The Role of Critical Thinking Skill to Develop EFL Learner's through Literary Texts

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A Case Study of Secondary School Students Wad Madni Locality (2018)

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Abstract

The importance of teaching critical thinking as one of the basic learning skills has been widely recognized. This study aims to develop EFL learners' critical thinking skills through literary work, encourage EFL learners' to identify the stylistics features of literary texts, prove that critical thinking literary texts improve learners'. The study used the descriptive analytical method. One tool is used for of data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to (50) teachers at secondary schools. This data was collected from Wad Madni secondary schools. This data is analyzed by using statistical package for social science (SPSS). As result of the analysis, teaching literary texts develops students' critical thinking skills and exposes them to different cultures, pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking, using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions. This study recommended teachers should be well qualified in developing their students in literary texts, teachers can provide a variety of exercises and activity, such as having situational dialogue, paragraph reading and interview exercise in or outside classroom.

Keywords: Role of Critical thinking to Develop Leaner's

1. Introduction

The importance of teaching critical thinking as one of the basic learning skills has been widely recognized. According to Fisher (2001), the expression itself has become something of a "buzz word" in educational environments. Though the critical thinking approach is not new, it has become extremely popular in educational settings over the last two decades. The intellectual roots of critical thinking can be traced back to ancient times, in particular, to the teaching practice of Socrates about 2000 years ago.

Norris and Ennis (1989) define it as reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. Haskins (2006) insists oncritical thinking as involving rational or objective thinking. He also identifies five steps that those thinking critically follow:

(a) adopt the attitude of the critical thinker,
(b) avoid critical thinking hindrances,
(c) identify and characterize arguments,
(d) evaluate information sources, and
(e) evaluate argument.

Objective of the Study
1. To develop EFL learners' critical thinking skills through literary work.
2. To encourage EFL learners' to identify the stylistics features of literary texts.
3. To prove that critical thinking literary texts improve learners'.

Question of the Study
1. Why can EFL learners develop creativity through reading literary work?
2. Why can literary texts encourage learners to identify the stylistic feature of the language?
3. What kind of activities that can be used to develop student's critical thinking abilities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking is a complex process that requires higher levels of cognitive skills in the processing of information. It is undeniable that teachers' perceptions of critical thinking among students influence their behaviors in the classroom. As far as culture and other benefits are concerned, Henning (1993:87) believes that culture and language cannot be separated, but should rather be integrated into the curriculum. Teaching literary texts provides added value beyond the level of language acquisition. These literary texts help students to expand their linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity. Creative thinking abilities can be developed through reading literary texts.

Definitions of Critical Thinking
A variety of definitions of critical thinking have been provided by theorists and

educators. Siegel (1988:32) defines critical thinking *as "the educational cognate of rationality"*, whereas Norris and Ennis (1989:3) define it as "*reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused upon deciding what to believe and do"*.

According to Lipman, (1991:32) *"critical thinking is a healthy skepticism.*" Elder and Paul (1994:18) define that" *Critical thinking is the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking and develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking"*. Maiorana (1992:71) explains that the purpose of critical thinking is to achieve understanding, evaluate viewpoints and solve problems. There is a little essential difference in these definitions. Educators in at least three areas of second language acquisition (SLA) have described the critical thinking skills needed for academic/professional work. Pally(2000:53) *"Students should be able to attain English language competence in cause and effect, description, categorization and differentiation, specifically for comparison and contrast.*" Mohan, (1986:42) emphasizes that:

> *"The skills of skimming, scanning and the ability to use the rhetorical conventions of academic or professional disciplines. Cognitive psychology highlights the understanding of the principles of temporal sequence, cause and effect, judgment and choice. Critical pedagogy focuses on examining the deep meanings, personal implications and social consequences of any knowledge, theme, technique, text, or material…its internal structure and its connections to self and society".*

EFL students need many of the critical thinking skills as emphasized in the above three areas to become proficient users of English. However critical thinking is an ongoing process in which all language learners must get engaged, regardless of their language proficiency levels. Critical thinking involves the use of information, experience and world knowledge in ways which allow learners to seek alternatives, make inferences, pose questions and solve problems, thereby signaling understanding in a variety of complex ways. Shor, (1992:78) mentions that:

