Critical Thinking as a Social Practice: The Interrelationship between Critical Thinking Engagement, Social Interaction, and Cognitive Maturity

Dr. Maroua ROGTI*, Teachers College of Laghouat (ENS), Algeria
m.rogti@ens-lagh.dz

Abstract

One determining factor for developing social competence is to set up the thinking pedagogy which can provide essential conditions for making reasoning, innovation, and constructing knowledge. Ultimately, social constructivists affirmed and believed that constructing knowledge can be through engaging in meaningful contexts, social interaction, and life experiences, thing that traditional pedagogies might have failed to achieve for developing students' active role in education and improving their thinking skills and cognitive abilities as critical thinkers. Critical thinking has emerged as one of the most highly valued skills to enable self-directed lifelong and innovative learning in higher education. In effect, educationalists have managed to use appropriate ways to develop critical thinking skills in EFL contexts; although no single method has emerged as the most efficient, some seem to be effective when properly implemented. The theoretical target investigation aimed at examining the potential of learning around the social perspective of critical thinking in Algerian higher education. It therefore emphasizes a set of teaching strategies and management practices which might be goal directed in stimulating critical thinking and may be applicable to EFL classrooms which are interactive, communicative, social, and cooperative learning strategies which might regularly lead to achieving self-guided learning.

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* Corresponding author

1. Introduction

Throughout the last decade, critical thinking pedagogy has been developed promptly, reflecting the changing goals and methods of education in response to the technological advances in the EFL context. As the financial managements of new institutes has intrinsically affected the educational policy and particularly productivity and individual capacity, teaching pedagogy in education has shifted from thinking of students as users of information aiming to develop students' cognitive and higher order thinking skills. On the other hand, due to technological advances, students became in need for analyzing and evaluating information to raise their cognitive skills to be able to solve complex problems.

Ultimately, changes in pedagogy of teaching also require the changes of the role of both teachers and students. Technological changes contributed to increasing students' capacities for problem solving, decision making, innovation, inference, and creativity. Critical thinking yet can be deeply related to the emotional and intellectual relationship with the individual himself, the others, and the learning context. Critical thinking development of students stands for the capacities of educationalists to implement the appropriate teaching pedagogies which can increase the students' critical abilities in the learning classroom. (Dale, 2000 & Rizvi, 2007)

Individuals are expected to think critically since their birth which can be noticed when children tempt to ask questions continuously. Nonetheless, in traditional classroom education the educational system may prevent questioning attitudes and cooperative learning, and require students to adjust with the existing learning methodology. Students then become restricted to the rules and become conformable and receivers of information. Therefore, the teacher will adopt a traditional environment with particular methods of teaching in which students are the submissive and silent in the learning classroom.

On the other hand, students in the EFL classroom may not be able to answer certain questions due to the quality of the lesson content or knowledge which will lead teachers to feel obliged to answer all their questions. This could be due their limited knowledge or professional development as they consider their teacher the only source of knowledge and the only authority. This habit of preventing students from asking questions in the EFL classroom can consistently restrict learning strategies such as discussion, interaction, questioning and peer questioning, and debating.

Educationalists in the EFL classroom can raise their students' critical thinking skills by incorporating instructional strategies which can engage students in the learning process by being active and independent learners. Teachers should put emphasis on the learning process rather than on the content, as they should avoid using traditional strategies such as structured drills and memorization. This study aims at exploiting the role of interactive teaching strategies in creating a high level of critical thinking process in the ELT classroom in Algerian higher education. It tempts to diagnose particular teaching strategies which may be employed in EFL classrooms along with interactive and cooperative teaching strategies such as questioning, debating, and cooperating with peers.

2. Critical Thinking: Conceptualization

A set of related literature on the notion of critical thinking affirm its relation with the teaching philosophy of the Greek Socrates who embedded these skills through a series of probing questions. Therefore, learning during ancient times was through self-reflection and self-inquiry which required the justification of existing claims and knowledge. This teaching practice denies the authority of singular perspectives, knowledge and power. The positive outcome of this approach to learning was

seen in terms of raising an individual's confidence and in the ownership of living a self-examined life; a life of quality. (Gagren, 2010)

In the English language teaching classroom, students need critical thinking skills to give convincing answers, supporting evidence, and to challenge others' arguments. Critical thinking is a self-regulatory and reasoned which encourages evaluation, problem solving, making inferences, making thoughtful decisions, and analysis. As students can be reflective thinkers by being able to decide what to do and be more aware of the meaning of language rather using it. According to (Kabilan, 2000), critical thinking must be used through language as students can engage in learning tasks with reflecting and interfering in different contexts.

