



Use of Authentic Materials in Classroom to Develop the Critical Thinking Skill

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Abstract

Developing critical thinking skill is considered to be one of the key skills for any 21st century learner. This study aimed at developing critical thinking skills using authentic materials among the first year undergraduate students. This study also focuses on the advantages of using authentic materials and also various methods used to develop critical thinking skills using authentic materials in the classroom. The authentic materials used for this study are newspapers, magazines, brochures etc. Students also responded positively to the authentic learning environment. The result had the implication that by selectively choosing various methods and materials can promote better understanding and active participation of students that leads to the development of critical thinking skills.

Key Words: Critical thinking skills, authentic materials

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Introduction:

In recent years, language curriculum is undergoing a rapid change. In order to cope up with this transition we have to mould our students accordingly. We should make our students to understand the importance of developing imagination, decision making and the other high order thinking skills to make them successful in both academic life and personal life. Developing critical thinking in the curriculum has been set as a primary goal in higher education for decades. But recently it has become more urgent in implementing this goal to enhance students' employability in the fast-changing workplace. So, this article is an attempt to prove, by using authentic materials we can develop critical thinking skills in students. The main advantage of using authentic materials in the classroom are the students can easily expose to real life language and that way we can make learning more active and interesting.

Background of the study

Education in India right now aiming only job market. It is getting more mechanized and devoid of individuality. In the present education system, critical thinking skill is pushed back and is almost neglected. In its place memorization, rote learning, pattern practicing, drill etc. dominate. Exams are tackled through memorization and mechanical reproduction. While the textbooks prescribed for the students contains only information transfer with same objectives, high order thinking skills can be better attained by using some authentic materials. Nowadays development of critical thinking skill has become an important educational task of colleges or universities.

Statement of the problem

Can reading authentic materials develop critical thinking skills?

What kind of authentic materials are beneficial to students to develop critical thinking skills?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study are:

- To develop critical thinking skills through reading authentic materials.

- To make teaching learning process more interesting and thought-provoking.

Scope of the study

- The study is focus on finding out whether reading authentic materials develop critical thinking skills.
- To evaluate the level of thinking skill by analyzing different authentic materials used by the students.

Review of Related Literature

Critical thinking skill has become a buzz word in the field of education. It is a multi-step process in which students can analyze and reflect on new knowledge and integrate in to existing knowledge. One method for developing critical thinking skill is using authentic materials in the classroom. It includes newspapers, magazines, films, brochures, advertisements, literature etc. By using authentic materials students will get a real-life experience and they can understand language deeply and in a broader base. It helps students to learn a target language which is used in the daily life. “Authentic materials provide valuable support (creative approach to teaching) and can be used for a specially designed curriculum. They are bridge between the classroom and the real world” (Peacock,1997).

According to Paul and Elder (2006), “Critical thinking is that mode of thinking about any subject, content, or problem-in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing and reconstructing it”. (p.23)

By using authentic materials, students will get more confidence and they will motivate ease by the support given by the teachers. In higher education, developing critical thinking skill has become the need of the hour. As a researcher, I am trying to prove by using various authentic materials we can improve critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking is an intellectual concept which provides correct thinking order and helps to analyze, evaluate and interpret ideas from a broader perspective. Nowadays developing critical thinking skills has been identified as one of the most important means and measures leading to a person’s whole personality development. Critical thinking is an extension of normal thinking. Therefore, the starting point of critical thinking can be the end point of normal thinking. In other words, critical thinking begins where normal thinking naturally

ends. By developing critical thinking skills, we can make students more reflective, creative, and able to build their self-confidence and get excellent opportunities in their future career. Brown (2004) states that in an ideal academic English program, “the objectives of a curriculum are not limited to linguistic factors alone, but also include developing the art of critical thinking”. (p.25)

Critical thinking and Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s taxonomy is considered as the representative of the educational perspective of critical thinking theory and the most influential models of critical thinking. As cited by Reza Vaseghi, Reza Gholami, Hamed Bajesteh, in Bloom’s taxonomy, there are six levels of successive hierarchy: Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. For teaching critical thinking skills, bloom’s taxonomy has been accepted and taught for all courses and it helps learners to practice the lower levels of critical thinking skills before going to the higher level of thinking skills.

