

Perception and Challenges in Fostering Critical Thinking through the Reading Activities in CEFR Aligned Textbooks

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Abstract

Critical thinking has become a vital skill that every person needs to equip themselves with from school to working life. It is a metacognitive process where one does not settle with what is being learned, but instead explores it by asking questions and making judgments. Teachers often face multiple challenges in fostering critical thinking among the students as this skill has to be developed through various activities. One of the focus activities for this research would be reading activities in the CEFR-aligned textbooks in Malaysian secondary school classrooms. The CEFR-aligned curriculum and textbooks have been incorporated into the Malaysian education system since 2013 which provides teachers with guided lesson plans, a scheme of work, and a curriculum framework. Thus, this research aims to explore the teachers' familiarity and the challenges they face in using reading activities in CEFR-aligned textbooks to foster critical thinking. It is quantitative research with questionnaires that will be distributed to secondary school teachers using purposive sampling methods.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Perception, Fostering, Cefr-Aligned Textbooks, Reading

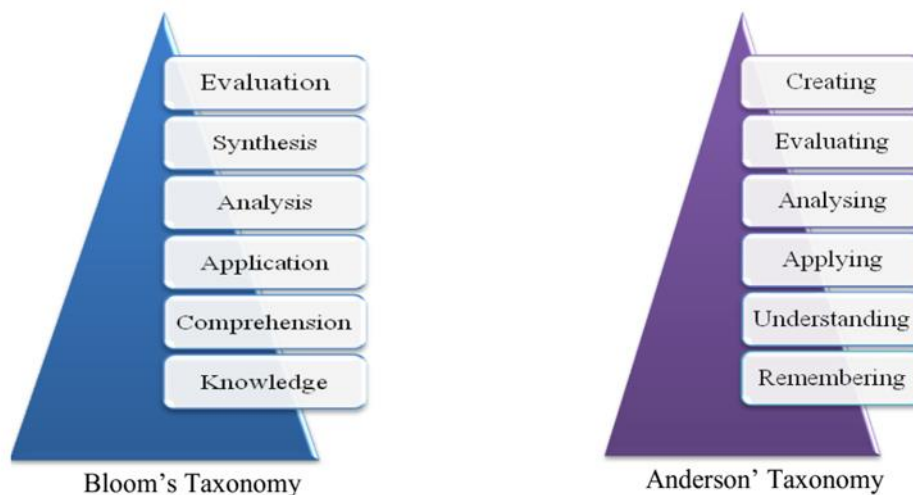
Introduction

The existence of critical thinking in our nowadays life is unavoidable. From school life to working life manpower who can think critically is much needed to boost the development of an institution. A learner or employee who can think critically can even contribute to themselves and also to society. Modern learning is inseparable from critical and creative thinking as they are the key elements of 21st-century learning (Eliyasni, Kenedi, and Sayer, 2019). Critical and creative thinking are considered to be the key elements of 21st-century learning. In order to learn critically, teachers should be able to foster this skill in their daily classroom lessons. This research covers the perceptions of Malaysian secondary school teachers who teach the English language from form one to form five students. The teachers should be familiar with the CEFR-aligned curriculum which was introduced in Malaysia in

2013. Since then, the teachers have been going to various cascading and workshops to get themselves familiar with this curriculum. Next, this research will cover one of the main components of higher-order thinking skills which is critical thinking among the students. The language skill involved in this study is reading, so this study will be focused on reading materials in the CEFR-aligned textbooks. The teachers need to be familiar with the CEFR-aligned textbooks as well. This research covers three objectives. First, it is to determine the teachers' level of awareness of critical thinking in reading activity in CEFR-aligned textbooks. Critical thinking has become an important component of the Malaysian education system. The impact can be seen in the Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013-2025 when critical thinking is mentioned as needed for the students so that they are able to analyse the information, anticipate problems and address the issues critically, logically, inductively, and deductively so that they can get the solution and can solve the problem. (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). Critical thinking is also stressed in the scheme of work of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and in the textbooks. So, the first objective is to identify the teachers' awareness of critical thinking in reading activities. The second objective is to gauge the teachers' perceptions of using reading activities to foster critical thinking skills in CEFR-aligned textbooks. The textbooks used in Malaysia are based on the CEFR-aligned curriculum. Even though critical thinking is being stressed in the blueprint, scheme of work, and also in the content of the textbook, there are no explicit instructions to use reading activities to promote critical thinking among the students. In this context, this research aims to explore the teachers' daily teaching lessons on how they use reading activities to foster critical thinking among their students. The next objective is to identify the challenges the teachers face in instilling critical thinking skills in reading lessons. English is learnt as a second language in Malaysia so the students and teachers face an abundance of challenges in learning and teaching the language. In this situation, if the teachers foster critical thinking in the reading lessons, it may create some issues thus this research aims to address them too.

Review of Literature

Katoningsih and Sunaryo (2020) claim that critical thinking can be helpful in developing the learners' reading activity because when the learners read something critical thinking will make them curious to find more about the texts and this can improve their reading skills. Critical thinking can make learners improve their reading and learning abilities because when they think critically thoughtful ideas are built. (Gopalan & Hashim, 2021). These ideas help them to enhance their learning in the future. Critical reading can actually provide a strong foundation for critical thinking. (Hu, 2015 cites in Ma & Han, 2020). So, if the learners are able to read critically automatically, they can think critically. Critical thinking can also boost the learners' motivation, self-awareness, and language skills. (Bag & Gursoy, 2021). When learners think critically, they make justifications based on reasons that make them confident in what they are doing. There are a few theories related to this research. One of the most notable theories involved is Bloom's and Anderson's Taxonomy. This theory was developed by Benjamin Bloom and later modified into Anderson's Taxonomy. Anderson's theory is much related to critical thinking as the top three skills analysing, evaluating, and creating summarise the critical thinking definition. The teachers in school often use this theory to create questions to foster critical thinking among the students. For this research, the questions can be used in the reading activity to make sure the students think critically.



Findings

The findings of this study will be used to foster critical thinking in reading lessons in a better and more effective way. When critical thinking is fostered during the reading lesson, automatically the learners will acquire skills such as analysing, synthesising, and problem-solving. These skills are needed for them to encounter the challenges in their future such as in their tertiary education, career, and personal lives. Learners with critical thinking can be helpful in the development of many sectors as well as the nation. On the other hand, through this study, teachers can plan better and more effective lesson plans. The findings will inform new ways or methods that can be used to foster critical thinking through reading tasks. Since the reading tasks are from the CEFR-aligned textbooks, it will also encourage the teachers to be more creative in utilising the reading tasks in the textbooks. This study can also be beneficial to the stakeholders as they can be informed about the real situation in the classroom as well as the challenges the teachers face to foster critical thinking through the reading tasks. Based on the findings the stakeholders can decide on organising workshops for the teachers to help them to overcome the challenges in the classroom.

Limitations

This study is only applicable to the secondary school context. The findings cannot be generalised to all levels of education in Malaysia since each level will have different contexts and challenges. Next, this study is also focused on critical thinking and reading skills. The other skills such as writing, listening, and speaking are not a focus here. Lastly, this study is from the teachers' perception and practice of fostering critical thinking through the reading tasks. The students' perceptions and views have to be considered as well because they are the ones who are going to benefit from this skill.

Conclusion

Critical thinking in education has proven to be powerful in terms of language learning and producing a competent individual. Fostering critical thinking through the reading activity is believed to help the learners to enhance their learning. Learners need to be critical in learning and in their real-life situations so that they can be competent enough in this rapidly developing era.

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