CRITICAL THINKING IN THE LANGUAGE-LEARNING CONTEXT.

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Abstract. This article examines the significance of critical thinking in education, emphasizing its historical roots, contemporary importance, and application in language learning. It highlights the varied interpretations of critical thinking, the challenges in defining it, and its role in fostering effective communication and cultural understanding. The article also underscores the essential link between critical thinking skills and language development, as advocated by education professionals and researchers.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Education, Interpretations, Historical roots, Contemporary relevance, Language learning, Definition challenges

Introduction

There are many interpretations and explanations of critical thinking by a wide range of prominent educators who advocate for the idea that the ability to think critically is crucial for gaining knowledge and learning new skills effectively. In fact, the term 'critical thinking' has been widely used across various fields of study since the late 19th and early 20th century. In her article “Critical Thinking in the Classroom…and Beyond” (2014), Linda M. Murawski[1] provides research data from the American Associate of Colleges & Universities (AACU), where 74 percent of respondents indicated that critical thinking was a core learning objective for the campus’s general education program (AACU Report, 2009, p. 4). She also refers to the fact while there is a general agreement among higher education professionals that critical thinking skills are important, there is a lack of clarity about what exactly critical thinking is. A California study found that only 19 percent of faculty could explain critical thinking clearly, even though the vast majority (89 percent) indicated that they include it in their curriculum.

Though the concept of critical thinking goes back to ancient times, its importance remains paramount in modern education. In this modern world, the accepted interpretation of critical thinking follows as “Critical Thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action”. (Scriven, Michael; Paul, Richard 1987).[2] Many fields

[1] Linda M. Murawski, EdD, in her article “Critical Thinking in the Classroom…and Beyond” (Journal of Learning in Higher Education 2014, Spring volume 1)

[2] Scriven, Michael; Paul, Richard (1987). "Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking

of exact science define critical thinking as a skill that helps to make good decisions, do exact analyses, develop problem-solving, make effective forecasting, and build strong management. But, what is critical thinking in language learning? Most sources on critical thinking in language learning, state that critical thinking in language learning refers to the ability of learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information while acquiring a new language. Simply, this is the fundamental skill that assists students in many language development areas. Critical thinking is essential for effective communication and understanding of cultural differences, as it encourages learners to engage deeply with the language rather than relying solely on rote memorization. According to Prof. Dr. Alek M, "Language learning can only reveal its full potential if it is accompanied by the development of critical thinking skills". (Prof. Dr. Alek M Jakarta Faculty of Educational Sciences 2023). [3]

Further analyses of critical thinking

It has been observed that in language learning, students who approach the task with critical thinking skills can gain a deeper understanding of the language, and learn much faster about the function of the language by questioning, making assumptions and drawing the right conclusion. For example, a learner with strong critical thinking abilities might compare and contrast their native language with the new language they are learning. By analyzing similarities and differences in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, they can identify patterns, enhance their understanding of language mechanics, and improve their language proficiency. Additionally, in language learning, critical thinking is crucial for problem-solving and effective communication. When faced with difficulties in comprehending intricate texts or articulating thoughts precisely, the learners who utilize critical thinking skills can deconstruct the issue, assess it from various perspectives, and formulate strategic methods to surmount linguistic hurdles. This analytical approach not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters adaptability and creativity in language utilization.

Critical thinking and Bloom taxonomy

Paul Dummett[4], trainer and author of the book "How to Write Critical Thinking Activities", describes critical thinking as a mindset that informs the way you approach learning at all those levels". Paul Dummett argues that critical thinking not only enhances language learning but also fosters essential life skills. In his one article he writes "critical thinking is a cognitive approach to learning and is often associated by educators with 'Bloom's taxonomy', a pyramid of cognitive learning

[3] Alek M. (2023) The Vital Role of Critical Thinking in Language Learning: Unlocking its Potential.

[4] Paul Dummett "How to Write Critical Thinking Activities" article retrieved from https://www.onestopenglish.com/how-to-write-critical-thinking-/552664.article

formulated in 1956 which begins with the most straightforward elements of thinking and works up to the highest levels of cognitive thought". (Fig. 1)

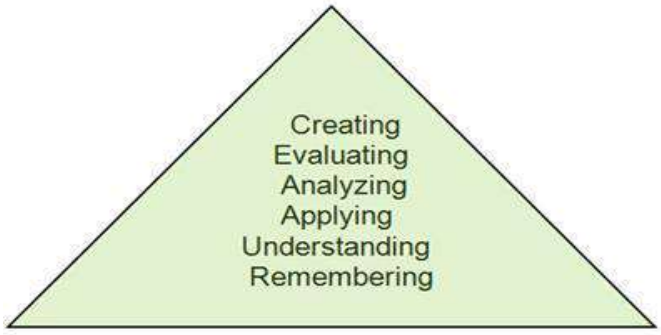


Fig. 1

Paul Dummett's perspective on critical thinking resonates strongly with the idea that cultivating a critical thinking mindset is not only beneficial for language learning but also for developing essential life skills. His emphasis on critical thinking as a cognitive approach to learning aligns with contemporary educational practices that aim to foster deeper levels of thinking and understanding. By linking critical thinking to Bloom's Taxonomy, Dummett underscores the progressive nature of cognitive development, highlighting the importance of moving learners from basic to higher-order thinking skills. This holistic approach to learning, as advocated by Dummett, not only enriches educational experiences but also equips individuals with the tools necessary for navigating complex challenges in various aspects of life.

Likewise, some educators admit the fact that critical thinking can aid in the development of communication skills. Santos (2018), [5]for instance, states that critical thinking is essential for developing language learners' ability to express themselves in the target language. Developing critical thinking skills allows learners to communicate more effectively and feel confident in their target language. While there are various definitions of critical thinking skills in the field of education, it is clear that learners who actively apply critical thinking will benefit from enhanced comprehension, improved problem-solving abilities, and greater confidence in their communication skills.

Conclusion

In my opinion, this article endeavors to elucidate that comprehending critical thinking is highly advantageous for educators in numerous scenarios, such as designing engaging lesson plans that stimulate higher-order thinking skills. For instance, when teaching a literature class, an educator well-versed in critical thinking principles can craft activities that prompt students to analyze characters' motivations,

[5] Santos, M. (2018). Critical thinking and language learning: perspectives from academic writing. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 1

evaluate plot developments, and draw connections between the text and real-world issues.

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