> *"The need for critical thinking in classroom does not mean that EFL learners lack the ability to engage in critical thinking. In fact, EFL students usually come to the classrooms with a variety of critical thinking skills developed in their L1. Many students are ready for critical thinking and to do in L2".*

Since higher-order thinking skills are increasingly required for success in a knowledge-based society, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to assist their students to acquire critical thinking skills while learning English. Shor, (Ibid)believes that without adequate practice in critical thinking, EFL students may lack "scaffold "to academic study,

miss the opportunity to actively participate in the international community.

Developing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking competency can be developed using several teaching models. As Collie and Slater,(1991:52)explain that each graduate should be able to think critically and make reasonable choices by acquiring, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating knowledge as Collie and Slater, (ibid:)clam that: sub-competencies that can be used in the process of assessing and measuring critical thinking can be itemized as follows

1. Knowing what to observe and systematically making accurate observations.
2. Representing observations in an appropriate pattern to show relationships.
3. Recognizing problems that need to be and can be solved
4. Using sequential and holistic approaches to problem solving.
5. Analyzing information and ideas to make decisions.

They further on add that some of the models of teaching which easily fit into the critical thinking competency are concept attainment, scientific inquiry, inquiry training, simulation, role playing, thinking inductively, advanced organizer, and synaptic.

Teaching Higher-Order Thinking

Of all the benefits of literary texts, higher-order thinking is the most exciting one. Young (1996:90) states that "*High intermediate/advanced students can analyze what they read; therefore, they start thinking critically when they read a literary text.*"He also itemizes two crucial advantages of literary texts when focusing upon critical thinking

> *"Literary texts have two crucial advantages over traditional content as they entertain students' pervasive apprehension making it easy for them to learn from the beginning that critical thinking is natural, familiar and sometimes even fun. Second, literary texts put issues of critical thinking in an easily remembered context"*

Howie (1993) agrees with the use of literary texts to teach critical thinking. Therefore, instructors have the responsibility to help students to develop cognitive skills because every learner needs to make judgments, be decisive, come to conclusions, arrange information, organize, evaluate, predict and apply knowledge. Depending on students' level (Erkaya, 2005) of proficiency, instructors can activate students' lower-or higher-order thinking. Beginners are able to recall information and respond to questions about dates, events and places. Thus, when asked questions about names of characters, setting and plot of the story, they will have no difficulties responding to the questions.

6. This is level 1 of the taxonomy knowledge. When students become more proficient in the language,

7. they can move to level 2.comprehension. In this level, they must demonstrate their comprehension by comparing, interpreting, giving descriptions and stating main ideas. As students become even more proficient,

8. they move to level 3-application wherein they try to solve problems by using the knowledge they have about the story.

9. In level 4-analysis-students must have reached the high intermediate level of proficiency to succeed.

Erkaya,(Ibid) the reason is that students must analyze, compare, contrast, explain, infer, etc facts/ideas about the story. Upon reaching the advanced level of proficiency, students can synthesize and evaluate what they read, the last two levels of the taxonomy (synthesis and evaluation). Instructors can then ask questions such as "How would you change the plot?" "What would happen if . . .?" "What changes would you make to solve . . .?" "Do you agree with the actions . . .? With the outcomes . . .?" "Why did they (the character) [sic] choose . . .?" "What choice would you have made . . .?" (Bloom's critical thinking questioning strategies). Questions added to each story should train the students to think critically. Some of the questions are exemplified below by Brumfit and Carter,(1986: 12)

1. In the story, "The Wisdom of Solomon," would it have made any difference if the real mother of the baby who was about to be cut in half, had stayed quiet instead of pleading to King Solomon not to cut him and give him to the other woman?

2. What would have happened if King Solomon had not heard the real mother of the baby and cut the baby in half, giving half to the real mother and half to the other woman who claimed to be the real mother?

