

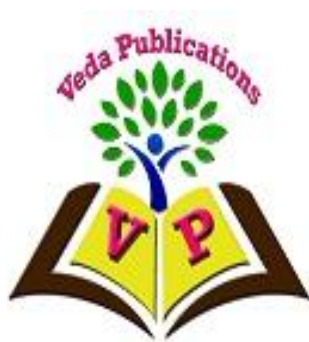


CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS (CTS): PROPAGATING THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING CTS AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

P. Suresh Kumar

(Doctoral Scholar in English, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, A.U. College of Engineering (A), Andhra University, Visakhapatnam – 530 003)

ABSTRACT



Language and thinking are unique abilities of human beings that separate them from other living things. The word “thinking” is used in many senses; generally we can say „we are because we think“. It is an automatic process. But in the case of “Critical Thinking” (CT) we must teach the learners how to become a critical thinker and how to apply “Critical Thinking Skills” (CTS) in their day to day life as well as academic setting in order to get required results from a particular situation; problem; circumstance; or a plan. One of the products of a liberal undergraduate education is the ability to think critically. In practice, Critical Thinking is a skill that undergraduate learners are supposed to master as they complete their studies.

Moreover the present education system focuses more on teaching facts rather than how to think. Since there is little emphasis on how to think at School and Intermediate level, undergraduate learners lack CT abilities. In this rapidly changing information age learners to a great extent need CTS for their academics, professional career, and life itself. In fact, it is very essential to teach learners at undergraduate level CTS along with other language skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Keywords: *Language Learning, LSRW Skills, Teaching Critical Thinking Skills.*

© Copyright VEDA Publication



1. INTRODUCTION

Language and thinking are very important aspects of education; they are unique abilities of human beings. The word "thinking" is used in many senses; Rene Descartes says "I am thinking, therefore I exist" (15). It is an automatic process of our mind. But Critical Thinking (CT) is a general term that covers all the thinking processes. In practice, CT is a skill that undergraduate learners are supposed to master as they complete their studies. CTS make them critical thinkers in their day to day life as well as academic setting in order to get required results from a particular situation; problem; circumstance; or a plan. It is very important for the English Language teacher to focus on CTS along with Language skills, as it helps them to deal with personal and professional setting in an independent and realistic manner. It is also very important to teach CTS in this information age because these skills are also referred as 21st century skills.

2. CRITICAL THINKING

As discussed, CT can be broadly understood as an umbrella term for many thinking processes. CT can be defined as an active, intellectual process where the learners will observe, analyse and reflect on new knowledge and integrate it into their current understanding. CT can be applied in a variety of learning platforms such as reading, written work, discussions and so on. CT is not a negative process, even though many link it with negative criticism. The Oxford Learners Dictionary (OLD) gives an interesting definition of CT as "the process of analysing information in an objective way, in order to make a judgement about it". There are many educators and researchers who defined CTS in various ways.

Cottrell explains CT as a cognitive activity that needs to be acquired or developed by every individual learner with some kind of practice or training in application. In fact, she defines CT as a "cognitive activity, associated with using the mind. Learning to think in critically analytical and evaluative ways means using mental processes such as attention, categorisation, selection, and judgement." (1). Halpern has defined CT as "thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods and making

decisions" (70). It is true that Critical thinker need to have a goal and follow some specific order of thinking by reasoning to obtain anticipated results. Richard Paul, R. states that CT as "the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it." (91) CT is the thinking process of our own thinking, and analysing, evaluating our own thinking in order to get correct thinking. According to Lipman "critical thinking is skill-full, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment" (39) if we go through the direct thinking processes we definitely arrive at a good judgement. Hughes comments CTS as "Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating, and Creating." (3).

3. CRITICAL THINKING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Teaching of critical thinking skills at the undergraduate level is one of the most important objectives/aspect of Higher Educational Curriculum in most of the Universities and colleges across the world. Several years ago theorists and researchers have identified the relationship of language and thought as interdependent. For example language is a tool to express or convey whatever we think, feel and wish to share. We can express our thinking/ thought only through language, without language we cannot express our thought, without thinking we cannot use language properly. So, one can understand that both thought and language are interrelated.

