



Critical Thinking as a Fundamental Ability of a Personality

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ABSTRACT This paper deals with an urgent problem of modern education. Therefore, the paper addresses the development of students' critical thinking. In fact, a student, who is able to think critically, has a variety of ways to comprehend and evaluate information, can identify contradictions, and argue their point of view by relying not only on their knowledge but also on the interlocutor's opinion. In fact, the student can systematically search for answers to the raised questions and reveal the causes and consequences of the facts. Thus, this paper aimed to show the strong potential of literature reading as a means for critical thinking development. On the one hand, literature shows the essential traits of the critical thinking, and on the other hand, it is believed to pass the global cultural heritage down through generations. Finally, results of the pre-course and after-course assessment showed the effectiveness of the suggested technology.

INTRODUCTION

According to modern philosophy, reason is a trait, which makes man different from animals. However, people largely differ in the way they use their mental abilities. Many of them take everything for granted, not subject to proof, and do not want to think independently. However, others try to analyze information, evaluate its credibility, and built their own judgements and conclusions. In other words, the second group of people uses their critical thinking abilities that are crucial for social and human progress (Allen et al. 2014; Lubsky et al. 2016; Bookchin 2017).

Since the 1990s, developing individual's critical thinking skills has been considered as a primary goal of education. Educators also confirmed that developing critical thinking skills would be essential to help people "know how to learn and how to think clearly" (Halpern 1998; Franco et al. 2015) and "make purposeful judgements about what to believe or what to do" (Facione et al. 1995; McPeck 2016).

Now, numerous developed models of critical thinking are found in the USA; from among them, two models are the most developed that have been widely accepted. The models are the American Philosophical Association ("The Delphi Report") and Paul-Elder's model, which have been promoted by The Foundation for Critical Thinking (Xiao-jing 2016; Patonah et al. 2019).

According to Delphi model, critical thinking is defined as a purposeful self-regulating system of judgements used to interpret, analyze, assess, formulate conclusions, and explain methodological, conceptual, and criterial tenets on which the system is based. However, an ideal critical thinker is supposed to be meticulous, well-informed, flexible, open-minded, unbiased, ready to revise their point of view, persistent in search for necessary information, reasonable in choosing criteria, and aimed at knowledge acquisition and results realization (Roberts et al. 2018).

However, according to Paul-Elder's model (Paul and Elder 1993), critical thinking implies the fact that people would use analytical and evaluating methods in order to improve the quality of their reasoning in the process of critical thinking. Actually, critical thinking is a self-controlling, self-disciplining, self-checking, and self-correlating process. It includes effective communicative and problem-solving skills.

In addition, Glaser (1984) defined a set of skills typical of critical thinking, including skills to identify and solve a problem, collect and classify necessary information, discover the unsupported suggestions and assessments, interpret facts and information, make right conclusions and generalizations, and so forth. In practice, Glaser' theory was developed by some scholars (Ennis and Azzarito 2003). However, the prob-

lem of critical thinking components is still open to discussion. Accordingly, Ennis determined 12 basic critical thinking abilities.

However, this paper agrees with Cluster (2001) who identified five components of critical thinking:

1. Critical thinking is independent. Therefore, it is individual in character.
2. Information is the starting, not final point of critical thinking. Knowledge makes motivation, which has a fundamental role in critical thinking.
3. Critical thinking begins with identifying a problem to be solved.
4. Critical thinking needs cogent argumentation. In fact, a critical thinker finds their own solution of a problem and bases this solution on reasonable arguments. All elements of argumentation (that is, statements, reasons, and proves) are well grounded.
5. Critical thinking is social in nature. It means that any thought is tested and improved when it is shared with other people. Actually, when we discuss something, argue, and share opinions, we will verify and deepen our own position.

For example, the ideas of critical thinking have become popular by the end of 1990s in Russia so that all works on the mentioned problem are practically connected with pedagogy (Fedorov 2007). In general, researchers would adopt the above-mentioned ideas to the Russian practice. For example, Gali et al. (2017) analyzed the problem in the context of developing gifted students, while Khovanskaya et al. (2017) studied the phenomenon from the perspective of university education. However, relatively few works dealt with analysis of the critical thinking level of the Russian school children and college students.

In this regard, a study reported the results of testing high school students. According to the authors, 82 percent of the respondents showed incompletely developed abilities of critical thinking, 9 percent demonstrated low level of development, and 9 percent had rather high level abilities. Therefore, it should be noted that the children were good at identifying the main and background information in the text but they practically failed to reflexively evaluate the content of the text.

In another study, Boyazitova (2016) tested critical thinking abilities of the college students. In fact, the author tested two groups of students. The first group of participants included the first year college students who had just finished school and entered the college. The second group consisted of the-fourth year college students who had just completed their Bachelor program.

