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Effect of Classroom Instruction on Second Language Learners' Critical Thinking Skills: A Study through English Literature

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KEY WORDS

Literature study, critical thinking skills, EFL teaching, critical discourse

ABSTRACT

Critical thinking skills always have positive impact on students' learning. The purpose of present study was to observer students' use of critical thinking skills during classroom discourse through the study of English literature. Sampling consisted of 102 students of M.A English with three subject lecturers. Two instruments were used for data collection. The data were analyzed to see quantitative results. The findings revealed that reading literature with an ELT lecturer improved students' use of critical thinking skills. This effect was also due to the students' active and critical participation that resulted in highest level of critical discourse. Particularly, overall findings revealed that English literature students exhibit critical thinking skills but they needed more motivation, reinforcement and insistence from subject lecturers' end. Findings also revealed that students should not remain silent in classroom discourse therefore teaching background played a significant role in developing students' critical thinking skills.

Introduction

The study of literature is an important part of education but it is more important that how literature is taught? According to Chin (2014), we come to know about world through stories hence stories are important when we think about them. Effective literature teaching leaves positive impact on students' learning when they use their thinking skills. In Pakistani context, English literature has never lost its significance. It has been part of curriculum in old public sectors institutes for last many decades. According to Swart and McGuinness (2014), through learning process, students develop their higher order thinking skills while Firdaus et al., (2015) said that universities which facilitate learners for the development of country they need to improve students' critical thinking skills.

Different scholars have offered different opinions on critical thinking skills since Socrates era. Lee (2015) asserted that critical thinking skills and problem solving tasks are interlinked and for mathematics students should learn critical thinking skills. Jaleel and Premachandran (2016) stated that metacognition is also part of critical thinking that means " thinking about one's own thinking". In addition, Hamid et al., (2015) asserted that social technologies improve students' critical thinking skills. For job purposes, use of critical thinking skills is important to get good job (Rodzalan & Saat, 2015). Literature review on critical thinking skills showed that CT must be an automatic task for students' everyday life (Sinprakob & Songkram, 2015).

Literature and Critical Thinking Skills

Literature and critical thinking skills have a strong relationship. In order to understand plot, character and setting of any literary work, non-critical thinking skills would not work. Critical thinking skills assist literature students to understand literary text with full understanding in a systematic way (Kohzadi et al., 2014). The study by Qamar (2016) showed that literature has strong relationship with critical thinking skills. Her study concluded that without the use of critical thinking skills literature study is incomplete and students must show domain specific knowledge while using CT skills. Tabačkováa (2014) found that literary text is a challenge to critical thinking skills for interpretation and logical reasoning. His study showed that a literary text reflects realities of life so it appeared effective to improve students CT skills.

Research Methodology

The present observational mixed-method study involved classroom interaction in English literature classrooms.

Research Instruments

Flanders' (1970) classroom interaction framework (see appendix A) was used for the recording of lecturers' and students' talk. Researcher designed list (see appendix B & C) was also used for the recording and assessment of students' and lecturers' use of critical thinking skills in classroom discourse.

Flanders' framework was used to observe how a lecturer motivates students to participate in classroom discussion and reduces silence while researcher design list aimed to observe that how a lecturer teaches and motivates for discussion likewise how students respond to lecturer's questions and use their critical thinking skills.

Sampling/Participants

Three different semesters of M.A. English Literature at a public sector university in Lahore city were observed along with three subject lecturers. Total numbers of students were 102 of both gender of mixed age and abilities. Homogenous sampling was considered best for this study. The purpose of homogenous sampling was to observe a whole group of learners in their relevant area.

It is assumed that selected students' critical thinking skills must be developed and adequate and literature lecturers are good at teaching literature with the objectives to facilitate critical thinking skills in classroom discourse. Enciso et al., (2017) stated that it is teachers' responsibility to assist students to develop critical thinking skills. Teachers should encourage critical thinking skills in Pakistani classrooms. If their methodology is not focused on critical thinking skills then learners must adequate to equip themselves with critical thinking skills on their own

Objectives

This study had the following objectives:

1. Explore/critique M.A. English students' use of critical thinking skills
2. Explore the extent to which M.A. English literature students exhibit critical thinking skills
3. Explore lecturers' methodology in terms of the enhancement of critical thinking skills.

Research Questions

1. Can teaching and learning of literature with critical thinking skills develop critical thinking skills among the students of L2?
2. Does teaching methodology of lecturers' cater to students' critical thinking skills during classroom discourse?

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected simultaneously from the three semesters from 52 observations with Flanders' Interaction Framework and researcher designed lists. The data were analyzed on SPSS for knowing students and teachers' talk percentage using the categories suggested by Flanders' (1970). Likewise, for both participants, researcher designed lists were also analyzed under SPSS and on Excel sheet (refer to table 2 & figure 1). In order to observe that how actively and critically students participate in classroom discussion, students' silence is analyzed to see Mean score difference (see fig 3). Reduced silence indicates students' active and critical participation in classroom discourse.