Teaching critical thinking may have different conceptualizations in the ELT context. It is considered as "social practice" (Atkinson, 1997, p.72) as it is affected by the social and cultural context of the learner. To guarantee the achievement of critical thinking, students need to be exposed to a set of strategies of learning to increase their critical skills. Teachers of language should direct them to a problem or a situation in order to synthesize and make reasoning. According to (Paul and Elder, 2001) students may be encouraged to acquire knowledge by expressing it in a set of lectures, and then are asked to internalize it outside the classroom. Students must be exposed to multiple perspectives to interpret a situation or problem in order to stimulate their cognitive development based on their social and cultural environment. (Kloss, 1994)

Cognitive Development

In the last decade, incorporating critical thinking in the teaching curricula has been coincided with the works of Freire, and Von Glasersfeld which inflicted overall performance rather than active involvement in judgments, constructing knowledge, and logical reasoning. As a new initiative of teaching and learning, this aims at help students to reflectively question and critically evaluate the social and cultural norms and values; as they could create judgments based on their cultural and social norms.

In effect, ancient philosophy of teaching has appeared as a reflection to human nature. The Greek philosopher Socrates investigated that thinking was built in human nature, as he contended that individuals can act and react according to the quality of their thinking. Based on Socrates' philosophy, educationalists started to focus their teaching on promoting students' thinking through probing questions. This foundation of critical thinking initiative created significant debate on dispute in educational teaching curricula in the recent decades.

In fact, educational teaching contexts may foster students' own ideas and knowledge through inquiry and promote their independent decision making and active interaction and engagement with the outside world. As (Freire, 1970) contends that the traditional transmission view of teaching, teachers do not allow students to construct knowledge, and this prevents them from having the opportunity to engage in dialogues which can foster critical thinking. Also, in traditional teaching classrooms, learning is based on into a habit on drills and repetition which can be made without thinking.

Critical skills are referred to as cognitive abilities students need to be developed within the scope of problem solving and leaning in the EFL teaching and learning context. (McPeck, 2016) Critical thinking allows students to be critical thinkers through dealing with situational obstacles and constraints. According to Sternberg (1986) critical thinking is "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts" (p. 3) it is "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis,

1993, p. 180) as it refers to a set of skills which can be used by critical thinkers who have disposition for solving problems or accomplishing a particular task. (Ennis, 2011)

It has been proved that the development of critical thinking requires a long-term process which may take a long time to develop. (Paul and Elder, 2006) have suggested stages of the development of critical thinking as illustrated in figure 01.
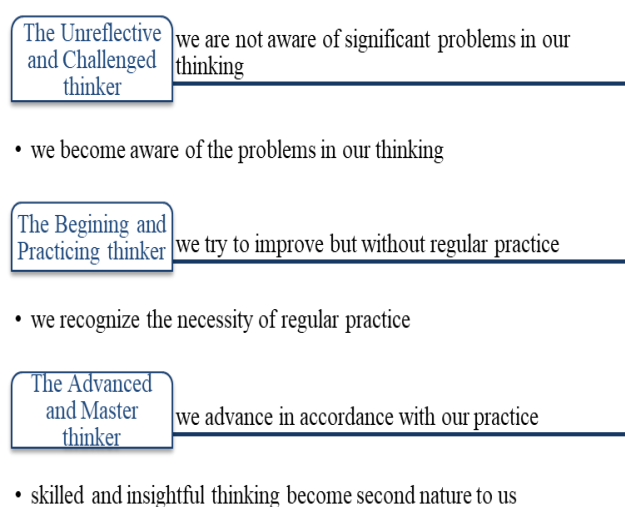

Figure 1 The Process of the Development of Critical Thinking
Source: (Paul and Elder, 2006)

Critical thinkers can grow intellectually and gain self-development continuous knowledge acquisition. Critical thinking can be viewed as a pedagogical competence of the teacher and a learning tool to help the students be self-directed learners. It is "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (Facione, 1990, p. 02) In the critical thinking process, educationalist must provide different perspectives and situations to engage their students in the process. Students are involved in evaluating assumptions and facts through

cooperation. They can make decisions about the construction of the knowledge.