The importance of teaching Critical thinking skill

We can make teaching learning process easier by teaching critical thinking skills. But it is not an easy process when we examined it in detail. Thinking is a natural activity and it happens when we interact with the world and it is an internal activity. Teaching critical thinking skills would give them a new experience and helps to keep away from rote learning and there by retain a long-term memory.

Authentic materials

Authentic materials are materials that are different from the usual materials used in the classrooms. They are more motivating, interesting and target different learning styles for learners and are used to develop all language skills and critical thinking skills. They were either images, written or oral languages that were not created for pedagogical purposes. Authentic materials may vary from variety of media like newspapers, magazines, periodical, brochures, movies, television, instructional materials etc. If we use authentic materials in the class rooms we are exposing our learners to real language and they can understand different native language speakers with different writing habits. As cited by Suresh BabuMoparathi, gives some examples to authentic teaching materials ESL/EFL teachers have used. He classified into four categories as follows:

- Authentic listening/viewing materials-TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news clips, movies, soap operas, professionally audio and taped short stories and novels, radio advertisements, songs, documentaries and sales pitches
- Authentic Visual materials-Slides, photographs, paintings, children's artwork, stick figure drawings, wordless street signs, silhouettes, pictures from magazines, ink blots, post card pictures, wordless picture books, stamps and X-rays.
- Authentic Printed materials-newspaper articles, movie advertisements, astrology columns, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, street signs, cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist information brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, TV, guides, comic books, greeting cards, grocery coupons, pins with messages and bus schedules.
- Realia (Real world objects) used in ESL/EFL classrooms-coins and currency, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, Halloween masks, dolls, and puppets, to name a few. Realia are often used to illustrate points very visually or for role-play situations.

Different authentic materials used to develop critical thinking skills

There are different methods to develop critical thinking skills using authentic materials.

Newspaper: Newspaper became an important authentic material in education for a long time.

A. The following are activities based on newspaper to develop critical thinking skills.

- Ask the students to guess the headline of the articles by giving them different articles without headlines. They have to guess the headline of the article based on the content and give an appropriate headline.
- Ask them to fill the missing part of the headlines and ask them to come up with most possible answers.
- Ask the students to select an interesting article from the newspaper and give them eight selected keywords from that article and ask them to come up with an interesting story
- Ask them to summarize an article from the newspaper.

Images: Teaching images with language we are developing their critical thinking skills and also the skills of visual literacy. Bloom's Taxonomy is required for communicating vague ideas through language. Images help students to boost these skills and can be a good way to

help them learn more about Bloom's Taxonomy often called "critical thinking skills". There are number of activities for developing critical thinking skills through images. Among them I have identified few interesting activities in online provided by The Learning Network of the New York Times The different methods for developing critical thinking skills through images.

- Ask them to write a caption based on an image. Teachers can ask the students to write an appropriate caption by showing an image.
- Ask open-ended questions. We can ask three deceptively simple open-ended questions that help students notice details and make observations without leading them toward any conclusion or right answer.
 - What's going on this picture?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What more you can find?

c) Build on other's observation about the image

We can encourage them to comment on other student's observations to help them to evaluate and link to their ideas. This type of activities helps students to inculcate life skills with English language learning. These are examples showing the importance of images instead of simply using as a common tool in the language classroom.

Short stories: Short stories can be explored to develop critical thinking skills among students. They are flexible tools used to raise students' cultural awareness, motivation and high order thinking skills. By reading short stories with different themes helps students to get a different perspective of the world. The following are the different ways to develop critical thinking skills using short stories:

- Ask the students critical questions concerning the characters.
- Ask them to analyze the events, symbols and special characteristics.
- Ask them to find out the logical reasons behind why the short story written.
- Ask them to write a probable consequence of alternative actions.

Conclusions

Critical thinking skill is considered as an invaluable skill needed for the student's to be successful in both personal and professional life. As teacher's we should be thoughtful and purposeful about creating desired learning objectives for developing both low order and high order thinking skills. Selectively choosing authentic materials can make the teaching learning process more interesting, make the students' actively respond to a text and helps to engage in problem based activity.

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