Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching English Language Productive skills

Basim Yahya Jasim
Department of English/ College of Arts/ University of Mosul

Suha Abdulmohsin Yahya
Department of English/ College of Basic Education/ University of Mosul

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, evaluate and judge on specific situation. This is possible by integrating critical thinking skills into teaching English language productive 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 productive 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, Productive Skills, English Language Teaching, EFL.

تكامل مهارات التفكير النقدي في تدريس مهارات إنتاج اللغة الإنجليزية

سهى عبد المحسن يحيى
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية التربية الأساسية
جامعة الموصل

باسم يحيى جاسم
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل

المستخلص:

ان تعلم الغة ألاجنبية هو ليس فقط إتقان المفردات والقواعد. بل من المهم أن يعرف الطلاب كيفية إبداء آرائهم وإعطاء أسباب وجيهة لتلك الآراء وتقييم موقف معين والحكم عليه. اذ يتم ذلك من خلال دمج مهارات التفكير الناقد في تدريس المهارات الإنتاجية للغة الإنكليزية. حيث أنها توضح كيفية إثراء وتطوير تفكير الطلاب وتطبيقها في العملية التعليمية والتعلم مدى الحياة. لذلك نجد بإن الهدف الأساسي من البحث الحالي هو تقديم مقترحات حول كيفية دمج مهارات التفكير الناقد في تدريس المهارات الإنتاجية للغة الإنكليزية. تنتهي الدراسة الحالية باستنتاج مفاده أنه من المقترح دمج مهارات التفكير النقدي في تدريس المهارات الإنتاجية للغة الإنكليزية لما لها من تأثير قيّم على تنمية تفكير الطلاب وتفاعلهم ووعيهم، فضلاً عن جعلهم أكثر تفاعلاً في عملية التعلم.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the importance of the underlying dynamics of critical thinking (henceforth CT) has been recognized in teaching English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL). In fact, EFL learning exceeds the limits of memorizing vocabulary items and grammar rules; other areas of knowledge such as social, cultural and discourse conventions are definitely to be included in the classroom input.

However, the grammar rules and vocabulary knowledge are not enough to master the language and reach at 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 are major parts of making sense of the new information which helps students learn effectively.

The current research is concerned with integrating critical thinking (henceforth CT) skills in teaching English language productive skills. It addresses the following research question: 1) how can critical thinking skills be integrated in teaching speaking? 2) How can critical thinking skills be integrated in teaching writing? It a space to review what CT is, its definition, characteristics and skills. Additionally, it sheds light on English language productive skills along with their definitions and types. After that, two lesson plans are designed and suggested to integrate CT skills in teaching and assessing EFL productive 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". According to Halpern (2014: 9) the critical part of CT gives an evaluative meaning. The word critical is sometimes used to mean something negative. However, evaluation should be a constructive reflection of positive and negative attributes. When people think critically, they are evaluating their own thought. CT involves evaluating the conclusion they have arrived at or the factors that affect their decision (ibid).

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. In the same way, Paul (1992: 9) asserts that CT is the prototype of thinking in a particular domain of thought that is disciplined and self-directed. 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". On the other hand, Lipman (1988: 3) defines CT as the type of thinking that is skilful and reasonable in judgments because of its major characteristics of criteria reliance, self correction and sensitivity to context.

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 point of views, make syntheses, evaluate and judge logically and do not accept things as they are. According to Bowell & Kemp (2010: 5), developing the 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, CT is more than just the knowledge of facts; it is a way of logical thinking to reach at judgment or conclusion. Therefore, critical thinkers need to update their knowledge and try to engage themselves in independent learning. The main characteristics of CT can be reflected by some of the attitudes or dispositions of critical thinkers. In a parallel view, Ennis (1993: 180) believes that a critical thinker characteristically needs to do some of the following actions: judging whether the sources of information are credible or not; distinguishing the ability to separate between conclusions, reasons, and assumptions; judging the acceptability

of arguments in terms reasons, assumptions and evidence; standing for a specific position well; clarifying questions; being open-minded; having enough information, and drawing logical conclusions.