Critical thinking can be guaranteed when students are engaged in thinking rationally, empirically, and reasonably through using interactive teaching tools such as engaging in discussions, debating, and asking questions. These tools can help students analyze, assess, and evaluate thinking. As they can be provided with a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking disposition, and group work. Students yet can develop an argument and use evidence to support their argument, make reasoned conclusions, and solve problems through the information they use and the knowledge they construct.

Social Interaction

Critical thinking may have been viewed as implicit knowledge which can be created through social interactions and practice. These can be a disposition the thinker relies on to act and think critically and creatively. According to (Nosich, 2012) critical thinking can make students be self-reflective thinkers, authentic, and reasonable. It may involve asking appropriate questions and answering them through reasoning, believing in that reasoning.

Hence, through discussion and problem solving, the student can construct knowledge, exchange ideas, make reasoning, identify the arguments provided, and identifying the problem to be solved. Thus, during the interaction process, the student can use his prior knowledge, interactive environment, and their social and cultural values, and relate it to their life experiences. They can see their own and view the world in a particular perspective. (Vygotsky, 1978)

Questioning Strategies

Questioning is a fundamental teaching tool which can stimulate students to think critically. They can be used by teachers and they may include lower level questions and higher level questions. Indeed, lower-level questions may be referred to as factual questions which involve

recognition, or recall of factual prior information previously acquired by the teacher. Whereas higher level questions involve manipulating previously acquired knowledge to make a particular response. These questions allow students to infer, make analysis, and evaluate. As (Orlich et al, 2013) believes that the level of student thinking can be related to the level of questions asked by the teacher; as the level of students responses and answers increases due to the high level of questions and vice versa.

Based on the manner and level of the questions asked by the teacher, students may use a set of critical skills such as synthesis, interpretation, analysis, and identifying assumptions to build results. (Mills, 1995) suggested that the teacher should use logical and thoughtful questions which are based on the level of knowledge of students and their thought. According to Bloom's Taxonomy questions, questioning may encourage synthesizing facts and evaluating tasks, as higher level thinking questions should start or end with either why, what, make a comparison, why, find a solution to the problem, and questions of agreement or disagreement like: do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Among questioning strategies which may develop students critical thinking ability is probing questions or Socratic questioning. According to (Wu, 1993) probing is an effective questioning strategy which can gather long and complex responses. This strategy can include questions for clarification, questions about different points of view, and questions for probing students' assumptions and evidence. (Paul and Elder, 2006)

Table 1 Examples of Questions at the Level of Bloom's Taxonomy

Category	Key concept	Examples
Knowledge comprehension	Memorization, description, comparison, explanation	What, when, who, define, describe, identify, state, show, how, Conclude, demonstrate, rephrase,
		differentiate, explain, give an example
Application analysis	Induction, deduction, logical order, application, solution	Build, construct, solve, test, demonstrate, how would you support, what reasons, does the evidence support the conclusion, what behaviors
Synthesis	Productive thinking	Think of a way, propose a plan, develop, suggest, formulate a solution
Evaluation	Judgement, selection	Choose, evaluate, decide, defend, what is the most appropriate, which would you consider

Source: (Bloom et al, 1956)

Socratic questioning can contribute to exploring meaning, justification, making a strong argument, and reasoning. (Paul, 1995; Paul & Heaslip, 1995) The teacher tempts to ask questions which inspect assumptions, results, and evidence. These questioning tools can promote interaction in learning by engaging students who are not active in class to think critically and creatively. This teaching strategy emphasizes clarification. Teacher should ask a second student to clarify or summarize the answer of the first student. Hence, the aim of clarification and summarizing the answer can emphasize whether the fellow student has already listened to the answer of the former student and got it to summarize it again himself.

Within the scope of classroom interaction, educationalists should familiarize students with questions which require short answer providing them with enough time to think before answering the question. As waiting for seconds may allow students to think and make thoughtful answers. (Mills, 1995; Dillon, 1990) as time must be given to students to think about possibilities and

make suggestions. (Elliot, 1996) Because using a fast exchange of questions and responses through teacher-student interaction may increase students' passive role and prevent them from thinking critically. (Fisher, 2011)

In English language teaching, there is another type of questions which are closed vs. open questions, and display vs. referential questions. Closed questions sometimes require a small number of possible responses, while open questions may gather many responses. On the other hand, display questions are questions which the teacher already knows their answers while referential questions are not recognized by the teacher and seek new information from students. (Wu, 1993)

Ideally, educationalists in the field of English language teaching usually tempt to ask lower level, closed; display questions which require limited and simple responses, however, they do not often use higher level, open, referential questions in the classroom. (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Wu, 1993) According to (Tan, 2007), lower-level questions do not encourage cognitive efforts from the part of students and they prevent them from being active in the classroom and having less chance to be self-directed learners who can think critically and independently.

