



Exploring the Ways Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) Teachers Target Students' Critical Thinking

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Abstract

Bloom's taxonomy was created in 1956 by the educational psychologist Dr. Benjamin Bloom. It was created to promote higher-order thinking skills in the field of education, such as analyzing and evaluating concepts, procedures, and principles, rather than just retrieving facts. As a result, language teachers have access to varied ways to trigger and prompt students' critical thinking by targeting their higher-order thinking skills. This qualitative research project explores how Moroccan AFL (Arabic as a Foreign Language) teachers target students' critical thinking. This project focuses on the extent to which Moroccan AFL teachers trigger learners' higher-order thinking skills, as well as the ways they target them. The research involved the observation of two lessons in a center of teaching Arabic as a foreign language. Three themes emerged from the data and were analysed: *First*, adopting the role of critical thinking, namely the role of a guide and mediator, not as a teacher of knowledge. *Second*, using two ways of motivation: positive comments and repeating

students' answers. *Third*, implement activities and questions that help students not to take things for granted.

Keywords: Behaviour; Critical Thinking; Moroccan Teachers; Motivation; Teaching Arabic.

Abstrak

Mengeksplorasi Cara Guru Pelajaran Arab sebagai Bahasa Asing (AFL) Menargetkan Pemikiran Kritis Siswa. Taksonomi Bloom yang diciptakan pada tahun 1956 Benjamin Bloom, psikolog pendidikan, bertujuan untuk mempromosikan keterampilan berpikir tingkat tinggi di bidang pendidikan, seperti menganalisis dan mengevaluasi konsep, prosedur, dan prinsip, bukan hanya mengambil fakta. Akibatnya, guru bahasa memiliki akses ke pelbagai cara untuk memicu dan mendorong pemikiran kritis siswa dengan menargetkan keterampilan berpikir tingkat tinggi mereka. Penelitian kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana guru pelajaran Arab sebagai Bahasa Asing (AFL) Maroko menargetkan pemikiran kritis siswa, sehingga penelitian ini terfokus pada sejauh mana guru AFL Maroko memicu keterampilan berpikir tingkat tinggi peserta didik, serta cara mereka menargetkannya. Penelitian ini melibatkan observasi terhadap dua pelajaran di pusat pengajaran bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa asing. Penelitian ini menunjukkan cara seorang guru AFL Maroko menargetkan pemikiran kritis siswa; Pertama, mengadopsi peran berpikir kritis, yaitu peran sebagai pembimbing dan mediator, bukan sebagai guru sumber ilmu. Kedua, menggunakan dua cara motivasi, yaitu penggunaan komentar positif dan pengulangan jawaban peserta didik. Ketiga, menerapkan aktivitas dan pertanyaan yang membantu siswa untuk tidak menerima begitu saja.

Kata kunci: Perilaku; Berpikir kritis; Guru Maroko; Motivasi; Mengajar bahasa Arab.

A. Introduction

Teachers can be creative, supportive, and approachable to students. However, some fail to establish a relationship between school practices and world realities as a result, many students find school subjects and school methodology monotonous. In 2021, it becomes mandatory to train learners to develop higher-order thinking skills, and to think critically. Students must be prepared for the learning they will have to do after they leave the Arabic classroom. Life-long learners are students who are capable to think critically and creatively.

Additionally, international students are exposed to unlimited methods of learning their mother language. However, when learning or teaching Arabic it becomes necessary to investigate which method is used or perhaps what ways AFL teachers are using. Another important issue to inquiry is the importance of targeting students' higher order thinking skills, especially learners' critical thinking. In this spirit, the present study is an attempt to explore the ways Moroccan AFL teachers target students' critical thinking. Based on this objective, the study is informed by the following research questions:

- (i) To what extent do Moroccan AFL teachers prompt learners' critical thinking?
- (ii) What are the ways Moroccan AFL teachers target students' critical thinking?

B. Literature Review

The purpose of this review of literature is twofold. First, it aims to provide definitions of the following terms: **Behavior, motivation, and critical thinking**; Second, it intends to cover some previous research studies that have been conducted concerning the importance of developing higher-order thinking skills.

Critical Thinking: is a term used to describe forms of learning, thought, and analysis that go beyond the memorization and recall of information and facts. In common usage, critical thinking is an umbrella term that may be applied to many different forms of learning acquisition or a wide variety of thought processes. In its most basic expression, critical thinking occurs when students are analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, or synthesizing information and applying creative thought to form an argument, solve a problem, or reach a conclusion (glossary).