In fact, language and thinking go hand in hand, we cannot teach them in isolation. When we want to teach language to learners particularly second language learners, we try to motivate them to create interest in them or make them turn towards the topic. After that, learners are asked to read and understand a particular prose or poetry piece of text in the class room, but generally teachers read the text and explain the text in their own way. The drawback in this process is that instead of making the learners to read, think and understand, teachers read and explain the given text in a teacher's perspective for the learners. As a result, knowingly or unknowingly we are making learners passive thinkers. Therefore the thinking ability of the learners is stagnated at some level. If the learners have not scored well in an exam, the blame is simply thrown



on teachers who taught them in the previous classes. But here the problem lies with the present teacher who has never given an opportunity to the learners to think and understand on their own.

So, before teaching something to the learners, one must make them to think about the topic and what they know about the topic. The teachers should also make students to relate the known with unknown.

4. WHY IS TEACHING CT IMPORTANT?

CT is important as it plays a central role in the life of undergraduate in the acquisition of problem solving, decision making and communication skills and it is required in the working environment. It is not only necessary for undergraduates but also required for everyone when understanding, analysing, evaluating, judging and making decisions; CT will help undergraduate learners to make them well-versed evaluators. The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction,(2006) defines critical thinking as, "that mode of thinking – about any subject, content, or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them and is closely related to educational goals to create lifelong learners because critical thinking is a skill that is applied across multiple subjects"

American president Obama himself emphasised about the importance of CT skills on one of his speeches "I'm calling on our nation's governors and state education chiefs to develop standards and assessments that don't simply measure whether students can fill in a bubble on a test, but whether they possess 21st century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity" (xxx). "For example, Bradford

University, in its mission information cites Critical Thinking as an „objective“, Critical Thinking: To support students and staff in developing a critical, independent and scholarly approach to their discipline which will enable them to apply their knowledge" (Moon 7).

Alnofaie, H. states that "teaching students to think can help them to communicate in the new language, to produce, various types of spoken and

written languages and to demonstrate creativity in using language" (155).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the importance of teaching CTS among language learners in the English class room due to its significance in developing proficient language skills LSRW and CTS. So promoting CTS is considered one of the tasks of language teachers, material developers and institutions. They can do this job through several ways, including, using appropriate activities, presenting arguments and group discussions in order to enhance critical thinking abilities.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Alnofaie, Haifa. A Frame Work for Implementing Critical Thinking as a Language Pedagogy in EFL preparation Programmes. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*. 10 (2013): 154-158.
- [2]. Cottrell, Stella. *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- [3]. Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations*. Laurence J. Lafleur (trans). New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1960.
- [4]. Hughes, John. *Critical Thinking in the Language Class Room*. ELI, 2014.
- [5]. Halpern, Diane F. *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Helping College Students Develop the Skills and Dispositions of A Critical Thinker*. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 80 (1999): 69-74.
- [6]. Halpern, Diane F. *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to critical thinking*, 3rd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996.
- [7]. <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/critical-thinking?q=critical+thinking+> . Retrieved, on 20th Feb. 2016.
- [8]. Lipman, Matthew. „,„Critical thinking: What can it be?"" *Educ. Leadership*, 46.1 (1988): 38-43.
- [9]. Lipman, Matthew. *Thinking in Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press,2003.
- [10]. Moon, Jennifer. *Critical Thinking: An exploration of theory and practice*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2008.
- [11]. National Council for Excellence in Critical



Thinking Instruction. (2006). Retrieved 28th Nov. 2009, from <http://www.criticalthinking.org/html>.

[12]. Paul, Richard. W. Critical thinking: What every person needs to survive in a rapidly changing world (J. Willsen & A. J. A. Binker, Eds.). Santa Rosa, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking, 1993.

[13]. Trilling, B. & Fadel, C. *21st Century Skills*. Jossey-Bass, 2009.