As teachers should give enough time for students to think before giving an answer and avoid giving them the answer after a short silence time. This will prevent students from higher thinking. Hence, higher-level questions and probing questions can stimulate students' reasoning, allow them to make inferences, judgments, and therefore have a great potential to think critically. Ultimately, teachers should engage students in critical thinking and should establish high level of interaction in the classroom.

Active and Cooperative Learning Strategies

To engage students in the critical thinking process, educationalists put emphasis on incorporating active and cooperative

strategies through which students can cooperate and interact freely. Through classroom interaction, students can be more independent and responsible and be stimulated to be critical thinkers. (Slavin, 2011) Among the communication and cooperative strategies are role playing, gaming, group work, (Dennicka & Exley, 1998), research projects, presentations, and debates. (Campbell, 2015; Slavin, 2011); and peer-evaluation (Fung, 2014) Indeed, these strategies, including group work, debate, and questioning, and peer evaluation are very relevant and effective strategies which can be incorporated into the EFL classroom.

Discussion and Debating

Critical thinking can be promoted through classroom discussion and debating. Indeed, discussion is a teaching tool in which students can exchange ideas and engage in active learning and participation. (Orlich et. al 2013) Group discussion can be effective in promoting critical thinking and achieve lifelong learning, because students tempt to use their thought and construct and clarify their ideas. Also, students can get into the multiple perspectives and views of others through exchanging ideas. (Platt, 2008, cited in Kabilan, 2000) Students' need training and should have an intention to make efforts in using group discussion strategies to encourage them to discuss, talk, question, debate, and think which will typically guarantee good achievement of critical thinking. (Garside, 1996)
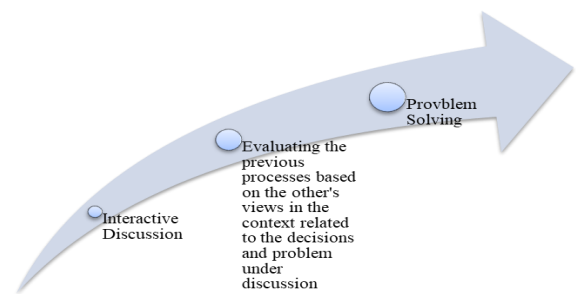
Figure 2 Pedagogical Model of Thinking Critically through Discussion

Source: (Paul, 2005, p.30)

Engaging in discussions and group discussions may require objectives to learn something, individual disposition, and student engagement. In order to promote CT and student involvement in EFL classrooms, students need to be aware of basic rules and skills for classroom and group discussion, such as listening attentively, responding appropriately to peer's ideas, asking others to respond, getting and giving feedback, making clarifications and verifications, agreeing and disagreeing with a particular claim, providing and asking for justification for evidence. (Gunning, 2008)

In addition, in order to foster critical thinking among students, the teacher should select appropriate topics for discussion such as debatable topics which require the assertion of claims and arguments to create a debate. Also, choosing topics which are near to students' life experience which can attract their attention and which can befit their cultural background and personal life experiences. According to Halvorsen (2005), incorporating controversial topics for students to engage in a debate can increase student participation and interaction which leads to increasing their critical thinking ability.

Peer Questioning

Peer questioning can be a useful strategy for promoting critical thinking ability of students in a language class. Unlike individual questioning, peer questioning requires pair work and group work, by asking questions to each other and answering each other's questions. Questioning and sharing responses in pairs or groups may help promoting students' critical analysis, synthesis, and comprehension. (Simpson, 1996) Through peer questioning groups, students will be encouraged to ask more questions through which they can get high level of reflection, understanding, and explanation, than students asking questions individually or

engaging in group discussion without questioning.

