

THE INFLUENCE OF SHORT STORIES TO THE CRITICAL THINKING ANNOTATION

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Abstract

The distinction between what to think and how to think, as well as the importance of monitoring one's thoughts, has been emphasized by scholars and educators. Critical thinking is characterized by the ability to reflect on our thought processes, make sound decisions, and think logically. This article aimed to develop critical thinking skills in TEFL students by providing them with short stories to read. To achieve this, a sample TOEFL reading comprehension test was used to select 40 homogeneous students from a pool of 93. These students were randomly divided into two groups of 20: a control group and an experimental group. After a two-month treatment period, the results showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group. Consequently, reading short stories proved to be effective tools for developing critical thinking skills. The study concluded that short stories can foster critical thinking skills and should therefore be included in the educational curriculum.

Keywords: Critical Thinking Skills; Short Stories.

Introduction

Short stories enhance critical thinking by offering rich, authentic contexts for analysis. They prompt students to make judgments, synthesize information, and evaluate situations, thus honing their critical thinking skills. Incorporating short stories into teaching also boosts students' creative writing abilities, imagination, and cultural awareness. Moreover, using short stories in language education fosters critical thinking, motivating students and enhancing their language proficiency. Additionally, examining short stories through the lens of identity theory, aided by critical thinking, helps in understanding characters' actions and motivations, further developing critical thinking skills. In summary, short stories are effective tools for promoting critical thinking through engaging narratives and thought-provoking themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Providing students with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills is a crucial educational responsibility. From an educational perspective, these skills contribute to students' intellectual development and are highly beneficial to educational systems. Critical thinking empowers students to engage deeply with the learning process, particularly in language learning. Short stories are considered effective tools for fostering critical thinking skills. When engaging with short stories, students should adopt a critical stance, ask questions, and make judgments.



Critical thinking is a productive and positive activity, a process rather than an outcome, and its manifestations vary with context. It can be triggered by both positive and negative events and involves both emotional and rational aspects. Key components of critical thinking include identifying and challenging assumptions and recognizing the importance of context. Critical thinkers strive to imagine and explore alternatives, leading to reflective skepticism.

According to Brookfield's framework, a critical thinker effectively uses the tools of identifying, challenging, imagining, and exploring to derive meaning from literary short stories. Critical thinking not only prepares students to act independently and collaboratively but also reduces stress and tension associated with learning, aligning with principles of humanistic education. In this educational approach, students explore knowledge independently, make logical connections, and behave reasonably, rather than passively absorbing information from their teachers.

This article aims to present short stories as tools for developing critical thinking skills in students. The study proposes three hypotheses:

1. There is no relationship between short stories and critical thinking skills.
2. Short stories can establish critical thinking skills in TEFL students.
3. Short stories cannot establish critical thinking skills in TEFL students.

Critical Thinking and Humanistic Education

Critical thinking is emphasized in educational settings to enhance students' thinking abilities. For instance, it provides students with opportunities to develop creativity. Humanistic education, which aligns with the philosophy of critical thinking, encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning process. Moskowitz contends that humanistic education is concerned with personal development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others. In critical thinking, students are given the freedom to develop their own learning criteria and think logically to solve problems, leading to significant personal interactions. This idea is supported by Rogers, who states that individuals should engage with their true selves, beyond surface behaviors.

Critical thinking, which advocates for allowing individuals to discover, reflect on problems, and analyze independently, emphasizes the active role of students in their learning. This philosophy is mirrored in humanism. Stevick outlines five key emphases within humanism:

1. **Feelings:** This includes personal emotions and aesthetic appreciation, rejecting anything that causes distress or inhibits aesthetic enjoyment.
2. **Social Relations:** This promotes friendship and cooperation, opposing anything that hinders these interactions.
3. **Responsibility:** This acknowledges the importance of public scrutiny, criticism, and correction, and opposes anything that denies their significance.
4. **Intellect:** This encompasses knowledge, reason, and understanding, and challenges anything that restricts intellectual freedom, being skeptical of untestable ideas.
5. **Self-Actualization:** This involves the quest to realize one's true qualities, believing that pursuing uniqueness leads to liberation, whereas conformity leads to enslavement.



Responsibility, intellect, and self-actualization, as highlighted in these emphases, are crucial to both humanism and critical thinking philosophy. Critical thinking is seen as a pathway to self-actualization. Maslow places self-actualization at the top of his hierarchy of needs, achievable only after all other needs are met. Bhatia describes self-actualization as self-discovery and personal growth. Schafersman aligns with humanistic views, arguing that critical thinking extends beyond logical reasoning, requiring confidence in one's values, premises, and beliefs to reason logically. Practicing critical thinking enables individuals to achieve a productive, successful, ethical, happy, and fulfilling life. Schafersman believes that self-actualization is inconceivable without the practice of critical thinking.

To Teach What to Think or How to Think?

Given the benefits of critical thinking and its teachability, this research study aimed to use short stories to develop critical thinking skills in students. This approach fosters meaningful connections between literature, society, and individual lives. Additionally, these social and cognitive interactions can facilitate second language acquisition from a sociocognitive perspective. Students often find it enjoyable to learn critical thinking skills through reading short stories, similar to how songs can be effective tools in language learning.

Typically, teachers enter classrooms and provide students with knowledge, teaching them what to think. However, educational systems are now shifting from traditional pedagogy to modern methods that encourage students to take active roles in their learning, with critical thinking being a key component. To promote critical thinking, teachers should guide students through the processes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as outlined by Sumrall:

1. **Analysis:** Students examine how ideas are structured, related, and interconnected with other ideas, uncovering assumptions and biases to reveal evidence. The inherent challenges of this process should be apparent.
2. **Synthesis:** Students combine analyzed parts with other information to create something original, drawing data or ideas from various sources.
3. **Evaluation:** Students assess, rate, and grade information, determining whether to believe or act on it.

Critical Thinking and Literature

This article aimed to help students develop critical thinking skills through reading short stories. The main reason for using literary short stories is that literature, traditionally seen as an object of study, has not been widely applied in other aspects of language learning, especially critical thinking. Many scholars support the integration of literature into language learning and teaching programs, arguing that it has an active and didactic role in education.

Maley suggests that ESL/EFL literature should be used as a resource rather than merely an object of study. Literary short stories can engage readers intellectually, offering opportunities to practice critical thinking skills such as analyzing, judging, synthesizing, evaluating, and thinking logically. While some argue that literature should be excluded from ESL curricula due to its lexical and structural complexity, non-normative language standards, and remote cultural perspectives, these characteristics can actually help students develop intellectually. Widdowson and others argue against separating English language from English literature in EFL/ESL education.



Students' reluctance to study poetry and literature may stem from inappropriate text selection and ineffective teaching methodologies, as noted by Khatib et al. Since short stories can activate readers' critical thinking skills, they are suitable tools for helping students achieve these skills. Reading literary short stories enables students to critically examine various aspects of language learning, thereby enhancing their critical thinking. From a language learning perspective, short stories also teach students special lexical bundles and collocations.

Critical thinking encompasses various skills that individuals utilize to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments, and solve problems. It is an active and systematic process of understanding and assessing arguments. Teaching students how to think rather than what to think empowers them to apply critical thinking skills to address their challenges. These skills are not limited to language learning but are also essential in other fields such as mathematics and science.

CONCLUSION

As highlighted earlier in the study, it is the responsibility of teachers to facilitate students' self-actualization. Critical thinking requires students to freely utilize their thinking abilities to create meaning and explore facts. The use of short stories to develop critical thinking skills in students has proven effective. The findings of this article underscore two key points: firstly, critical thinking skills are undeniably crucial in educational settings, as supported by numerous studies and scholars. Secondly, reading literary short stories is a viable approach to fostering critical thinking skills in students. This highlights the significance of literature as a valuable tool in education, particularly in language learning contexts.

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