Test results showed that 54 percent of the first-year students had average level of critical thinking development, 2 percent showed high level abilities, and 44 percent of the participants demonstrated poor critical thinking abilities. Therefore, it was concluded that the first-year students have incompletely developed abilities.

In the researchers' opinion, literature is one of the most effective tools for engaging students in critical thinking. Thus, by teaching students to analyze and evaluate literary texts, we can help them develop critical thinking skills, which involve, first of all, analyzing the events and seeing relationships between them, drawing inferences, synthesizing evidence, and evaluating both the content of a text and the language used to express the ideas contained within it.

For the following reasons, literature reading is greatly compatible with the essential traits of critical thinking. Firstly, literature reading makes readers recall, retrieve, and reflect on their prior experiences or memories to understand the text. Therefore, they demonstrate capacities to differentiate facts from opinions, understand both the literal and implied meanings and the narrator's attitude, analyze the connections between events or actions, to be perceptive of multiple perspectives, reason and judge, and finally apply the skills mentioned to other domains or the real world. In terms of critical thinking theory, they will explain, analyze, synthesize, use appropriate argumentation, interpret, evaluate, solve problems, infer, reason logically, and apply (Brunt 2005). In brief, each ability is a critical thinking skill. That is why Lazere (1987) argued that "literature...is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking."

Secondly, working on literature exposes readers to multiple points of view and thus compels them to think and rethink their own ideas and

actions and helps them to see their limitations and weaknesses. Therefore, readers may change and gradually achieve self-direction and nurture such affective disposition as open-mindedness, self-confidence, prudence, and truth-seeking, which are necessary for developing critical thinking (Facione et al. 1994). Taking all these reasons into consideration, we hypothesized that literature class could provide the best opportunities to develop the students' critical thinking abilities if working is organized in an appropriate manner (with the aim of the development of critical thinking abilities).

Objectives

This paper aimed to show the strong potential of literature reading as a means for critical thinking development.

METHODOLOGY

To test the hypothesis, the researchers developed a course in Modern English-speaking Literature for the fifth-year students of Kazan Federal University who are trained to be teachers of Law and English. They selected the students for two reasons. Firstly, the course in Modern English-speaking Literature is included in their curriculum. Secondly, as the teachers of the 21st century, they are expected to have highly developed critical thinking abilities. The statistical population consisted of 75 students and the course lasted for one semester (72 academic hours).

However, in order to measure the students' level of critical thinking development. Therefore, the researchers used the test variation formulated by Boyazitova (2016). Seven indicators were measured that included abilities to interpret, analyze, assess, conclude, explain, self-control, and apply the acquired skills in practice. Finally, the same test was conducted after the course was completed. Then, both test results were compared and discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conditions of the students according to the results of the first test are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Students conditions based on first test results

Had incompletely developed level of critical thinking	46%
At low level of development	43%
High level of development	9%
Highly developed interpreting abilities	8%
Incompletely developed level of interpreting abilities	47%
Low developed level of interpreting abilities	45%
Highly developed analyzing skills	20%
Incompletely developed level of analyzing skills	33%
Low developed level of analyzing skills	47%
Highly developed assessing abilities	16%
Incompletely developed abilities	50%
Low level of development abilities	34%

Furthermore, the highly developed abilities to make conclusions were displayed by 38 percent of the respondents, 47 percent had incompletely developed level, and 15 percent experienced poor abilities to make conclusions. Thus, highly developed level of abilities to explain accounted for 25 percent of the participants, 49 percent of the students experienced the incompletely developed level, and 26 percent of them had low developed level of explanation abilities. Regarding the self-regulating skills, 5 percent of the participants had highly developed level, 55 percent of the students experienced the incompletely developed level, and 40 percent of them had low developed level. Ultimately, the abilities to apply the acquired skills in practice included 7 percent highly developed level, 46 percent incompletely developed level, and 47 percent low developed level.

Upon the course ended, the second test was conducted with the following results. It was found that 12 percent of the respondents had highly developed interpreting abilities, 58 percent of them had incompletely developed level, and 30 percent experienced low developed level of interpreting abilities. In addition, 35 percent of the participants had highly developed analyzing skills, 45 percent of them were at the incompletely developed level, and 20 percent were at the low developed level of analyzing skills. In the next stage, 18 percent of the students had the highly developed assessing abilities, 57 percent exhibited incompletely developed abilities, and 25 percent of them had low developed level.

In addition, highly developed abilities to make conclusions were displayed by 40 percent

of the respondents, 52 percent accounted for the incompletely developed level, and 8 percent demonstrated poor abilities to make conclusions. Moreover, abilities to explain included 25 percent of the students at the highly developed level, 56 percent of the participants had incompletely developed level, and 19 percent of them exhibited the developed level of the explanation abilities. Furthermore, highly developed level of abilities of the self-regulating skills was displayed by 5 percent of the participants, 57 percent of the respondents had incompletely developed level, and 38 percent exhibited low developed level of self-regulating skills. Finally, the abilities to apply the acquired skills in practice accounted for 8 percent highly developed level, 49 percent incompletely developed level, and 43 percent low developed level.

