمج مهارات التفكير الناقد في تدريس المهارات الاستقبالية للغة الإنكليزية. تنتهي الدراسة الحالية باستنتاج مفاده إنه من المقترح دمج مهارات التفكير الناقد في تدريس المهارات الاستقبالية للغة الإنكليزية لما لها من تأثير قيّم على تنمية تفكير الطلبة وتفاعلهم ووعيهم، فضلاً عن جعلهم أكثر تفاعلاً في عملية التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكير الناقد، مهارات التفكير الناقد ، مهارات اللغة الإنكليزية الاستقبالية، تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية، اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية.

1. Introduction

Motivation of learning a language goes wider in terms of advantages of the target language. According to (Gallagher-Brett, 2004: 2), learners learn the language to get benefits for the following rationals: citizenship, communication, economic, social and political dimensions, democracy, ecological balance, equal opportunity, globalization, identity, cultural competition, foreign policy, key skills, language awareness, mobility/travel, multilingualism, personal and social development and values. However, these goals or reasons differ according to personal needs and it is clear that one should learn further to do so. However, the grammar rules and vocabulary knowledge are not enough to master the language and reach such goals. This is due to the fact that successful

language learning requires cognitive processes like other types of learning. In other words, thinking, reasoning and critical thinking (henceforth CT) are major parts of making sense of the new information which help students learn effectively.

The current research is concerned with integrating CT skills in teaching English language receptive skills. It addresses the following research question: 1) how can critical thinking skills be integrated in teaching listening? 2) How can critical thinking skills be integrated in teaching reading comprehension? It specifies a space to review what CT is, its definition, characteristics, scope and skills. Additionally, it sheds light on English language receptive skills along with their definitions and types. After that, two lesson plans are designed and suggested to integrating CT skills in teaching and assessing English language receptive skills.

2. Critical Thinking

The word "critical" is derived from the Greek word 'Kritikos' meaning to judge; then this word passed to Latin language as 'Criticus' meaning discrimination and making judgments. According to the Oxford Online Dictionary CT is "the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment".

However, CT is credited to John Dewey, the American philosopher, psychologist and educator, who is widely regarded as the 'father' of the modern CT tradition. He calls it 'reflective thinking' and defines it as "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1910: 6). By

'active' Dewey means that the person should think about things and issues himself, be independent thinker, ask questions and try to find solutions and does not only rely on others' ideas and information in a passive way. The most important point in Dewey's definition is "grounds which support it" which means that there must be logical, and sound reasons behind what we believe. Moreover, (Elder & Paul, 1994: 34) view CT as individuals' ability to control their own thinking and develop appropriate criteria and standards for analyzing their own thinking.

According to (Browne & Keely, 2015: 8), CT can be used either for defending or evaluating and revising initial beliefs. The difference between them is shown in Richard Paul's distinction between weak sense and strong-sense of CT where weak-sense CT is for defending current beliefs whereas strong sense of CT is for evaluating claims and beliefs, "especially your own". Another way of the distinction between defending and evaluating is the difference between open-mindedness and close-mindedness. When one is closed-minded s/he will stick to her/his own beliefs, and when one is open-minded s/he respects the opinions and beliefs that differ from his/her own and welcome criticism (ibid).

According to (Ennis, 1985: 45) defines CT as a "Reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do". This definition views CT as a focused logical thinking which leads to the right decision and beliefs. More recently, (Facione, 2000, 61) supports Ennis's definition of CT and views it as "judging in a reflective way what to do or what to believe".

A closer look to the definitions mentioned above gives a sense to claim that characteristics of CT are basically related to the features of

people who think critically. For example, being active thinkers who can think independently, being open-minded, analyze different points of view, make syntheses, evaluate and judge logically and do not accept things as they are. According to (Bowell & Kemp, 2010: 5), developing ability to analyze attitudes and strategies of persuasion can result in being able to realize whether they are giving logical and acceptable arguments or not which, in turn, liberates from accepting what is being said or written without presenting logical reasons.

