

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Integrating the Critical Thinking Skills in Libyan EFL Public High Schools: the Literacy or the Challenge

By Afaf Rajab Abad, Asmahan Al-Atrash
*English Language Department, Almergib University,
Alkhoms, Libya*

Aafa84@gmail.com
taj.alwakar79@yahoo.com

Abstract This study tries to investigate whether Libyan as a foreign language (EFL) teachers integrate critical thinking skills in their classrooms, and this study argues that many EFL Libyan teachers have no idea about the meaning and the ways of using these skills in their classes. Data are collected through three qualitative methods: observing 10 EFL Libyan teachers in different public high schools and interviewing 5 EFL teachers. Also, the Libyan curriculum of high schools “English for Libya was analyzed qualitatively whether it provides opportunities for integrating critical thinking skills or not. The finding stated that most teachers participated in this study do not understand the meaning of critical thinking skills and they give more priority to grammar rules and vocabulary through asking their students to memorize them for exams.

Keywords—critical thinking skills: the skills of being independent in individuals thinking and perception.

EFL: English as a foreign language.

Integrating: implementing.

Procedural knowledge: the application of given information.

Declarative knowledge: the understanding and memorization of given information.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this study, there is much focus on the definitions of critical thinking skills, their positive effect on improving the English language skills and the challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers in using them in their classes. Critical thinking skills can be represented by the first “No” said by a baby to tell his/her parents that “I am here and I have an opinion”. Hence, for students in particular, critical thinking skills improve them to positively participate in building their societies. If teachers ask their students to simply memorize the information they receive in the class without giving them any chance to discuss or debate about this information, there will be “copy-pasted” minds. Thus, the question here is why do we have teachers then? Integrating critical thinking skills is very necessary specifically in language classes where students are required to be exposed to a foreign culture and respect as only a different culture not a rude one.

II. STUDY BACKGROUND

In Libya, the English as a foreign (EFL) language policy has been given special attention by the Ministry of Education in recent years. That is, Libyan students started to learn English at grade 1 in primary schools in 2018. For high schools, the English curriculum is classified into two sections, the scientific and the literary one. Additionally, this syllabus has been revised and improved many times.

However, for the teaching methods used by Libyan EFL teachers to teach English at high schools, most of them are traditional. That is to say, it is argued that they do not care much about integrating new skills such as critical thinking. In other words, Arabic language is the dominant language in the classroom interaction, especially when teachers explaining the meaning of new words as students often write the Arabic equivalent of the English words to help them memorise the meaning. Also, there is no assessment of student's mistakes neither in oral performance nor in written performance. Moreover, for the assessment of pronunciation, there are no tests for speaking or listening skills. Finally, teachers do not use English to communicate with their student in the classroom.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims at:

1. Exploring better possible teaching methods and strategies which can provide good opportunities for Libya high school students to use their critical thinking skills
2. Trying to avoid using the old traditional teaching methods such as translating to Arabic which can prevent students from using their critical thinking skills
3. Integrating more critical thinking skills at high schools when learning English language.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 .Do Libyan as a foreign language (EFL) teachers use any critical thinking skills?
2. What are the Libyan teachers perceptions of critical thinking skills?
3. Do Libyan teachers introduce their students to critical thinking skills?
4. How can EFL Libyan teachers use critical thinking skills?

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the field of language teaching and learning many educators as well as researchers base their arguments and suggestions on second language acquisition theories (SLAT). For this research, as the purpose of this work is to increase the awareness of Libyan EFL teachers towards the importance of integrating the critical thinking skills in their classrooms, the skill acquisition theory can confirm the significant role of critical thinking skills in improving the English language skills of Libyan EFL students. According to Taie (2014), this theory provides the potential opportunities for teachers to implement both explicit and implicit learning in SLA. Also, this theory highlights the role of practice, engagement and performance for students in order for them to get improved in language skills particularly the productive skills. More importantly, it entails the utilization of declarative knowledge followed by procedural knowledge. According to Richards & Schmidt (2010), “declarative knowledge is conscious knowledge of facts, concepts or ideas that can be stored as propositions. And procedural knowledge refers to unconscious knowledge of how an activity is done”.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking skills have been differently defined, for example, according to Elder and Paul(1994) state," critical thinking skills are defined as the ability of individuals to take charge of their own thinking and develop appropriate criteria and standards for analyzing their own thinking" . Moreover, as Norris (1992) states, "critical thinking skills aims at achieving understanding, and evaluating different perspectives, and solving problems. For the challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers in the integration of critical thinking skills, Pathan and et al (2010) stated that the difficulties faced teaching English across Libyan schools are consistent; these are motivation, large classroom, low achievement rates, insufficient time to teach curriculum, and teacher training. Teachers of English in secondary schools are only Libyan and their level of proficiency in the English language may not always give confidence in encouraging and motivating the students as they tend to focus on explaining the declarative knowledge such as grammar rules and vocabulary asking their students only to memorize instead of practicing them. Critical thinking skills have positive effects on the language teaching process.

They have been introduced and they have gained a special attention in many foreign language teaching (FLT) settings so

that nowadays enhancing critical thinking skills of students is considered one of the foreign language teachers tasks at schools .

The manipulation of critical thinking skills into the FLT classrooms is very important to improve the performance of EFL students to the English language skills for several reasons. First, if students can take charge of their own thinking, they can monitor and evaluated their own ways of learning more successfully. Second, critical thinking skills expand the learning experience of the students and makes the language more meaningful for them. Third, critical thinking skills have a high degree of correlation with the students achievements. Different studies have confirmed that the role of critical thinking in improving EFL writing performance, language proficiency and oral communication skills. Students may become proficient language users if they have motivation and are taught the ways of displaying critical thinking skills in foreign language usage. Which signifies that the students must have reflection on their production of ideas and they may critically support those ideas with logical details .Educators have emphasized the importance of developing higher-order thinking skills in foreign language classrooms(Chamot,1995 Al-Arishi and et al 1991).Students who have developed critical thinking skills are capable of doing activities of which other students may not be capable.

VII. RESULTS

This study revealed that there is a misunderstanding of critical thinking skills meaning by Libyan EFL teachers. Also, Teachers focus more on teaching

The grammar rules, vocabulary and memorization of the syllabus.

Additionally, teachers are more concerned with students' grades rather than their performance.

On the other hand, the Libyan curriculum of English provide many chances of using these critical thinking skills such as reflecting on the reading passages by sharing students' experience.

Much research is required to clearly investigate the teaching methods used by Libyan teachers.

This study recommends offering more training programs to improve teachers' teaching methods, particularly integrating critical thinking skills which can help in improving students' levels of English skills.

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