Motivation: Critical thinking is also linked to motivation. Many researchers agree that critical thinking includes a certain set of skills, abilities, and dispositions, and the disposition to think critically has been defined as the consistent internal motivation to engage in problems and make decisions by using critical thinking (Facione, 2000, p.65). Motivation itself is an essential internal process to move towards a goal. (Halpern, 1998) considers' motivation as a precondition for critical thinking skills.

Behavior: Critical thinkers demonstrate actions and behaviors that make them stand out in problem-solving situations. For example, clarifies through debate, asks questions, gathers and tests information, and reflects with metacognition. Concerning teachers' behaviors are demonstrated in the practical and concrete application of techniques and activities that help learners behave and act as critical thinkers.

Several studies have been written concerning the importance of critical thinking and its practices within the educational field. An interesting study by Meei-Ling Liaw (2007) entitled “*Content-Based Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Skills in an EFL Context*”. Meei-Ling Liaw examines the effectiveness of promoting learners’ critical thinking skills and EFL skills by using content-based approach. This research paper aimed at documenting the practical concerns about promoting critical thinking skills in an EFL setting in Taiwan. The findings of this study showed that content-based instruction for critical thinking skills helped the participant to improve their thinking skills and also their English language skills.

Another very significant study is that of A. Mehdi Riazi (2010), entitled “*Evaluation of Learning Objectives in Iranian High-School and Pre-University English Textbooks Using Bloom’s Taxonomy*.” The purpose of this research was to evaluate Iranian high school English textbooks taking into consideration the six levels of learning objectives in Bloom’s taxonomy. This research investigated how Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives is represented in the context of textbooks. In his research, he evaluated the textbook’s content and made several suggestions on how to improve Iranian textbooks. The major findings of this study indicated that lower-order cognitive skills (knowledge, comprehension, and application) are the most frequent learning objectives pursued in high school and pre-university English textbooks in Iran. Another significant made in his stud is that an analysis of activities, reveals that there is a lack of intellectual development from the lowest of Bloom’s cognitive levels (knowledge) to the highest cognitive levels(: evaluation) as we move from grade 1 to pre-university textbooks.

Additionally, Servat Shirkhani, and Mansour Fahim (2011), researched to help teachers develop students’ critical thinking by managing the ways of assessing language learners’ abilities. Their study titled: “*Enhancing critical thinking in foreign language learners*” presented several assessment methods and activities for language teachers to facilitate improving learners’ critical thinking. The main findings of this research study are that Critical thinking needs to be developed among EFL learners since it is essential in developing effective language learning. So promoting critical thinking skills is considered one of the roles of language teachers, in various ways, including using suitable ways of assessment.

Furthermore, Cairan Zhao, Ambigapathy Pandian, and Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh (2016) made a study on three sets of research-supported teaching strategies which are useful in promoting critical thinking and practical for EFL classrooms; that is, explicit instruction, teacher questioning, as well as active and cooperative learning strategies. The findings of this study suggest that when designing critical thinking

activities in the classroom, teachers need flexibility and creativity; that is to say, they may creatively combine various strategies or develop alternative methods appropriate to their learners. Effective critical thinking instruction in EFL classrooms depends on teachers' persistent efforts.

Another study is conducted by Hana Lorencova, Eva Jorossova, Sofia Avgitidou, and Catherine Dimitriadou (2019). The research title is "*Critical thinking practices in teacher education programs: a systematic review*". The study aimed at reviewing critical thinking practices that are used in Teacher Education Programs. Research findings have pointed out that critical thinking is based on components that can be learned, developed, and improved through purposefully designed education. These findings have led to various attempts to promote critical thinking abilities in Higher Education Institutes. Although this study review aimed at presenting critical thinking practices in Teacher Education programs, it did not present or state these practices clearly within the research.

Finally, a significant study done by Mahmoud Itmeizeh and Hadi Hassan (2020), headed "*New Approaches to Teaching Critical Thinking Skills through a New EFL Curriculum*". The ultimate aim of the study was to provide teachers, students, curriculum designers, and policymakers with several guidelines for integrating critical thinking into English as foreign language curricula in Palestine. The findings of the study demonstrated that the majority of EFL students do not recognize critical thinking skills. Analysis of the reports showed that most periods delivered to EFL students do not enhance critical thinking skills. Based on the results the researcher presented some activities, guidelines, and strategies to be utilized by EFL teachers regarding course content, methods of teaching, classroom management, and EFL students' assessment.

