

**Critical Thinking-Based Learning: Developments, Trends,  
and Values**

التعلم التفكير الناقد : التطورات ، الاتجاهات والاهمية

By

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**Abstract:**

In recent years, English language teaching and second language acquisition has demonstrated a significant accentuation upon basic reasoning abilities improvement in the language capability advancement. Encouraging a point of view of duty to training basic intuition aptitudes in accordance with the English language courses, this paper gives an account of an investigation directed at theoretical meanings of basic deduction, drifts about the centrality of basic speculation for language educating and associations between critical thinking and language learning. The educators have the focal pretended by basic intuition in successful language teaching method, identified to Ennis' (2011) critical thinking categories. The skill of thinking critically is generally accepted as a very vital stage in every field of learning. As a result this study draws a general explanation on the significance critical thinking ability the practical aspects of critical thinking teaching activities in the English language classroom to more holistically prepare students for further academic studies and their future careers in the workplace. Therefore, critical improvement must be innate in training as social orders need residents who encourage their advancement. Having at the top of the priority list that understudies invest a ton

of energy in school, educators are called to build up our understudies' basic speculation aptitudes during their normal instructing practices.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, development, Important in ELT, Critical Thinking in Higher Education, Critical-Based Learning Activities.

### **1.Introduction**

The 21st century has seen noteworthy changes in all parts of life, including education. 21st schools and universities also ought to get ready understudies for an alternate public activity, an alternate financial world and an all the more requesting and abilities situated working environment. As such, 21st century understudies need to build up the vital 21st century aptitudes.

Thinking critically will help creativity and improve the manner in which you utilize and deal with your time (Hader, 2005) and critical thinking not just depicts the capacity to think as per the guidelines of rationale and likelihood, yet additionally the capacity to apply these aptitudes to genuine issues, which are not content-autonomous. Critical thinking can provide students with an insight understanding of themselves. It will offer them an opportunity to be objective, not so much passionate, but rather more liberal as they value others' perspectives and feelings. By deduction ahead, they will pick up the certainty to introduce crisp points of view and new bits of knowledge into troublesome concerns.

The estimation of critical thinking skills are contemplated at present as being ones of social strengthening, upgraded correspondence, employability and systems administration. The most unequivocal point at issue, from one perspective, is that of invigorating and improving student capacity for critical thinking, sustaining and promoting critical thinking skills across disciplines and diverse socio-cultural and instructive settings. On the other, it is that of educators' capacity to constantly self-

survey their own convictions and strategies in the classroom so as to improve students' critical thinking skills. (Al-Busaidi & Sultana, 2014) and their preparation for future work.

The issue of higher education graduates' preparedness for the modern job markets and the abilities' deficiencies that these business sectors are confronting are at present among the worries saw by different productions. The majority of this exploration caused to notice the way that numerous advanced education graduates need limit in explicit zones needed by managers. It likewise brings up issues about understudies being insufficiently "furnished with general, transferable abilities" Shaw (2011), that are fundamental for effective expert vocations in the new worldwide economy and in quickly developing nearby employment markets.

In late decades, a well-known theme for examine, discusses, gatherings and meetings on the role of education is the need to assist students develop critical thinking skills. Significant scholars, supporters and analysts on critical thinking defend its fundamental role in all different fields and knowledge domains, just as in all life settings where individuals grow, for example, work, training, family, companions, and community (Moseley et al,2005; Butler,2012).

However, for the purpose of this paper is to follow a few meanings of critical thinking that could be put inside a continuum among theory and intellectual brain science and not at either end, and the advancements of critical thinking in despite the fact that they have been proposed by masterminds, analysts and researchers who at first preferred a particular methodology however later received less extreme perspectives.

## 2.Critical Thinking

Thinking is a natural process that develops in every individual from birth. Thinking allows a person to impart knowledge through a process of reasoning, analyzing, problem solving, and decision-making (Nickerson et al., 1985). Thinking can lead people to view a problem as if receiving new information by developing the ability to reason inductively and deductively before making a decision. Individuals should develop their abilities to filter negative influences by increasing their thinking skills through training. Through teaching and learning, an individual may train their brain to think sensibly and cohesively. Moreover, the stages of thinking take place over time, reflecting personal development and professional growth (Van Gelder, 2005).

According to Edwards and Briers (2000), thinking skills are divided into two levels: lower-order thinking and higher-order thinking. Although some researchers postulate critical thinking is interchangeable with higher-order thinking, a counterclaim categorizes critical thinking under the umbrella of higher-order thinking skills. Bloom (1984) also believed critical thinking is a type of higher-order thinking. "Higher-order thinking includes critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking", whereas critical thinking is "reasoned, purposive and reflective thinking used to make decisions, solve problems, and master concepts". Whether critical thinking is under higher-order thinking or is in the highest categories in thinking, the expectation is practically similar.

According to Ennis (1985:45) defines "critical thinking is reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do". The definition of critical thinking as "the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome". Facione (2000) stated critical thinking is judgment, reasoning, reflective, and purposeful thinking processes, which allow people to find reasonable meaning to

their problem solving tasks. In the same way, critical thinking is posited as an “art of analyzing and evaluating thinking” (Paul & Elder, 2008:2), which enables people to “raise vital questions and problems, formulate them clearly, gather and access relevant information, use abstract ideas, think open-mindedly, and communicate effectively with others”. In brief, questioning, reasoning, analyzing, evaluating, and problem solving are some features that should be considered to become a rational, fair, and independent critical thinker.

### **2.1 Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain**

Teachers may comprehend more about critical thinking when it is associated with the cognitive domains of Bloom’s taxonomy because it has proven to be a useful and an influential tool .Brown (2004:76) asserted Bloom’s taxonomy is a significant structure to foster critical thinking, which generally gives guidelines for students to “establish clarity and accuracy, assess relevance, and demonstrate the ability to think in depth”. Teachers can make use of Bloom’s taxonomy in their teaching as a reference for writing learning objectives, developing lesson plans, asking questions of students, organizing class activities, and preparing tests and examinations to assess students’ critical thinking. Bloom’s taxonomy is a “convenient, quick, efficient, testable, measurable and accountable” multi-tiered model of knowledge production and thinking. Bloom’s taxonomy classifies six levels of thinking: “(a) knowledge, (b) comprehension, and (c) application represent lower-order thinking skills; (d) analysis, (e) synthesis, and (f) evaluation signify higher-order thinking or critical thinking skills” (Bloom, 1984: 18). The levels are ordered from simple to complex in terms of the development of critical thinking. The steps to engage in critical thinking are the higher order skills of Bloom’s taxonomy, which only can be reached based upon prerequisites

of the lower level (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, some categories in Bloom's hierarchy embodied terms that confuse teachers and learners in their effort to optimize the usage of Bloom's hierarchy .

Regardless of new recognitions of the cognitive domains, Bloom's taxonomy is still recognized as an essential tool in education. By using Bloom's taxonomy, teachers can incorporate appropriate strategies to develop student thinking and help "students master different types or levels of objectives" in their learning (Anderson,1994: 134). By and large, teachers are responsible to incorporate strategies that encourage students to optimize their learning more effectively.

## **2.2Metacognition**

The metacognitive approach is significant to enhance students' critical thinking. Yet, there are inconsistencies in defining metacognition as well. The metacognition associate with "metacognitive beliefs, metacognitive awareness, metacognitive experiences, metacognitive knowledge, feeling of knowing, judgment of learning, theory of mind, memory, metacognitive skills, executive skills, higher-order skills, metacomponents, comprehension monitoring, learning strategies, heuristic strategies, and self-regulation" and the lists go on (Veenman,et al, 2006: 4).

Flavell (1979:906) defined metacognition as "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena". Metacognition as "higher-order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning". In particular, teachers are accountable to make changes in their teaching and to incorporate strategies that motivate students to enhance their learning. Also, critical thinking can help students to develop other think skills.

Metacognition is described as "awareness and management of one's own thought," which uses "inquiry, analysis, inference,

and argument” in its process, all are important elements in critical thinking. Metacognition is used to emphasize thinking about teaching in developing teachers’ own teaching concepts which called meta-teaching (Timpson, 1999). Accordingly, teachers and students gain benefits from this metacognition process and it helps to develop and improve their thinking skills.

### **3. Development of Critical Thinking in ELT**

Initial studies conducted on critical thinking began in the years of 1960s. Researchers have intended to explain critical thinking with two main disciplines thorough these studies. Philosophical approach has dwelled on norms of good thinking, the concept and motive of human thought and cognitive skills necessary for an objective world view; while psychological approach have dwelled on thinking and experimental studies thinking, individual differences in learning thinking and the concept of problem solving which is a piece of critical thinking.

Paul (1989) conducted a study touching upon the adaptation of critical thinking dispositions in learning environment. In this study Paul suggests dispositions to be disciplined and self-directed thinking could be taught. He maintained that critical thinking was constructed from skills, such as spotting conclusions, examining premises, forming conclusions and diagnosing fallacies. Thus he proposed that critical thinking be constructed as ‘disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies perfection of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking.