However, the nature and scope of teaching CT is controversial. On the one hand, some scholars believe that CT is domain specific or subject specificity which is credited to (Ennis, 1989: 4) in his research "Critical Thinking and Subject Specificity: Clarification and Needed Research" in which he believes that CT is a subject within a specific domain. In light of this, (McPeck, 1990: 11) argues that thinking is wide and cannot be limited to a number of skills that can be applied on all contexts fairly.

On the other hand, other scholars believe in the general view of CT. For example, (Halpern, 1993: 277) provides evidence that CT can be taught separately through designing a course for developing students' thinking by teaching them thinking skills. This is concluded by the positive results of his research regarding that CT skills can be improved as a result of thinking-skills instruction far from domain specific limits. Furthermore, (Gelder, 2005: 43) argues that CT is general in nature and should be learned in order to be practised in different domains. He clarifies that it is not possible to transfer CT skills that have been learned in one domain into other domains rather, students need to learn these skills separately in order to be able to transfer their knowledge of these skills into other domains.

2.1 Critical Thinking Skills

A skill is the ability to do something efficiently so that the required task can be performed efficiently (Smith, 2002: 661). Furthermore, in educational contexts, a skill is the role of the teachers to teach learners not just language skills, but also CT skills. Through listening, speaking, reading and writing the learners use their CT skills to reflect their thoughts and beliefs consciously or unconsciously. These skills are highly helpful for learners in learning assignments. Therefore, CT skills are recommended to be taught in educational contexts to make students become creative, independent and confident.

According to (Pithers & Soden, 2000: 241), the assumption of good thinking is based on the idea that the "meta-cognitive ability, for instance, involving perception, critique judgment, or decision-making allows people to orchestrate and self-regulate their own learning strategies and those abilities are encompassed in the term CT". Indeed, (Elder & Paul, 1994: 34) add that CT is the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking and learning. This requires students develop logical criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and use these criteria to improve their level of thought. According to (Costa & Kallick, 2008 cited in Mohammadi & Golandouz, 2017: 107) CT skills are the most important which are used to determine the ability of thinking in understanding the logical connections among issues, theories, and ideas, to perceive the importance and priorities of ideas, to evaluate possible arguments, and to propose solutions.

3. Critical Thinking and Language Education

Higher education nowadays requires independent learning and learner-centred focus (Faramarzi et al., 2016: 879). In this view, CT in terms of making students independent thinkers fosters learners' independent learning and autonomy which is fundamental in higher education. However, (Browne & Keeley (2015: 95) argue that students at university level generally lack CT skills. Hence, (Alexander & Laboratory, 2012: 263) attribute the reason of this lack for the traditional methods of education which are based on passing standardized tests and ignoring students' critical role. Furthermore, (Davies, 2007: 19) confirms that the traditional method of teaching students to memorize and students' passive learning, not participating in class and their lack of analytical and CT skills do not promote successful learning and do not produce independent and critical thinkers.

Therefore, philosophers and educators stress the importance of CT as a primary output of a successful education. According to (Halpern, 1999: 70), developing CT is the basic element and primary reason for higher education. Therefore, students need to improve their thinking so that they can self-regulate and monitor their own learning. To foster CT within the field of education, teachers can orient their students to notice by teaching them the concept of valid argument, not to stick to invalid arguments and to enable them to be self-oriented individuals (Bailin et. al., 1999: 275).

Furthermore, (Mahyuddin et. al., 2004: 24) believe that incorporating CT skills in language learning makes students think critically and creatively, develop the ability of decision making and solving problems, take thinking skills for granted, and be well-balanced in terms of intellect, physic, emotions and spirits. Importantly, (Vaseghi

et. al., 2012: 404) and (Tuzlukova et. al., 2018: 198) point out that incorporating CT in language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) is beneficial since it results in active learning with focus on how to think instead of what to think. Thus, incorporating CT skills in language learning promote autonomous learning (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011: 112). To sum up, (Vdovina & Gaibisso, 2013: 58) state that CT in English language teaching is essential and beneficial: it involves students' in interactive activities to develop self-consciousness, understand students' abilities and limits and self-improvement.