In the English language teaching classroom, questioning is an interesting task for learners, they are allowed to engage in peer questioning in all language tasks. (Berkeley & Barber, 2015) Students can ask higher level questions through many ways such as thinking loud, analyzing the relationship between ideas, predicting, providing evidence and support to the answer through questions of agreement and disagreement, and evaluating. (King, 1995) Hence, students can improve the level of their skills and peer questioning strategies continuously through practicing asking and answering questions, as they can subsequently become critical thinkers. Questioning strategies suggested by the teacher or chosen by the student can serve as effective tools to foster students to become critical thinkers in the EFL classroom and help them interact with each other and exchange ideas.

Student-teacher Interaction

Classroom interaction can be an effective way of helping students engage in discussions, debates, and conversations. These activities can help students develop their thinking skills and abilities. Interacting with peers and teacher in the classroom can be a part of active learning, as students can have the opportunity to share ideas and information, ask cogent questions, identify errors, and generate arguments. (Omelicheva and Avdeyeva, 2008) students' higher-order thinking skills and critical evaluation can be developed through interactive debates in the classroom.

In the ELT classrooms, learning can mostly occur through classroom interaction through which both students and teacher can construct an amount of knowledge as they can get a mutual understanding through their interaction. As "through interactions with their teachers, students are socialized into particular understanding of what counts as the official curriculum

and of themselves as learners of that subject matter" (Hall and Walsh, 2002) Interaction can yet be a determinant of a good student-teacher relationship in the EFL classroom. (Duffy, Warren & Walsh, 2001)

Teachers can use teacher talk to increase intellectual ability and manage classroom tasks. (Feng, 2007) this can contribute to organizing, explaining, summarizing, and redirecting the way teacher and students exchange ideas and interact in the classroom. Through classroom interaction, learners can think critically and exchange ideas and arguments with peers. As classroom interaction can be considered as "a two way process between the participants in the learning process. The teacher influences the learners and vice versa" (Dagarin, 2004, p.128)

It can be a motivational determinant for learners to be linguistically and cognitively competent and share ideas feely in the classroom. As (Chaudron, 1988) puts forward that:

> Interaction is viewed as significant because it is argued that only through interaction can the learners decompose the TL structures and derive meaning from classroom events. Interaction gives learners the opportunities to incorporate TL structures into their own speech, and meaningfulness for learners of classroom events of any kind, whether through interactive or not, will depend on the extent to which communication has been jointly constructed between the teacher and learners. (p.10)

According to (Içbay, 2008) classroom interaction can allow constructing classroom phenomena, as it can help students be a fundamental contributors to learning, and can communicate freely in the classroom Also, interaction can provide students with the required opportunities to expressing their ideas and thoughts collectively with their peers. Ultimately, teacher-student interaction can help decreasing classroom obstacles. Asking

questions by the student and distributing questions to them such as asking referential questions, managing the teacher talk by being relevant to the topic, providing target language input might provide a successful teacher-student interaction which may help increasing the level of readiness to learning which may guarantee the development of critical thinking process and ensuring a good interactive classroom environment.

3. Conclusion

In planning critical thinking tasks in the ELT classroom, teachers may implement various strategies or incorporate multiple methods appropriate to their langue classroom. Achieving critical thinking ability requires teachers' high intervention and competence. With the use of such strategies, students can be encouraged to be self-directed by making questioning assumptions, thinking, and exchanging opinions. Engaging students in critical thinking increases classroom interaction and allows a space for meaningful discussions and debates which will result in self-directed learning.

Regardless of the methods used to promote students' critical thinking, educationalists should be aware of certain factors which may prevent students from thinking critically. Among those factors is the student's disposition to think critically which is highly required. Also, students in the EFL classroom should be encouraged to be ready to learn, ask questions, and not accept everything they receive such as acquiring new information or receiving criticism. Students' thinking can be developed through continuous practice and evaluation using practical and appropriate learning strategies.

Hence, it is yet persistent to claim that critical thinking skills can be fostered and encouraged in most language classes and in the ELT classroom in particular by educationalists in higher education. Although this disposition may not be developed in all educational streams,

critical thinking may not be reflected in higher college education, educationalists may still be inquisitive to incorporate further teaching strategies to increase the critical thinking abilities of students and use them in order to encourage long life learning.

Therefore, further research may foreground the diverse barriers or obstacles which can block the process of critical thinking such as lack of training, lack of resources, limited language proficiency, and time constraints. These may intrigue to impede the learning environment and tools which contribute to guarantee the achievement of students' critical thinking. Further, actively engaging students in project-based learning yet can foster students' critical thinking development with the teacher's intervention by leading their thinking process in the classroom.

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