

الصعوبات التي تواجه المعلمين عند تطبيق استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي في الفصول الدراسية

ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على العوامل المتعلقة بالصعوبات التي تواجه المعلمين في كلية التربية بجنزور عند ميلهم إلى ممارسة و تطبيق استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي و يكمن السبب وراء اختيار هذا الموضوع كونه موضوع لازال حديثا قيد البحث و لازال بحاجة لبحث اكثر من اجل تطوير ودعم مهارة التفكير النقدي عند الطلاب . يحاول هذا البحث معرفة تصورات و آراء المعلمين و الطلاب تجاه هذه الاستراتيجيات و تحديد التأثيرات الرئيسية التي يمكن ان تعيق تطبيق هذه الاستراتيجيات. لجمع البيانات المتعلقة بهذه الدراسة تم استخدام مزيج من طرق البحث الكمية و النوعية فقد وزع استبيان على 38 طالبًا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، أجريت 6 مقابلات مع 6 معلمين. و لتحليل إجابات الاستبيان تم استخدام برنامج SPSS ، بينما تم تطبيق التحليل الموضوعي على البيانات النوعية. كشفت النتائج أن معظم المعلمين و الطلاب كانوا على دراية بأهمية و ضرورة تطبيق استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي. وكذلك أظهرت تعليقات المعلمين أنهم كانوا قادرين و راغبين في تنفيذ استراتيجيات مختلفة للتفكير النقدي لتحسين أداء تعلم طلابهم. لكن، يواجه المعلمون تحديات مختلفة عندما يميلون إلى تطبيق استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي في فصولهم الدراسية مثل التحفيز و الفصول الكبيرة و الوقت غير الكافي. هذه الصعوبات إلى جانب العديد من الصعوبات الأخرى يجب أن ينظر فيها المختصين و أصحاب المصلحة . و ستساهم نتائج البحث عمليا في تطوير تطبيق استراتيجيات التفكير النقدي و كذلك ستساهم في مجال البحث الاكاديمي من خلال زيادة الابحاث و التي ستفيد الباحث في المستقبل .

What Barriers Educators Face In Implementing Critical Thinking Strategies Into Their Classroom

By Alzadma Eltaher Alforjani
English Language Department, University of Tripoli
Tripoli / Libya
Zainebelforjani@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims to investigate factors related to difficulties that face teachers at faculty of education Janzour when they tend to practice critical thinking strategies. It sought to explore teachers' and students' perceptions towards these strategies and identify major influences that could have effects on these practices. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was utilised to collect data. A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to 38 students. In addition, 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 teachers. SPSS software was used to analyse the questionnaire responses, while thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data. The findings revealed that most teachers and students were aware of the significance of critical thinking practices. Teachers' comments showed that they were able and willing to implement different critical thinking strategies to improve their students' learning performance. However, teachers encounter various challenges when tending to apply critical thinking strategies in their classrooms such as motivation, large classes and insufficient time. These difficulties beside many others should be considered by educators and stakeholders.

1. Introduction

The idea of critical thinking has been around for many years and has been recognized as an important educational goal. Critical thinking is the ability to objectively analyze information and draw a rational conclusion. The ability to think critically helps learners in both their personal and professional lives (Tomlinson, 1998). He insisted on the learning activities which require the learners to make discoveries for themselves. During the operation of teaching and learning, research in education and psychology highlighted many psychological and social variables that might play an important role in students' success or failure. Among these factors is the learning environment (Hedge, 2000, p.292). Creating a classroom environment in which students are encouraged to make meaningful connections by thinking critically and reflecting upon their

experiences may help engage them in today's classrooms (ibid). It is important in the current world to have learners with a lot of capabilities such as understanding and using different ways of thinking, problem solving, critical thinking and creativity because critical thinking is one of the aspects of thinking that has been accepted as a way to overcome the difficulties and to facilitate the learning process. Further, it helps to ease the access to information in life (Tomlinson 1998). This can be achieved when teachers take on the role of facilitators, which is an important element in fostering successful student engagement. Though the idea of critical thinking is recognized and valued by many, it seemed that it is inadequately addressed in the classroom.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study intends to understand the possible challenges that teachers and students may face through implementing critical thinking strategies and the benefits that stem from a critical thinking methodology. It aims to explore educators' personal experiences and beliefs regarding critical thinking, and discover the teaching strategies that help students to improve their learning performance within the limits of the classroom. It also hopes to develop recommendations for future practice.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the possible benefits for student learning that result from integrating critical thinking into classroom teaching?
2. What specific intellectual tools and strategies do teachers use to encourage critical thinking and student engagement in their classrooms?
3. What challenges do teachers face in encouraging critical thinking in their classrooms?

4. Literature Review

4.1.1. Definitions of critical thinking

Throughout this research project, I will be discussing the concept of critical thinking and the effects that it has on student engagement in classrooms. However, it is evident from my research collection, that there are countless definitions of critical thinking and the way it is defined has changed somewhat over time. In 1986, Chance described critical thinking as “the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems” (p. 6).