4. Receptive Skills

The English language receptive skills are listening and reading, and they are called receptive because learners do not need to produce language but they receive and understand it. Therefore, receptive skills refer to the ability to listen and understand the language. According to (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018: 670) "Listening is stage one of responding act of a communicating event. Listening is a sustained effort to receive sound and make meaning. It opens up possibilities for continuing interaction".

English language communicative skills that are taught in EFL lessons are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four language skills are referred to as the productive and receptive skills. Productive skills are speaking and writing and known as productive because they both require some sort of language output and active interaction. On the other hand, listening and reading are known as receptive skills because learners do not need to produce language but they receive and understand it (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018: 670).

However, the current research is concerned with the receptive skills. Listening is the first receptive skill and considered the basic source of language input. It provides the learners with the information they need to construct the necessary knowledge for using the language. It is a complex process which requires more than listening to what is said. According to (Nunan, 1997: 5), listening is a constructive process through which active listeners make sense of what is said by drawing connections on what they already know to make use of new knowledge.

Generally, (O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1989: 434) define listening comprehension (henceforth LC) as an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by connecting the new information with his previous knowledge depending on the resources available in order to fulfil the tasks. Moreover, (Purdy, 1997: 8) points out that listening is "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings".

In terms of purpose, listening can be divided into two types: extensive and intensive listening. It can be defined by referring to all listening activities that evoke learners to deal with comprehensible and enjoyable listening input (Renandya & Farrel, 2010: 56). While intensive listening is the process of "listening for precise sounds, words, phrases, grammatical units and pragmatic units" (Rost, 2002: 184). Thus, the ability to decode a message by concentrating on all spoken details is considered an essential part of listening proficiency.

The second receptive skill is reading. It is generally defined as getting meaning from printed texts in its widest sense (Day & Bamford, 1998: 12, cited in Byberg, 2015: 24). According to (Grabe & Stoller, 2011: 3), reading is the ability to understand meaning and interpret what is read appropriately from the printed page. From another perspective, (Anderson, 2003: 68) defines reading as a process of combining students' background knowledge with the new information from a text to decode meaning. For (Harris & Hodges, 1995: 39), reading is a "reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message". In conclusion, reading refers to the ability to comprehend what is read through connecting information with readers' previous knowledge.

More interestingly, there are two main types of reading namely: extensive and intensive reading. Extensive reading is reading a large amount of materials within learners' linguistic competence (Grabe & Stoller, 2011: 286). Similarly, (Yamashita, 2013: 248) states that extensive reading refers to engaging students to read large amount of reading texts. This process of reading a large amount of texts has a positive effect on raising EFL learners' reading comprehension ability, reading attitude and vocabulary knowledge (Chen et al., 2013: 308). As a result, students become more motivated and stimulated to develop their reading abilities. On the other hand, intensive reading is referred to as reading for extracting specific information. According to (Grellet, 1981: 4) intensive reading is an accuracy activity which requires reading in details. Thus, (Rashidi & Piran, 2011: 471) explain that intensive reading is mostly about comprehending lexical and syntactic level of texts. In other words, intensive reading is characterized by understanding all the lexical and syntactic features of a text and reading word-for-word. This

requires translating words into their native language and focus on grammar use and rules (Day et al., 2011).

5. Integrating Critical Thinking in Teaching and Assessing Receptive Skills

This section is related to the practical integration of CT skills in teaching listening and reading through a suggested lesson plan as in the following sub-sections.

5.1 Integrating Critical Thinking in Teaching and Assessing Listening Skills
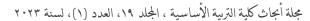
5.1.1 Pre-listening Stage

This stage is an introductory or a preparatory one, through which essential keywords that have relations to the topic are provided to make students predict what is going to be presented and recognize its appropriate classification (Berne, 1995; Chang & Read, 2006, cited in Chang and Read 2008: 377).