It is clear that, questions 1 and 2 require students to think of a different end to the same story and probably see both the real mother of the baby and King Solomon in different ways from how they were portrayed in the original story. Brumfit and Carter,(1986:12) also exemplified:" *Do you agree with the way king Solomon acted? Do you agree with the way the real mother acted*? 4. *Do you agree with their solutions of the story*? Different stories may elicit different questions. The questions will depend on the plot, characters, conflict, climax, complications and resolution of each story. The more questions requiring higher order-thinking students answer, the better prepared they will be to face the world once they graduate.

How Can Best Literary Texts be Selected

In choosing acceptable texts for the EFL context there are several factors to consider. A number of important reasons lead a language teacher to choose literary texts in the classroom. Brunt, (2005:35) notes that:

> *"The first factor is the difficulty of the vocabulary and syntax which compel teachers to look for works that match the level they are teaching. Other factors that make a literary text difficult are the historical, social and political references that add complexity for non-speakers of English".*

Brunt,(Ibid)Claims those students' cultural unfamiliarity with texts causes problems and makes the students dependent on the teacher's interpretation. As a result, students often have to study literary texts by listening to the teacher's translation and writing new words. Collie and Slater (1990:3) state that: *"literary texts are valuable as authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement"*. In a sense, readers are exercising what the CT experts' call explanation, analysis, synthesis, argumentation and application.

2.4.1 Authentic Material

Literary texts are authentic materials. Most works of literary texts are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials as Brunt, (2005:34)states *"Learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life /real life like settings. Literary texts can act as a beneficial complement to such materials that make learners creatively read then think"*. However in reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers. They become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

2.4. 2 Cultural Enrichment

For many languages learners have ideal ways to develop critical thinking and increase their understanding of verbal/nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Maley (1989:12) states that: *"Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social, regional backgrounds can be described"*. It is clear that a literary text is best regarded as a

complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding in the country whose language is being learned. Also, literary work adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

2.4. 3 Language Enrichment

Literary texts provide learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language upon reading a substantial and contextualized body of texts. Giroux (1997:73) states

> *"Students learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures and the different ways of connecting ideas which develop and enrich their own writing skill."*

Nevertheless students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts. When selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students as Collie and Slater (1990:6-7) mention *"to take into account t whether a particular work is able to reveal the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learners' interest and eliciting strong positive reactions from them."*

Accordingly choosing books relevant to the real-life experiences, emotions or dreams of the learner is of great importance. Language difficulty has to be considered as well. If the language of the literary work is simple, this may facilitate the comprehensibility of the literary text but is not in itself the most crucial criterion. Interest, appeal, and relevance are also prominent. Furthermore reading a literary text is more likely to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge when it is meaningful and amusing.

However enjoyment Collie and Slater,(1990) a fresh insight into issues felt to be related to the heart of people's concerns, the pleasure of encountering one's own thoughts or situations exemplified clearly in a work of art, the other equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective, all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in a less involving material. Students' motivation in the learning process is often determined by their interest in and enthusiasm for the material used in the class, the level of their persistence with the learning tasks as well as the level of their concentration and

enjoyment. Literary-based reading has an important effect on the development of critical thinking. A reader must recognize the patterns within text, fit details into these patterns and then relate them to other texts and remembered experiences.

Personal Involvement

Literary texts can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. (Maley, 1989) Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text, understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases become less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax, he feels close to certain characters, shares critical thinking and emotional responses. Maley (Ibid: 12) states some of the reasons for regarding literary texts as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:

1. Universality
2. Non-triviality
3. Personal Relevance
4. Variety
5. Interest
6. Economy and Suggestive Power
7. Ambiguity.

So this can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, interests and language level of the students is evident.

Variety

Literary work includes within it all possible varieties of subject matter. It is in fact, a battery of topics to use in ELT as Tishman, (1998:74) states "*Within literature, we can find the language of law and of mountaineering, of medicine and of bull-fighting, of church sermons and nursery talk*" Therefore Literary texts deal with themes and topics which are interesting because they reflect part of the human experience and are exhibited in ways designed to engaged the readers' attention.

Economy and Suggestive Power

One of the great strengths of literary work is its suggestive power. Even in its simple storms, Perkin and Tishman, (1998) it invites us to go beyond what is said to what is

implied. Since it suggests many ideas with few words, literary work is ideal for generating language discussion. Maximum output can often be derived from minimum input.