Ethical Considerations

To follow ethics, the researcher first took university's director permission for the observation of classes prior to conducting. The researcher also assured the lecturers and students that their names will not be mentioned in the research.

Results of Flanders' Interaction Framework

Following are the results of Flanders' framework which indicate overall percentage of lecturers' and students' talk. The results are based on frameworks' nine categories.

Table 1

Lecturers and Students' Talk Percentage from 52 Observations

Lecturers' Talk	Percentage	Semesters/Students	Percentage
L1	4.35	Semester II	5.95
L2	6.67	Semester III	2.16
L3	6.67	Semester IV	6.67

Comparative Results of three Lecturers against Self-Designed List

Following are the comparative results of lecturers' regarding their reflective discussions in classroom discourse. Last four categories are taken for analysis.

Table 2

Lecturers' Self-Designed List Results for Mean Score Comparison (Last Four Categories)

Lecturers		Critically Reflexive	Reflective Discussion	Motivate for Reflection	Encourages Reflective Discussion
Lecturer I	Mean	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	.5000
	N	12	12	12	12
	Std. Deviation	.00000	.00000	.00000	.52223
Lecturer II	Mean	.7667	.7667	.3333	.4667
	N	15	15	15	15
	Std. Deviation	.25820	.25820	.48795	.51640
Lecturer III	Mean	1.0000	1.0000	.0667	.0000
	N	15	15	15	15
	Std. Deviation	.00000	.00000	.25820	.00000
Total	Mean	.9167	.9167	.4286	.3095
	N	42	42	42	42
	Std. Deviation	.18860	.18860	.50087	.46790

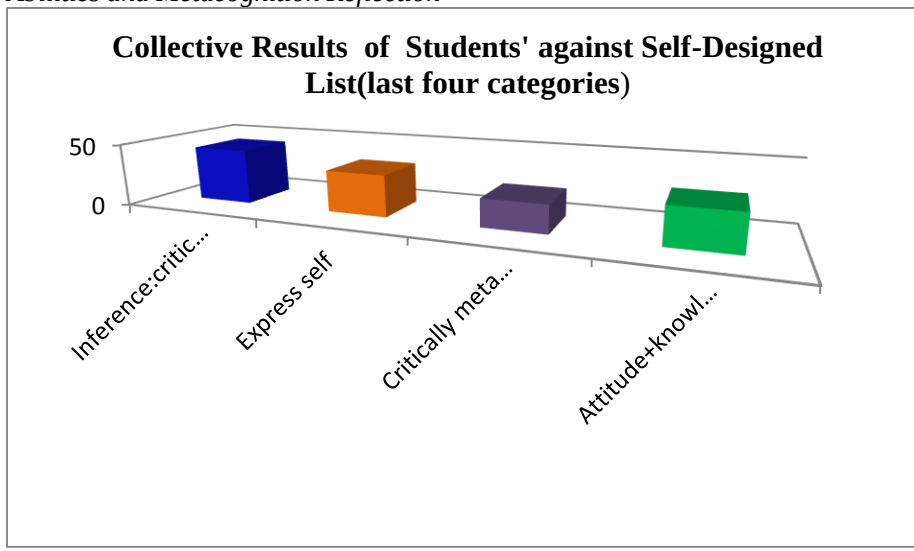
The above results showed that only second semester's students were motivated to write critically

Collective Result of Students' against Self-Designed list

Following are the results of three observed semesters' students' obtained against self-designed list's last for categories for knowing overall use of critical thinking abilities and reflection.

Figure 1

Results of Students' Self-Designed List's for the Use of Critical Thinking Abilities and Metacognition Reflection



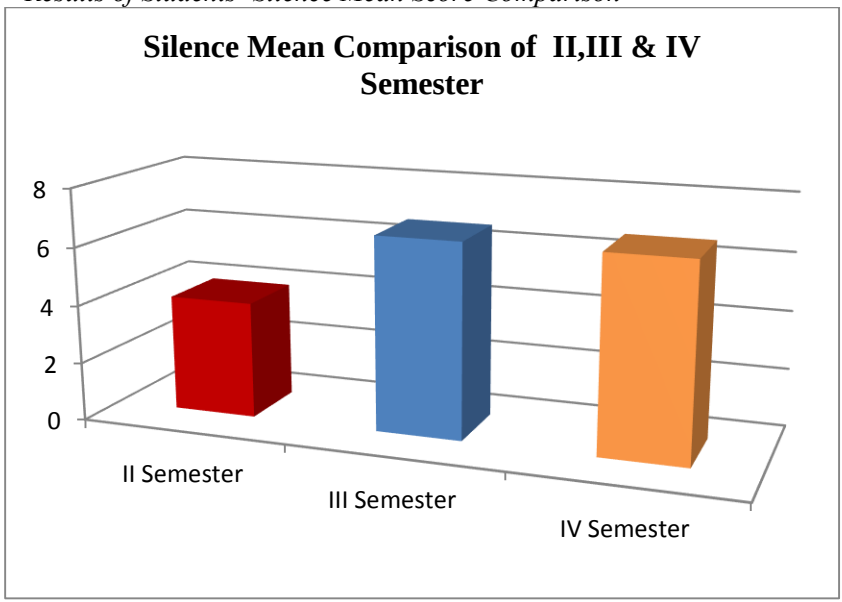
The results indicate all students' little use of metacognitive reflection ability while their use of critical thinking abilities and inference abilities were better.

Comparative Results of Students' Silence

All selected students' silence was also recorded (based on Flanders's framework) and then compared for mean score comparison.

Figure 2

Results of Students' Silence Mean Score Comparison



The figure shows that average silence (Mean=4.00) was observed in second semester, in third semester (M=6.67), and in fourth semester (Mean=6.67). It indicates that students' little silence was due to the motivation of the lecturer who insisted students for participation and increased silence was due to students' habitual nature e.g., their little interest for participation and due to extensive lecture delivery (See appendix A for Flanders' framework).

Discussion

It is apparent in the results that lecturers' methodology effects students' use of critical thinking skills in classroom discourse and improves their learning. Although no intervention was applied in this study but lecturers' actual classroom practice was supported. Findings explicitly revealed that teaching experience with ELT background had an effect on students' CT skills. The other two lecturers had the tendency to teach literature in classrooms but simple story reading and self-answering restricted the students to participate in the classrooms.

The findings revealed that lecturers had an aptitude for literature

teaching and critical thinking skills. Critical lecture discussions were salient part of their teaching. The role of a lecturer is very important in developing CT skills among the students. However, if lecturers limit themselves to simple/traditional lecture method then students cannot get a chance to interact.

The decreased level in the use of CT skills showed that students' attitude towards knowledge was not to greater extent (see fig 1). Despite the fact that they expressed themselves and generated ideas but they were hesitant at the beginning of lessons. The overall findings of students' researcher designed list revealed that they were respondent whenever they were asked to answer. Notably, when students replied their answers were critical and they expressed their feelings. It is evident from the findings that lecturers' different teaching methodology restricted students' performance and allowed them to participate in classroom as well.

It was seen in the results that a decrease in lecturer's direct talk resulted in students' response. The decrease in lecture's indirect talk facilitated more students' responses. The findings revealed that a lecturer must have an aptitude for encouraging and motivating students. It is apparent in the results that motivation encouraged students to use their critical thinking skills because critical thinking needs motivation (refer to fig 1).

Particularly, one of the most encouraging findings in this study was the little silence and participation of the students (refer to fig 2). The critical reflective lectures enabled students in reflective process. Critical lectures always motivated students to reflect and maximized students. Improvement in students' critical thinking is in accordance with Rosenblatt (1938) who defined a teacher's role and said a teacher becomes a tool to enhance an individual learner's capacity to think critically. Particularly, the study of literature enabled students to use their critical thinking faculties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Particularly, critical thinking in English literature classrooms can be developed to greater degree but it requires greater level of practice and reflective discussions during classroom discourse as Timperely et al., (2007) says that in classrooms, teachers act as ''arbiters of meaning''. It is also concluded that teaching background plays an important role in developing students' critical thinking skills.

Little use of critical thinking skills is due to lecturers' different teaching methodology. In this context, lecturers should avoid the traditional teaching in literature classrooms so that they could utilize a visionary approach while thinking over students' silence and more time should be given to questioning session. Furthermore, lecturers should think over 'suitability and practicality' for the assessment critical thinking skills and must equip themselves with new innovative ELT pedagogical techniques in

literature classrooms.

Keeping students' educational and professional need in mind, a future research must be conducted on undergraduate students to examine that how students and lecturers use their critical thinking skills during classroom discourse.

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Appendix A

Flanders' Interaction Analysis Framework

Teacher Talk	1.	Accepts feelings
	2.	Praises or encourages students
Indirect Talk	3.	Accepts and uses ideas of students
	4.	Asks questions
Direct Talk	5.	Lectures
	6.	Gives Directions
	7.	Criticizes or justifies authority
Student Talk	8.	Response
	9.	Initiation
	10.	Silence

Appendix B
Self-Designed List for Students (Sample)

Observations	Responding to Questions	Asking Questions	Analyze a text	Generate ideas	Inference: Critical &General	Express Self	Critically Meta Cognitive Reflexive	Attitude Knowledge+ Thinking skills=Critical Thinking Abilities
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								

Appendix C
Lecturers' Self Designed List (Sample)

Observations	Asking questions	Focus on problem solving tasks	Inference: critical &General	Unfold text to its full extent	Critically Reflexive	Motivate for Reflection	Reflective Discussion	Encourages Reflective Discussions
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								