However, when a foreign language is taught/learned, even the survival language level may require more thinking of how to communicate in a foreign language. This is because languages are culturally determined (Paul & Elder, 2008:24). And as cultures differ, so do languages. Traditions and mentality reflect in the language, its vocabulary, grammar structures, modality,

etc. When learning the target language, students need to accept these cultural differences not as a deviation from the natural way associated, as they may think, with their mother tongue but as a fully natural, though different, way of verbal expression within a different cultural domain. Practicing thinking critically when trying to identify similarities and differences in how one and the same cliché is put in words in another language makes the learning process more enjoyable and culturally enriching even at the beginning level. Moreover, the English language took the role of the lingua franca and is used globally by non-native speakers of English for intercultural communication.

One more aspect of developing and requiring critical thinking introduction in the ELT class arises due to the rapidly growing international student mobility trends and the use of English as the language of instruction in universities around the world. Researchers of the American Foundation for Critical Thinking ([www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org)) argue that critical thinking is not as a natural skill as speaking or running, it is a deliberately developed complex set of skills and features which takes years to acquire. Similarly, a foreign language acquisition needs years of persistent training. So practicing both simultaneously saves time and provides a synergy effect: developing the former we improve the latter and vice versa (Rudd, 2007: 47).

Critical thinking requires active and interactive learning. It does not tolerate passive learning, taking new things and opinions as ready-made words of wisdom. In our experience, students tend to learn better by actively communicating with each other in a particular academic content, especially if they are encouraged to apply critical thinking when comparing their views and ideas, when evaluating arguments, when probing into the intellectual standards of clarity and accuracy, breadth and width, relevance and fair-mindedness. Shaw (2011), engaged in the interactive activities while practicing both communicative



skills and critical thinking, students have a better chance to improve their self- consciousness, their understanding of their abilities and of their limits and thus paving the road to self-improvement as learners, as future professional, and as individuals.

#### **4. The Importance of Critical Thinking Skills**

There are various factors that affect student's ability to communicate in EFL/ESL classes. Here, we can mention motivation, classroom environment, and other factors such as teaching and learning contexts and ability to think and act critically. Good teachers know how to challenge students (Ur, 1996). One of the factors that affect learner's communication is the learner's ability to think and act critically. Through critical thinking, learners develop the ability to communicate in English very well. Therefore, fostering critical thinking stimulates autonomous learning. Language learning is not an easy process. Exploiting means and possibilities of practicing language in the classroom is one of the teacher's and learner's concerns too.

There are different definitions of critical thinking skills, but the essence of the meaning is the same: the ability to think logically in an inquiry way. Critical thinking refers to the ability of individuals to take charge of their own thinking and develop appropriate criteria and standards for analyzing their own thinking. (Elder & Paul, 1994) Tasks and assignments used in class affect student's perception of the language. The role of the teacher in a language class is very important.

It is the teachers' role to teach learners not just language skills, but also critical thinking skills. Through writing a paragraph, the learners use their critical skills to synthesize and evaluate a passage. Sometimes they use these skills unconsciously. In the course of writing an assignment, these skills are utmost helpful for learners. Recently, the fostering

learners' critical thinking is considered to be one of the teacher's tasks. Critical thinking skills make students reflect and to become creative. Through critical thinking, students become autonomous and self-confident. Critical thinking skills can be taught at all levels of studies from secondary and high -school students to university students as well.

While thinking critically, students try to relate the known information with the unknown, draw schemes, and relate thoughts with meanings. It is the teacher's task to show them how to do this, to resolve and draw conclusions. Through critical thinking, students develop creativity and enlarge their vocabulary, language knowledge, and cultural knowledge as well. The question raised is Why? When? and How? to teach a student uses critical thoughts: in a reading passage by relating his/her own experience to that of the character of the passage; in a writing exercise whereby a student prepares an outline of opening, body and close remarks, taking into consideration the time given (if it is a writing exercise given in class, 10-15 min or an essay that a student has to prepare at home); in a listening exercise (listen and fill in blank, draw conclusion); while speaking, example: debate, discussion (when the topic is known or unknown) (Rudd, 2007: 77)..

In all language skills, the learner has to use his/her critical skills. Critical thinking enhances communication in English language. The steps of fostering critical thinking skills begin with creating the conditions and preparing them to reinforce these skills. In a communicative classroom, even the activities are communicative. In an ideal academic language program, the objectives of the curriculum should go beyond linguistic factors to develop critical thinking among learners (Brown, 2004). In a foreign language class, require the use of different meaningful activities where the learner relates what is learned with real life situations. Language functions are classified in teaching and

learning process that includes: Teaching and searching for information, understanding statements, meaning and intention, suggestions of action research or giving instructions, questions about likes or dislikes, approval or disapproval of something, etc. (Paul & Elder, 2008:24). As a result, teachers use a range of practical communicative activities that require students to practice language, stimulate thoughts, stimulate critical thinking, enhance vocabulary, and make use of different language functions.