2.4.7Ambiguity

As it is highly suggestive and associative a literary texts portrays different meanings to different people. In other words, since literature provides students with a wide range of language varieties like socialists, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects, etc. Brunt, (2005:34)

> *"It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. In teaching this has two advantages. The first advantage is that each learner's interpretation has validity within limits. The second advantage is that an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed since each person's perception is different"*

Therefore a person speaks differently in different social contexts like school, hospital, police station and theatre (i.e. formal, informal, casual, frozen, intimate styles speech) hence, incorporating literature in to a foreign language teaching program as a powerful source for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language gains importance. It seems that no two readers will have a completely convergent interpretation establishes the tension that is necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas. One of the main functions of literary work is its sociolinguistic richness. The use of language changes from one social group to another. Likewise, it changes from one geographical location to another. it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language as clearly exemplified in a work of art; the other, equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective: all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material in choosing acceptable texts for the EFL context.

Critical Thinking as an Educational Purpose

Learning to think is the central purpose of education. (Pally,1997) considers that critical thinking should be a purposeful, self-regulatory judgment ending in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. It also involves conceptual and contextual basis of those judgments as Pally (1bid:52) argues that**:** "*critical thinking assists students to examine the deep meanings, personal implication and social consequences of any knowledge, theme, technique, text, or material.*" Hence a critical thought about a subject reveals its internal structure and its connections to self and society.

2.5.1 Critical Thinking and Disposition

Critical thinking is an attitude or disposition to recognize when a skill is needed and

the willingness to exert the mental effort to apply it. As Facione (2007:25) states that:*"It is a probing inquisitiveness, a keenness of mind, a zealous dedication to reason and a hunger or eagerness for reliable information"* Facione (Ibid) also believes that a critical spirit suggest a positive effect that transcend normal thinking and can assist learners in transforming their thinking.

3. METHODOLOGY

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was Sudanese teachers of English (50 teachers) from different schools who were responded to the questionnaire.

Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher used two tools to collect the data for this study. These tools are, a questionnaire for teachers.

Procedures

The questionnaire is designed and used as a tool to collect data for investigating the topic the role of critical thinking skill to develop EFL learners through literary texts by secondary school students, at secondary school this questionnaire is distributed to the EFL teachers at secondary school.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Analysis of the Result of the Questionnaire

Teaching literary texts develops students' critical thinking skills and exposes them to different cultures

Table(4.1)

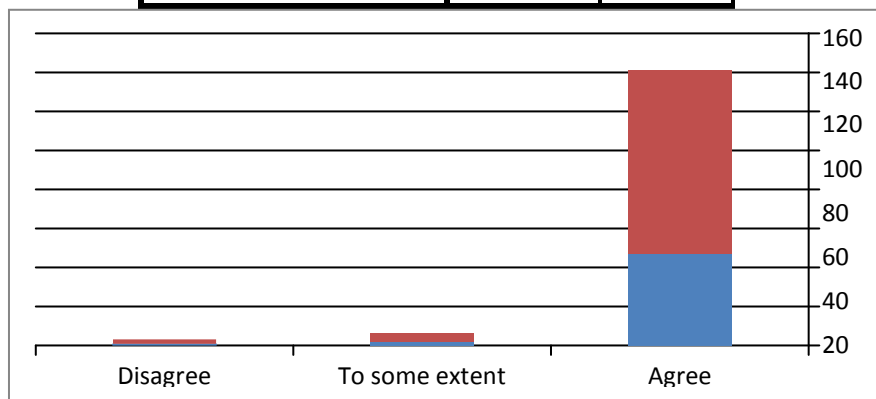|	Frequency	Percent
Agree	47	94.0
To some extent	2	4.0
Disagree	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Table (4.1) teachers who agree are (94%), to some extent (4%) and disagree (2%) according to the result (94%) of the respondent agree that teaching literary texts develops students' critical thinking skills and exposes them to different cultures.

Teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning

Table(4.2)

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	42	84.0
To some extent	5	10.0
Disagree	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0
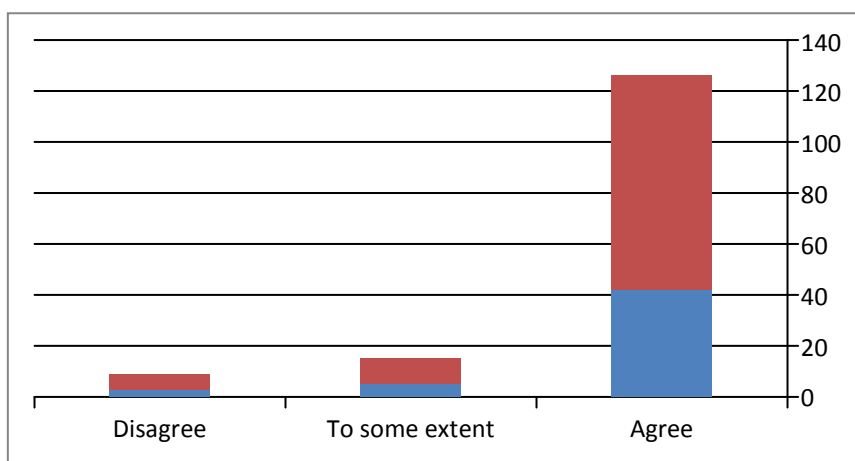
According to the statistical analysis, the majority of respondents (84 %) agree that, teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning. Thus this statement is accepted.

Pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking

Table(4.3)

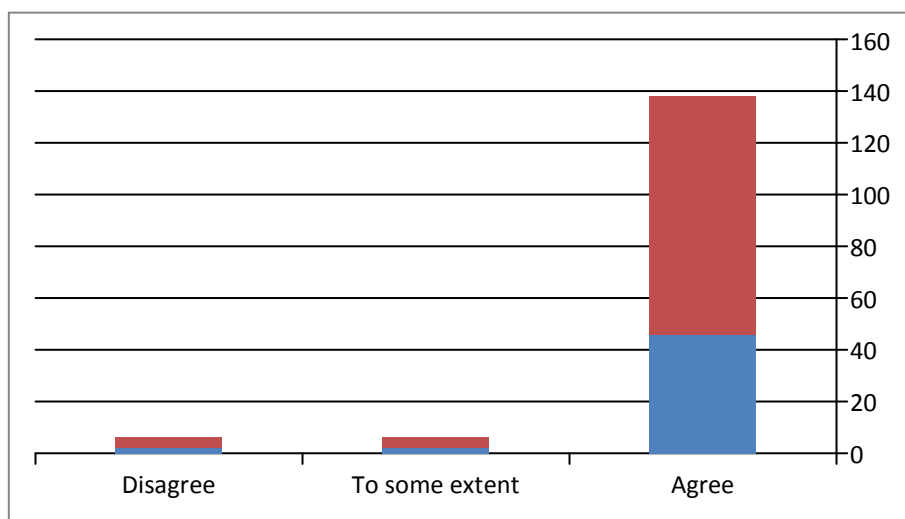|	Frequency	Percent
Agree	46	92.0
To some extent	2	4.0
Disagree	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Table (4.3) show that, pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking most respondents (92%) agree, (4%) to some extent and (4%) disagree that, pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking. Therefore this statement is accepted.

5. CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion
Literature teaching, as a compulsory subject and an indispensible component of modern liberal arts, occupies a steady seat in tertiary education. It is an undeniable fact that it plays an important role in language teaching and learning in the EFL context.

Findings
1. Teaching literary texts develops students' critical thinking skills and exposes them to different cultures.
2. Critical thinking activities encourage students to identify language varieties in the text.
3. Task-based activities do not help students to enhance their critical thinking skills.

Recommendations
1. Teachers should be well qualified in developing their students in literary texts.
2. Teachers can provide a variety of exercises and activity, such as having situational dialogue, paragraph reading and interview exercise in or outside classroom.
3. EFL students should be motivated through using technology in learning literary texts.

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Appendix

	Statement	Agree	To some extent	Disagree
1	Teaching literary texts develops students' critical thinking skills and exposes them to different cultures			
2	Teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning			
3	Pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking			