Chapter 5
Fostering Critical Thinking Using Instructional Strategies in English Classes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to provide both theoretical and practical ideas about critical thinking development within English language teaching contexts. Encouraging language learners to be critical thinkers is important in teaching English as a foreign language. However, achieving the goal remains a challenge. Using various strategies together seem to be effective when properly implemented. Therefore this chapter outlines these strategies which include communicative language tasks, using authentic meaningful texts, using critical literacy, being aware of whole-brain learning, adopting a reflective teaching, enabling students to become autonomous, using explicit instruction, teacher questioning, using active and cooperative learning strategies, using literature in English classes, using creative drama, and adopting self-assessment. Teachers can enable learners to have critical thinking skills and more efficient English lessons by combining these strategies in a new way or by designing critical thinking activities in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Recent trends in English as a foreign language (EFL) have emphasized the importance and requirement of improving critical thinking as an integral part of English language curriculum (Davidson & Dunham, 1997; Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011; Sun, 2015; Tang, 2016). In English language learning, students need critical thinking skills that are related to quality thinking to analyze, reflect, self-assess, argue, be autonomous, and evaluate during his/her learning. As Kabilan (2000) maintains, only using the target language and knowing the meaning are not enough. Learners must be able to have critical thinking through the language because critical thinking enables students to expand their learning experience and makes language learning deeper and more meaningful in addition to providing learners with a more skillful way of communicating with other people, enabling them to acquire new knowledge, and deal with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes.

A lot of different definitions have been introduced for critical thinking. Norris and Ennis (1989) define critical thinking as "reasonably reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." According to Siegel (1999), Lipman (1991) and Maiorana (1992), critical thinking means achieving, understanding, and evaluating different perspectives, and solving problems. Elder and Paul (1994) state that critical thinking refers to the ability of individuals to take responsibility of their own thinking and improve appropriate criteria and standards for analyzing their own thinking. Zintz and Maggart (1984) inform that critical thinking "involves learning to evaluate, draw inferences and arrive at conclusions based on the evidence". Paul (1991), well known for his works on critical thinking, has described it as reaching conclusions based on observation and knowledge (p. 125). Paul (1991) also defines critical thinking as "thinking about it when it performs the thought action to improve one's own thinking". According to İpşiroğlu (2002), critical thinking is the most developed and advanced form of thinking because critical thinking means objective, reflective and not obsessive thinking. Beyer (1987, p. 32-33) points out that critical thinking is the evaluation of the authenticity and precision of the information and the value of beliefs, arguments and information claims. Smith and Rawley (1997), on the other hand, stated that criticism is a judgement that focuses on accepting or rejecting claims. According to Mayhewv, critical thinking is the process of questioning "how" and "why" (as cited Branch, 2000). Ennis (1985) points out that critical thinking is composed of abilities and tendencies. Norris (1985) also defines critical thinking as "Students put into practice what they have already known and change their pre-learning by valuing their own thinking" (p. 40). Considering these definitions that include temperament, tendency and skill, it can be said that critical thinking is a practical activity.

As a matter of fact, the most basic requirement for being a contemporary society that produces knowledge is educated individuals equipped with critical and creative thinking skills who make new inventions and discoveries and want to initiate social change. In other words, what is expected from educated individuals is that they can make logical inferences, and relate them to everyday life in addition to that they can inquire into what they have learned, accepted and confronted with. Creating these changes in the individual is one of the creative functions of education (Tezcan, 1997, p.188). In education, the existence of critical and creative thinking is also influential in improving the academic achievements of the individuals as it is in daily life (Güven & Kürüm 2006, Koray, Yaman & Altunçekiç, 2004, p. 2).

In general, it is important for a person to learn to criticize in his / her own life for reaching individual enrichment integrality because critical thinking helps an individual to self-govern in his/her life, to clearly see his/her choices, and to help him to liberalize against challenging influences (Chaffee, 2010, p. 519). Watson and Glaser (2010) point out that thanks to critical thinking, learners have the ability to

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