Based on the comparative analysis of the results, basic critical thinking abilities were noticeably improved thanks to the fact that the course "Modern English-speaking Literature" aimed to develop these abilities. In fact, the course was allocated to the creative activity of popular British and American writers. However, it was not based on a traditional approach when students are informed of the biography of a writer, their main works, plot and message. Therefore, the researchers rejected this informative approach and conducted their study based on a different scenario.

To this end, the researchers used the so-called "reading with stops" technique. According to this technique, the teacher beforehand breaks the text for the analysis into semantic passages. It is important that each passage be logically complete, while giving scope for imagination: "And what will happen next?" Thus, reading begins at the stage of comprehension and has several stages, including reading, questions on the text, and assumptions. Then, this chain is repeated as many times as there are passages in the text. It is notable that in order to show how this approach works, the researchers chose Otsuka's (2007) novel "When the Empire Was Divine."

There are several reasons for choosing the above book for studying. In fact, American diversity is found not only in ethnicity but also in history, regionalism, and lifestyle. And it is in America's literature that this diversity is best

represented and provides a wealth of issues for discussion. It is also crucial that students develop an interest in and understanding of a world beyond their own.

In 2013, the first novel by Japanese-American writer Otsuka (2007) called "When the Emperor Was Divine" was published in Russia. It is the only novel translated into Russian, which has been allocated to the internment of the Japanese-Americans. In fact, the novel is the story about one Japanese family who had been living in the USA for many years, adapted to the foreign country, and had become members of the American world. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, they, as the other 110 thousand of Japanese immigrants, were announced "enemies" by the President F. Roosevelt and were interned on account of their ethnicity alone. Actually, the novel describes adverse impacts of the internment of the Japanese-American families.

It should be noted that students need historical background concerning World War II and the internment of the Japanese-Americans. Historical context is also necessary for understanding the "When the Emperor Was Divine" because the novel firmly deals with the issue of the Japanese-American identity.

For example, Julia Otsuka herself belongs to the third generation of the Japanese immigrants who identify themselves as a member of an American nation. Their native language is English and their native culture is American. The book is based on her family's history. Her mother, uncle, and grandmother were interned to Topaz Camp in Utah in 1942 and spent 3.5 years there. "As a writer and as a Japanese-American, I feel a responsibility, especially now, to remind people of what happened to the Japanese in this country during WW II, because the effects of wartime discrimination last a lifetime. All these years after the war, my mother still signs off every telephone conversation with, "The FBI will check up on you again soon!" (Khovanskaya et al. 2017).

This is interesting, but Julia Otsuka's (2007), characters do not have names, which helps the author generalize and portray not the predestined of an individual but the tragedy of thousands of people. In fact, the novel characters are the members of the family: Father, Mother, Daughter, and Son. In the beginning, we see all

things are happening through Mother's eyes, then, through Daughter's eyes, after that through Son's eyes, and, finally, through Father's eye, who has returned from another Camp for the interned people. This condition was especially important for children as the third generation of the Japanese believed to be Americans. They did not know the Japanese language and traditions, they read books in English, and had white friends. However, the novel addresses the problem of Japanese-American identity. Is it half Japanese and half American, or is it either?

These activities benefit students in many ways. 1. They learn to be self-confident and value their own opinions. 2. They are forced to think and present their views in a more logical and creative manner. 3. They become motivated to read more. You're a Japanese-American mother who lives with your children in Topaz, an internment camp. They ask you why the family is living in the camp, why things are the way they are. What will you say to your children? How do you feel about the USA at this point of your life? Task of the third group was to write a review on Otsuka's novel.

CONCLUSION

As shown in the studies, development of critical thinking abilities is one of the vital problems of modern psychology and pedagogics. In fact, critical thinking helps people understand the heart of the matter, make right conclusions and judgments, control cognitive processes, and be independent and creative. However, critical thinkers cannot be manipulated and pressed by the authorized opinions. Critical thinking abilities are crucial for social and human progress. Moreover, college education is supposed to play a fundamental role in the process of critical thinking. In addition, the analysis of the psychological and pedagogical works devoted to the problem shows that college students do not possess well developed abilities of critical thinking. Nonetheless, literature reading is one of the most effective ways of the formation of the completely developed abilities of critical thinking. In this regard, an experimental course in Modern English-speaking Literature aimed at critical thinking development indicated its effectiveness, which is confirmed by the results of the conducted tests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this paper analyzed both theoretical and practical aspects of critical thinking development, it can be recommended to educators and practical teachers who wish to know how to organize the critical thinking process at their colleges and universities.

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