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). 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". 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) CT skills are the most important skills 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

According to Chaffee (2015: xv), the basic need nowadays in higher education is to integrate CT thinking skills in different faculty disciplines such as philosophy, cognitive psychology, linguistics, and the language arts (English, reading, and oral communication) in order to develop students' thinking abilities to think more effectively. Moreover, researchers emphasize the importance of incorporating CT with L2 teaching and learning. Tarvin & Al-Arishi (1991: 24) believe that language learning and CT are inter related incorporating CT activities promote language learning and foster students' motivation.

Furthermore, many researchers highlight the benefits of incorporating CT in language education. It is suggested that teachers should train students to CT skills of argumentation, analysis and evaluation as well as incorporating activities of problem-solving and decision-making to foster CT ability (Lipman, 2003).

However, Gunawardena & Petraki (2014: 66) argue that incorporating CT skills in language education is restricted and is still argued bout. According to Dwee et al. (2016: 634), some of the reasons for these constraints can be related to how teachers approach criticality in addition to the difficulty of incorporating CT skills in language teaching and learning. They add that constraints can also be related to students' educational background since their role in classrooms is used to be passive: being rarely involved in interactive activities of questioning and discussing. (ibid: 634; Gunawardena & Petraki, 2014: 73).

4. Productive Skills

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 (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018: 670).

However, the current research is concerned with the productive skills. Speaking is the first language productive skill which is defined as "the action of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in speech" (Oxford Dictionary, 2010: 31860). Chaney (1998: 13 cited in Kayi, 2006: 1) states that "speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal in variety of context". This means that speaking requires verbal and nonverbal activities to convey meaning in different contexts. on the other hand, Bailey (2003: 48)views speaking are lifelong skill that takes place in real time and it is the hardest skill among the four language skills to teach (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) because speakers, unlike writers, are unable to revise their speech. He defines it as "productive aural/oral skill which consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning". In the same line, Thornbury (2005: 20) considers speaking as an activity in real-life time by which speakers are able to convey their messages and ideas to communicate with others. He further adds that it is

different from other skills e.g. writing in that it is unplanned and its continuity depends on the situation.

Furthermore, speakers speak differently by focusing on two criteria. These two types are accuracy and fluency. Speaking accurately means producing correct language features. It refers to the use of correct forms where utterances do not contain errors affecting the phonological, syntactic, semantic and discourse features of a language (Bryne, 1988 cited in Sohlan, 1994: 3). Moreover, Harmer (2001: 104) points out that accuracy requires the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. These three components can be regarded as criteria for assessing "learner's command of the linguistic systems" (Thornbury, 2000: 3). Similarly, Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005: 139) refer to accuracy as "how well the target language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language". As far as fluency is concerned able to use the language regardless of some mistakes. According to Tumova (2002: 21), fluency refers to using the language that has been learnt freely in spite of making mistakes. While to Thornbury (2005), views fluency as a reasonably fast speed of speaking with little use of gap fillers like "um, er etc.". That is to say, expressing the message without spending a lot of time to choose the appropriate language items and structure.

The second language productive skill is writing. It is a form of communication that delivers thoughts or expresses feelings through the written form (Harmer, 2004). This means that it is basically concerned with generating ideas and expressing oneself through the written forms.

Writing is the construction of letters or graphic symbols for the purpose of communication (Collins, 2003). This means that writing refers to the ability to produce written words and symbols to communicate.

However, writing is more than producing letters words, or sentences randomly; rather, they should be arranged according to specific criteria to form an acceptable piece of writing. Syntactically, writers should be aware of four kinds of structure in writing, they are: word structure, sentence structure, paragraph structure and overall text structure (Collins and Gentner, 1980: 67). However, Andrews (2005: 43) believes that writing is not only cognitive and linguistic abilities, rather, it is based on the imagination, feeling, state of mind, mood, cognitive state, capability with the medium, context and other factors. Moreover, Abisamara (2001: 1) views writing as the ability of generating and inventing ideas meaningful ideas for communication that precedes the construction of form and grammar.

The Importance writing lies in that: firstly, it is an act of clarifying and exploring thoughts and ideas. It is not only changing thoughts into words but it is also considered as a tool for developing and exploring ethics, thoughts and values (Tchudi & Mitchell, 1999: 244, 245 cited in Ahmed, 2011: 57). Similarly, Rao (2007: 100) asserts that writing in EFL is a highly important and useful skill in teaching and learning English since it aids in stimulating students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarize, analyze and criticize. Additionally, it develops students' learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language.