The goals of this stage are to pay more attention to the contents of the topic to encourage the listeners to think about what is going to be listened to in addition to focusing on the grammatical constructions and pronunciation, to stimulate listeners' previous knowledge and build their predictions for the coming information (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011: 982).

For example, if a given topic is about open-book examinations, it is helpful if the teacher gives some keywords that stimulate students' background knowledge and thinking towards what they are going to listen to e.g. open-book, notes, handouts, memorize, etc.

5.1.2 While-listening Stage

While-listening activities refer to the tasks and questions that students are asked to do during the listening process to help them comprehend the ideas and the spoken language (Pospieszyńska, 2000: 2). There has been a debate concerning whether these tasks and questions should be presented before or after they listen to the text, some scholars (Buck, 1990 cited in Buck 2001: 137) found that providing these tasks and questions for listeners after listening to the text have negative effects because they listen in an unfocused way and they are uncertain about why they are listening to the text. On the other hand, some scholars (Sherman 1997 cited in ibid) found that providing these tasks and questions before listening to the text may be confusing and out of context until they hear the text. Therefore, (Sherman, 1997 cited in ibid: 137) found that the most powerful improvement in performance came from showing the questions after listeners had heard the passage once, but before they heard it for a second time.

Sherman's approach of giving tasks and questions after listening to the recorded tape of passage once then let them listen to it again then react to these tasks and questions could be the best suitable option. However, the contribution of CT skills here is related to the nature of these questions in that they are rather controversial. They reflect listeners' own thinking, personal experiences, beliefs or points of view, reasons for or evidence supporting their positions in a specific argument or their evaluation for the arguments. Thus, the recorded tape for the listeners could be about a conversation, taken from (Sharpe, 2013: 496) *Barron's TOEFL iBT*, between a student and a professor on open-book examination, where the student raises some questions about it and the professor clarifies some concepts.

Integrating CT skills into such topics in LC in the form of controversial questions functions as an improvement tool for listeners' thinking in addition to the linguistic ability to achieve better LC. For example, the questions could be about asking the listeners for:

1. Clarifying the meaning of open-book examination (the purpose of such question is it to activate the basic CT skill: interpretation by encouraging the students to give their own understanding of the topic concept),

2. Providing evidence or logical reasons for standing for or against the idea of open-book examination (when the students answer to such kind of questions and give the evidence and personal experiences that support their position, they are actually practicing another important CT skill in LC which is analysis),

3. Evaluating the credibility or acceptability of open-book examination arguments (in this kind of questions, students are involved to pose their judgment on the idea of the topic by applying evaluative CT skill).

Such questions reflect listener's thinking independency supported by his personal experiences or logical reasoning aiming at focusing students' comprehension on the speaker's spoken language and ideas; paying more attention to listeners' critical reactions and personal responses to the speaker's ideas and use of spoken language.

5.1.3 Post-listening Stage

This stage is complementary to the previous stages and can be practised afterwards. Students have the chance to broaden their knowledge about the topic "this interest is not confined only to the

original passage but it tends to include student's impressions, opinions, attitudes" (Hedge, 2000 cited in Pardosi, 2018: 33). For example, after the students have thought about the topic individually, their thoughts, opinions, and arguments will be reviewed in terms of an open discussion between the listeners to discuss the arguments and counterarguments and clarify the questions that might be left unanswered or unsupported with evidence and organize their thoughts and discover shortcomings in weak arguments and correct them to reach an acceptable and logical conclusion. In other words, by opening a discussion on strong and weak arguments to reach logical reasoning, students are involved in practising another CT skill which is called self-regulation or self-correction.

The aim of this stage is to enable listeners to assess how much they have understood from the listening tape, listeners could understand the points they have not understood in the previous stages. Furthermore, there is a good opportunity for listeners to use the expressions and structures they have learnt in the target language.