Therefore, it is clear that critical thinking is an intellectual process that helps students to act correctly. The significant role for the ability to think critically is that students can make correct proper in solving problems, it can help them to be able to solve problems more perfectly, and make decisions quickly and correctly.

The teacher’s role is very important in developing students’ critical thinking ability. They can improve students’ critical thinking skills through classroom learning activities. Besides, this can be done through the selection of various strategies and methods of teaching and learning which are appropriate for their students (Brown, 2004). Improving the quality of classroom learning can also be done through designing and preparing materials that can create a positive learning environment. Brown, (2004) confirmed that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes to teaching and learning have a great impact on teaching practices and outcomes inside the classroom because what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe (ibid).

The working definition of critical thinking in the current study involves the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully, analyzing, creating, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, cognitive, or good communication.

4.1.2. Using Critical Thinking Strategies to Engage Students

Teaching method that teachers use to deliver course material in ways that keep students engaged and practicing different skills sets is very significant. Applying specific strategies in teaching and learning situations can improve and develop critical and creative thinking achievement of students. Researcher Chance (1986) writes that critical thinking enables students to assess their learning styles, strengths and weaknesses; it also helps them to take ownership of their education and learning process. A simple strategy that teachers can apply to develop critical thinkers in their classroom is to help students collaborate and create student led- discussion. Further, students can practice questioning so that they find the opportunity to be creative and improve their critical thinking (ibid).

Ur (2012) supported this strategy and confirmed that one of the most common practices used by teachers is questioning. This practice helps students to develop and explain their idea around particular tasks. Teachers use questioning for several reasons: e.g. .they stimulate and maintain students' interest. Using this strategy encourage students to think and focus on content of the lesson. In addition, it enables a teacher to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items, and encourage student participation in a lesson. According to Ur, (2012) language teachers' aims in questioning should help students to engage and participate in the classroom activities through creativity and critical thinking. The features of the effective questioning practice are the ones that motivate students and encourage them to engage and take part in the learning process. Effective questioning practice is believed to be the “one that elicits immediate, motivated, relevant and full responses” (Ur, 2012, p.230).

Teachers are advised to provide their students with the opportunity to be creative and practice critical thinking skills. Designing activities, which interest students, are often considered useful way of giving them valuable opportunities to be active and participate in classroom. In this kind of activities, learners can practice oral strategies such as describing, predicting, and solving problems (McDonough et al., 2013). This notion is supported by many scholars who believe that employing cooperative learning in language classrooms can enhance learners' motivation and interest in language learning and helps learners to become more responsible for managing their own learning.

4.1.3. Barriers to Critical Thinking

It has been said that students engage in the learning process when they are intrinsically motivated, that is to say if students are interested and find the environment in which they enjoy learning, they become increasingly eager to extend and develop their knowledge. Students who struggle with learning a language might need more assistance from their teachers. Cornelius & Harbaugh, (2010) proposed that facilitative relationships characterized by empathy, acceptance and honesty can develop students' learning. Thus, good student-teacher relationships provide a positive climate, which motivate students to engage and take part in the learning process.

During the operation of teaching and learning, research in education and psychology highlighted many psychological and social variables that might play an important role in students' success or failure. Among these factors are; the learning environment, emotions towards learning and students' motivation to learn (McDonough et al., 2013). Therefore, to make the learning process more effective, the learning environment should be enjoyable and pleasant for students since it is the place, where learners feel that they are safe and keen to be involved in their learning. In other words, a learning environment can be developed by designing and collecting materials that suits students' needs and interests and can help in motivating students to involve in classroom activities.

Emotion is also considered central to successful teaching and learning. Cooper (2011, p.119) insisted on creating secure and trusting climate through individual contact, and close observation. This indicates that if students feel happy and interested in their learning that helps more in encouraging them to be active and participate in classroom activities. However, if students feel that they are uncomfortable, frustrated and nervous, this might become as a barrier that hinders their learning. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the impact of positive or negative feelings on students' learning and be willing to take part in the learning process. Thus, it is important for teachers to put into consideration these factors when planning classroom activities so that students feel secure and being encouraged by their teachers. This may assist students to become a successful learners and overcome different difficulties.

5. Instruments for Collecting Data

Walliman, (2011) indicated that using mixed methods may help researchers to view problems from multiple perspectives and may enhance and enrich the meaning of a single perspective. It can also present a greater diversity of views and provide stronger inferences. The questionnaire

was used in the current study as a tool for data collection because it has probably been the most commonly used data collection tool in social research. In addition, questionnaire enables researchers to receive responses without having to talk to every respondent (ibid). A questionnaire composed of 11 close-ended questions was constructed and administered among thirty eight Libyan EFL students randomly selected from fifth and sixth semester. All the items were put in five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree” to “Not Sure”, “Strongly Agree”, “Agree” which measures the degree to which students agree with those items.