### **5. Critical Thinking in Higher Education**

Critical thinking is claimed to be the most recommended skill set in higher education because it gives added value to students' learning outcomes (Ennis, 2008). Today's college and universities are concerned to "define the enhancement of critical thinking as a primary reason for higher education" (Halpern, 1999: 70). Correspondingly, universities and colleges are doing their best to enrich the quality of learning processes to drive students to be active and empowered citizens. At universities, lecture is one of the prominent methods usually used to convey information. In contrast, many students prefer to be challenged by active methods that encourage them to be critical in what they learn (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Students are more interested to have educative experiences that give more focus on what they can do and contribute in the real world. These experiences include sharing ideas, exploring real life situations, and solving problems on real issues.

Changing from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches enables higher education students to increase their intellectual abilities such as critical thinking and self-regulated learning through "problem orientation, experiential learning, and lifelong learning" (Wal & Jickling, 2002:229). Those educational directions can be applied as "a range of complex interactions

between student, teacher, setting and learning activities". In student-centered classrooms, students can be guided in their learning to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the course

The development of critical thinking is not a short-term process. The initial stage of critical thinking should be introduced and fostered at elementary levels, followed by retaining and further developing the critical thinking concepts at the lower secondary and upper secondary level, and consistently practiced at college and university levels (Halpern, 1999). In essence, critical thinking can be fostered at any educational level and appropriate approaches are recommended. The training and encouragement are important to develop students' critical thinking. For this purpose, students in higher education should be explicitly taught to think critically, which leads to problem solving and creativity and at the same time enables them to articulate their knowledge, reasoning, and problem solving in the world of work (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Fostering critical thinking also facilitates effective thinking, important to workplace demands. Subsequently, critical thinking skills developed over time are useful for life. With critical thinking, students impart their knowledge into a lifetime context, which helps them to improve their ways of thinking.

## 6. Some Critical-Based Learning Activities

Here are a number of practical learning activities to foster student's critical thinking:

**1. Information-Gap Activities:** Students work in pairs, they share information with each other (example: a listening or a speaking exercise).

**2. Role-play Activities:** Students work in pairs, they play roles (example: situations from real life: in an airport, in a doctor's office, in a shop, etc).

**3. Simulation Activities** : Students work in groups, they play roles (example:

situations from real life: at a railway station, in a mall, etc.).

**4. Jigsaw Activities** : the teacher divides the class into groups. Students collaborate with each - other, share opinions, and discuss about the topic given. students share information. Example: exercises on a reading passage.

**5. Surveys** : Students have to work together to write a report on a survey that they have prepared ( example: environmental issues, climate changes, pollution, etc.)

**6. Interviews:** Usually, interviews are individual. Students prepare questions at home as a homework assignment and then use them in class(Wal & Jickling, 2002:229).

Critical thinking skills are developed in different subjects and in different language skills. For example, in English classes with students at the Universities, some of the activities that are used to stimulate thoughts are project-works, essays, simulations, debates, and discussions , in other words, students critical competence is reinforced through different activities such as: simulation of English classes where the teacher (student in such a case) has to resolve different classroom situations or classroom problems(Brown,2004).

In all the above mentioned activities, students use the known and the collected information, stimulate critical thinking, and uses language which is even the goal of learning English language.

### **Conclusion**

Critical thinking is associated with quality thinking and, it is developed, through providing learners with a more skillful way of communicating with other people, acquiring new knowledge, and dealing with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. In all these areas language plays a crucial role. The learners may need to distinguish between the language as a communicative vehicle in

everyday situations and the use of the language beyond the survival level. So, critical thinking is a process of different intercultural communication in various situations. Critical thinking skills are indispensable when practicing such intellectual traits as empathy and tolerance thus getting ready for communication in multicultural contexts.

In EFL/ESL classes, fostering student's critical thinking is one of the teacher's role and task. Stimulating thoughts make students to become aware of what they are going to use. In every language context, students activate the known grammar, vocabulary, Speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills help students to enhance their communication. Through critical thinking, students learn independently and make their own decisions in various tasks.

However, there are various factors that motivate and affect foreign language learners' critical thinking. The ability to think is a basic requirement for students' success in inquiry learning (Clark & Starr, 1991). The professional teacher uses activities to involve students in collaborative learning. It is very important for a foreign language learner to first improve his/her critical skills and then to use these skills to improve his/her language skills. Through the activities students find themselves interacting, collaborating, and using language. Well prepared critical-based learning activities help students to understand the learning process and enhance communicative competence. Learners become aware of the language potential and their capacity to improve language proficiency.

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