However, there are two major types of writing that have different features and rules. These types are academic and non-academic writing. Academic writing is a genre of writing for specific purposes that have strict rules and practices that should be learned. Baily (2011: 3) proposes that this kind of writing is used for specific purposes such as: reporting

researches done by others, answering questions that have been given by other writers, discussing scientific subjects of common interests or synthesising other's researches on a topic. Vásquez (2013: 100) adds that the main purpose of academic writing is described as "writing to learn" which means that students write academically to explore topics, to learn new things, to argue for or against a specific topic and demonstrate what they have learnt. It gives the professors an idea of how students think.

5. Integrating Critical Thinking in Teaching and Assessing Productive Skills

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

5.1 Integrating Critical Thinking in Teaching and Assessing speaking Skill

Speaking can be taught in sequential sequence i.e. pre-speaking, while-speaking and post-speaking (Richards, 2008; Ngan, 2013).

5.1.1 Pre-speaking Stage

This stage can be regarded as a preparatory stage within which, the teacher can provide titles about a number of familiar topics that are controversial and give general views about them. Then the students can choose a specific topic as a task for next. The students will be divided into groups and members of each group will give their co-operational ideas about the topic in the next stage. For example, the topic selected might be about dictatorial parenting. The teacher gives them a brief

introduction about what is parenting and what is dictatorial parenting. Then the teacher asks the students to prepare their ideas, vocabularies and personal experience in order to discuss them in the while-speaking stage.

What makes this approach different from the traditional approach of teaching speaking is that it meets learners' environment and interest in addition to making students think about the topic, generate ideas, review their personal experience, and try to discover more information (decoding significance CT skill). It involves a brief discussion or introduction on the topic to give students time to think and collect ideas, prepare necessary vocabularies (Richards, 2008: 33). Instead of just memorizing vocabularies and dialogues of a conversation between two or more communicators is limited in benefits. These activities of presenting a familiar topic and arousing interest are the most important activities in this stage (Sariçoban, 2005: 44).

Within this stage, other skills might be involved such as listening and sometimes reading. Therefore, the teacher's role is to present the topic, spoken or written, to the students and give them an idea about what is going to be discussed in the next stage (Ngan, 2013).

5.1.2 While-speaking Stage

Within this stage, students start to practice speaking. After the students had enough time for thinking, students of each group during this stage start to speak and explain their arguments and judgments about the topic under discussion as well as listening to arguments of other group to compare their ideas and evidence in order to reach at most reasonable judgment. For example, if the topic selected is about parenting, then the teacher will ask the students to share their points of view in that whether

they stand for or against dictatorial parenting and provide logical reasons supported with evidence and personal experiences. Students of each group will start to speak and share their ideas and judgments on the topic and the teacher asks the speaking group to clarify the arguments using different words or expressions (the purpose of these skill, clarifying meaning and analysis of CT skills, are to give students the opportunity to express themselves, share their opinion and ideas freely, and practice the language).

For example, if members of one group state that dictatorial parenting have high negative effects on their children's personalities and future, the teacher might ask for a more clarification about this argument and whether they have a supportive evidence or personal experience about them or someone they know to support their argument.

5.1.3 Post-speaking Stage

The final stage of speaking is for evaluation of the while-speaking stage. This means, that after listening to students ideas, opinions, judgments and evidence, the teacher explains all the perspectives about the topic shedding light on the advantages and disadvantages of dictatorial parenting and giving students the opportunity to suggest or decide what the most appropriate parenting way is by comparing their arguments especially those which are supported with more than one evidence and logical reasoning this is called problem solving.

Moreover, the teacher observes and evaluates speaking ability on the basis of two factors: accuracy and fluency. In accuracy, speaking is to be evaluated according to the ability to use the appropriate vocabularies, grammar, paraphrasing, and speaking with little pauses. In fluency,

speaking is to be evaluated according to whether the argument is connected to the main idea and supported with evidence or personal experience this is called (Detecting arguments CT skill). This type of evaluation is adopted from Sharpe (2013: 58) Barron's TOEFL iBT. Based on this skill, the teacher observes whether the students answer the question of the topic, clarify their points of view clearly, the sentences are logically connected and content and examples support their argument.