5.2 Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching and Assessing Reading

5.2.1 Pre-reading Stage

According to (Chen & Graves, 1995: 664), pre-reading activities are "devices for bridging the gap between the text's content and the reader's schemata". In fact, (Halvorsen, 2005: 1) adds that it is more appropriate to present topics that are close to students' interest especially in CT domains. This means that pre-reading stage involves presenting more than one topic to the learners to choose what they desire to read. The purpose behind pre-reading stage is to activate students' background knowledge, predict the content of the text in addition to raising their
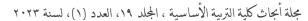
interest and motivation and activating learners' schemata to explore what the learners know about the topic of the reading passage. Therefore, this stage starts with introducing topics to the learners to choose from.

This can be done by providing pre-reading questions before reading and after choosing specific topic to read, in order to foster CT tasks for the next stages. These questions are general and directives and could be asking about, for example, how can fast food affect our lives? What piece of evidence in negative fast food effects do you find and why" or Think about the advantages and disadvantages of fast food. Such kind of questions, posing ideas to consider and connections to think about before reading, creates substantive and interactive discussions between students, fosters their thinking, draw inferences and organize ideas which support value judgment.

5.2.2 While-reading Stage

After the students have chosen the topic for reading, assuming that it is about 'fast food', the teacher presents the topic for the students and instructs them to read, take notes while reading and pay more attention to the message behind the text.

The text might contain a one-sided argument that either stands for or against the fast food. The purpose here is to leave a part for the students to think about the other sides of the topic and be able to infer (inference CT skill) that something is not complete and it will be their contribution to fill this gap in the next stage (solving problem CT skill). For example, the text might contain argument that highlights the negative side of fast food orders and their several negative effects on personal

health, family union and society leaving the positive features of saving time and efforts unstated.

This stage is complementary to the previous stage where it stimulates students' thinking, reading, discussing one's own impressions, opinions, and understanding the social consequences of the subject; discovering the meaning of the text. Through this stage, students relate what they read to their own experience and go through several CT skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

5.2.3 Post-reading Stage

After the students have read the topic, they are required to answer three kinds of questions that are different from the traditional approach of teaching reading comprehension. These questions are derived from CT skills and they are: interpretative, analytical, and evaluative.

In terms of interpretative CT questions, a question raised could be about what fast food means; where a person can get a fast food from or the ways of getting fast food. As for analytical CT questions, they could be asking about whether the argument stated in the text is instantly correct in all cases, whether there are situations in which fast food is beneficial or whether there are kinds of fast food or comparing the advantages and disadvantages of fast food. One of the important things accounted for in answering analytical questions is to support answer with evidence or previous experience. Regarding the evaluative CT questions, it is the learners' role to evaluate the argument stated in the text or the counterargument they provide in their answers supported with logical suggestions for solving the problem.

After that, students' performance is assessed by answering the interpretative, analytical and evaluative questions that follow the passage, whether the students' answers are logically supported by evidence or stand for or against the argument written in the passage.

At the end, the teacher clarifies how fast food has become part of the modern life and is regarded as beneficial and one of the necessary life style for some people. At the same time, it might be dangerous when it is from restaurants that do not take health standards into considerations and might cause serious diseases at the personal and social levels.

6. Conclusions

The importance of touching upon CT in EFL classes is one of the most important issues that are emphasized in the new curriculums. CT skills of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference and solving problems are among the skills that can be developed in EFL classes and needed to raise learners from critical perspective. This enables learners not to accept knowledge as it is and try to question and look at things from different perspectives through how and why questions, investigation, reasoning and producing new knowledge. This is due to the argumentation that CT skills play a positive role in developing language receptive skills i.e. listening and reading as well as developing cognitive awareness that can be targeted in EFL classes.

It is worth mentioning that more research is needed to integrate other language skills, namely, listening and reading with CT skills in order to complete the picture and make use of CT skills in teaching all language skills.

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