A thorough understanding of the teachers’ perceptions of implementing critical thinking strategies requires an investigation of their beliefs and opinions of critical thinking main principles and practices. This can be achieved through interviewing them to find out the related issues (Walliman, 2011).). Therefore, teachers’ semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study. The researcher wanted to understand more information related to the topic under study. To achieve this, 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 teachers from Janzour faculty of education.

6. Results and Discussion

6. a. Students’ questionnaire

The answers to the questionnaire statements regarding the views that students held about the application of critical thinking strategies revealed various responses as illustrated in table (1) bellow: To make this interpretation and analysis clear and easier, only the positive and the highest responses to the questionnaire statements will be discussed in the following section.

Table 1: Distribution of fifth semester students’ responses towards critical thinking strategies

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I use problem solving skills to find solution	12%	25%	48%	10%	5%
2.	I use decision making skills to consider possible options	8%	12%	55%	15%	10%
3.	I have seldom found myself actively engaged in thinking about complex issues	22%	40%	18%	18%	2%
4.	I have improved my ability to judge the value of the new information or evidence presented to me	35%	50%	5%	5%	5%
5	My teachers have encouraged me to explore the ideas and assumptions related to the subject area	38%	42%	5%	11%	4%

6.	My teachers have not demonstrated how to think and express myself in a more objective and evaluative way	30%	10%	48%	12%	0%
7.	My interest in questions related to my subject area has increased	22%	73%	0%	2%	3%
8.	I can communicate ideas effectively	40%	40%	1%	5%	14%
9.	My teachers use various strategies to help me think clearly	33%	57%	0%	3%	7%
10.	I learned how to find reliable information relevant to the answering question in the subject	21%	39%	20%	12%	8%
11.	My teachers explain different types of critical thinking in a way that you can explain and understand them	11%	12%	57%	15%	5%

In response to the first research question, a number of important findings emerged from the quantitative findings. It is noticed from the table above that a high percentage, more than 73% of the students reported that their interest in questions relating to their subject area has increased which, means that their teachers have a concern of encouraging them to engage and be active learners. This strategy helps students to be critical thinkers as illustrated by (Ur, 2012). It can also motivate students to take part in the learning process. Regarding, statement 4 “*I have improved my ability to judge the value of the new information or evidence presented to me*”, the finding revealed that 83% of the students were positive towards this statement. It is evident that the students generally prefer to be encouraged to explore the ideas and assumptions related to the subject area. It is also noticed from the students’ responses that the majority 80% of them can communicate their ideas effectively. This reflects their awareness of the importance of the exposure to English input for developing their communicative competence.

6. b. Teachers’ Interview

The qualitative data results showed that teachers had various views about implementing critical thinking strategies. They provided different reasons to justify their practice and perceptions towards the possible benefits that result from integrating critical thinking strategies into their

classroom. Nevertheless, all the teachers were aware of the importance of developing critical thinking skills. The teachers' interview data revealed that all of them had positive views towards using various strategies and techniques to motivate students and to help them improve their learning skills. They all believed that being able to think critically helps students to express themselves and encourage them to improve their abilities to judge the value of the new information or evidence presented to them.

Another important finding was that there was agreement between teachers' perceptions towards the importance of learners' true engagement and active participation in the learning process through working cooperatively. Therefore, offering students more chances to work cooperatively during language classes was emphasised by the majority of teachers. This reflected their understanding of the importance of students group work in promoting students' communicative competence and improving students' ability to be creative learners and participate in classroom activities. However, 5 out of 6 teachers claimed that they face different challenges during the teaching and learning process.

They argued that the current teaching methods and the teaching and learning environment beside other factors have negative impact on students' learning. One of their arguments against them was that they present pressure and stress to students as well as their teachers that affect the learning process. One more important finding was that 4 out of 6 teachers were against the view that the teacher's role was only to transmit knowledge through explanations and by giving examples. These teachers considered that the teacher's role should be a facilitator, who guided and facilitated students' learning.

7. Conclusion

The focus of this study was to find out factors related to difficulties that face teachers when they tend to practice critical thinking strategies into their classroom. It sought to explore teachers' and students' perceptions towards these strategies and identify major influences that could have effects on these practices. It was also intended to raise awareness to the authorities and stakeholders such as students, teachers and decision makers of the importance of implementing critical thinking strategies in Libyan context. A combination of quantitative and qualitative

research methods was utilised to collect data in order to evaluate the perceptions and views of students and their teachers.

Based on the results, it was clear that both of teachers and students had concerns about critical thinking skills. They clarified that implementing this strategy can be very beneficial to students' learning. Teachers explained that students should be given varieties of activities which can attract their attention and help them to be creative learners.

Finally, the results draw attention to the impact of various significant factors that shape teachers' current teaching practice. Some of the issues that had been raised by the participants were; the limitation in the resources and facilities provided for faculty. They also complained of the imposing English language classrooms with its large number of students. These factors besides many others affect in one way or another teachers' ability to employ useful strategies and techniques to assist and improve students' performance.

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