Speaking critically makes students able to interpret life, pose their own judgments independently and freely, establish healthy relationships with others, and persuade others with their arguments in a spoken manner. It develops students' ability to find creative solutions to problems.

5.2 Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching and Assessing Writing

There is a debate in teaching writing between the traditional approach to writing that focuses on structured writing and the modern approach that allows free writing, or gives the students the opportunity to write in the way they want. However, both approaches of writing are highly advised to be in the form of what is called an essay. Moreover, showing the ability of being independent thinkers is an essential element in essay writing, especially at university level (Rafidi, 2013: 41).

A piece of writing is regarded as good in quality not only when it is grammatically correct but also when it sounds logical in thinking and presentation (Mike & Smith, 1990 cited in Husin & Nurbayani, 2017: 241). Therefore, it is suggested that learners need to be taught to write critically and not only rely on forming grammatically correcl sentences

one by another. In other words, learners should focus on both content (ideas) and form (grammar).

Rohman (2002: 7) proposes three stages for the writing process to transfer ideas and thoughts into written form. These stages include the pre-writing, writing and rewriting.

The pre-writing stage is defined as the discovery stage when the writer understands the topic and generates and develops his/her ideas. The writing stage includes changing ideas or thoughts into words and put them on paper. The rewriting stage is for revising what has been written and polish it before hanging it out (ibid).

Putting this in mind, in teaching writing we suggest that students' attention should be drawn to the importance of learning and applying CT skills in writing. For example, in addition to teaching students the grammatical rules for correct writing in their syllabus textbooks, teachers need to help students learn what and how to write logically in both thinking and presentation. This is possible, for example, when they are taught to divide their piece of writing into three parts where the first part should be *interpretative* in classifying (categorization) the topic into a specific framework, (clarify the meaning CT skill) of its basic concepts and show its importance (decoding significance CT skills) to remove ambiguity. The second part should be *analytical* which means providing independent argument about the topic and comparing it with other arguments and facts (examining ideas CT skill). Moreover, supporting information, descriptions and reasons have to be provided about the argument in this paragraph for the purpose of supporting or opposing claims, opinions or points of views (detecting and analyzing arguments). The last part should be *evaluative* which involves proofing the credibility

and acceptability of an argument (assessing claims and arguments CT skills) by drawing logical and reasonable conclusions supported by clear evidence to develop a persuasive argument to support an individual's opinion (Querying evidence CT skill).

The next stage is the actual writing stage within which students start to transfer their ideas into words and write them down on paper. The writing process here depends on students' linguistic abilities. However, the role of the teacher is to help students choose the appropriate vocabularies that fit what they want to say through providing the most relevant keywords about the topic. It is worthy for the teacher to make students aware that this writing process is considered as the first draft that they can put some notes during writing to come back to it later to revise it in the following stage.

The final stage is the rewriting stage. In this stage, students review and revise what they have written and check their piece of writing to discover whether there are grammatical mistakes or for organizing ideas and choosing more suitable vocabularies. In other words, this stage is an editing stage to add, remove or change the place of something.

The teacher assesses the performance of their writings by presenting four or five introductory lines about a specific topic containing brief introduction about the topic and basic keywords. For example, the students are instructed to write three paragraphs of not more than 200 words about the topic and showing personal position to stand for or against the statement written in the introductory paragraph. Their performance is assessed according to on the basis of both content and form. The content is assessed whether the students have divided their piece of writing into 1. Interpretative (giving a clarification about the

meaning of the concepts and their importance, 2. Analytical: containing arguments with information and description that support or refute other arguments or points of view and 3. Evaluative: drawing logical and reasonable conclusions supported with clear evidence. The other kind of assessment is based on grammatical aspects which include grammatical errors, punctuation marks, division and spelling mistakes committed by the student.

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 evaluate learners from critical perspective. This enables learners not to accept a piece of information as it is and try to questioning and looking 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 communicative skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing 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, speaking and writing with CT skills in order to complete the picture and make use of CT skills in teaching all language skills.

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