As this review of the related literature indicates, developing critical thinking skills helps students in many aspects of learning English as a foreign language. In the Moroccan context, we need to explore the ways Moroccan teachers promote learners' higher-order thinking skills in the AFL class. The current study aims to explore the ways Moroccan AFL teachers target students' critical thinking.

C. Method

After we made contact with an AFL teacher, we sent him the main reasons behind this research, and the main components we would observe in his teaching and the learning of his students. After the teacher had read all of the documents, he articulated whether or not he was willing to be observed. We observed five lessons; each observation was conducted for a full 45-minute class period. During the three first

lessons, we did not take notes to make the learners and the teacher used to our presence. During the two remaining lessons, we take notes, based on the teacher's behavior, questions, activities, ways of motivation, feelings, and students' behavior and feelings. Then, after each lesson, we organized the observation into field notes. Additionally, a content analysis was used to explore the themes that can emerge from the collected data.

D. Results

Overall, we observed a total of two lessons, two speaking lessons, with the same teacher and the same class. The observation was conducted in an AFL center in Rabat that teaches both Turkish and Pakistani students, for religious and educational purposes. Additionally, a content analysis was used to discover themes. Throughout the observation, a total of three themes were reviewed and will be discussed below.

1. Theme I: Teacher's Roles

Throughout the observation, the teacher's talking time was average, frequently the students who were talking and participating; teacher interferes only to ask for clarifications. For example, in the first observation, the teacher instructed his students to imagine themselves being rich, then he raised the question of the manner they are going to spend the money, only students were talking and discussing with their friends. They were thinking critically, in a deep manner, and providing long answers and it can be seen from their answers:

Teacher : وأنت ماذا ستفعل لو كان معك مال زيادة؟

Student 6 : لو كان معي مال زيادة سأنشئ مؤسسة جديدة لتعليم الطلاب كيف يعملون بعد . الدراسة...يعني يتعلم عن مهنته لكي لا يجد مشكلة بعد الدراسة

Teacher reflects on student's idea: يقول مثل صيني علمني كيف أصطاد سمكة ولا تعطيني سمكة كل يوم. زميلكم لديه فكرة رائعة فهو سيعلم الشباب وسيساعدهم على إيجاد مهنة بعد الدراسة.

Teacher : تخيل أنك غني جدا؟

Student 7 : إن كنت غنيا جدا، سأقوم بتجارة لأصبح غنيا أكثر، ثم سأنشئ وقف لمساعدة الفقراء . والطلاب و اللاجئين وكل المحتاجين

Teacher : مثلا طلاب يريدون أن يتزوجو ماذا ستفعل؟

Student 7 : طبعا سأساعدهم من هذه الأوقاف .

Teacher : ما شاء الله هذا جميل جدا .

As a result, the teacher's role here is that of a mediator. Another role emerges from the second observation, the teacher talked only four times. The first time, was to explain and to set the scene for the debate, consequently, the teacher's role as a guide, for the three remaining times the teacher was permitting each group to reply or to present their arguments:

-تفضلوا الآن بالإجابة-

-من يجيب عن هذا السؤال؟-

-هل تتفقون معه؟-

2. Theme II: Teacher's Ways of Motivation

In both observations, teacher's ways of motivation were not varied but they seem to have a great impact on students. Verbal comments or positive rewards were one way used by the teacher, for instance:

-جيد-

-جيد جدا-

-ما شاء الله-

-رائع-

-شكرا-

-ما شاء الله هذا جميل جدا-

-أوووو فكرة رائعة-

-كلام عجيب-

Another way to motivate students was by repeating their answers to others. Pride was apparent on students' faces when the teacher repeated their answers loudly, and the same students were encouraged to participate more and more after repeating their answers. Additionally, most students' participation showed that they are using their higher-order thinking skills, that is to say, they were evaluating other answers, creating imaginative situations, and inventing new and exclusive expressions:

-Student 7 answer: ما فائدة السلطة إن كانت لا توجد أخلاق و عدل

-Student 1 answer: ما فائدة العلم إن كان لا يوجد عمل

-Student 3 answer: ما فائدة المال إن كان لا يوجد وجدان

3. Theme III: Teachers' Questions and Activities

During the observations, the teacher's questions were clear and direct. These questions teased students to express their views, made them use their imagination, and were mostly open-ended. Furthermore, the same questions were real-life situations. Based on the teacher's questions the students were prepared for real situations outside the classroom.

Moreover, the types of activities required students to use higher-order thinking skills like metacognition, argumentation, debating, creating, problem-solving, and imagination. These activities were varied, sometimes they were individual, others in pairs, and other activities were in groups like in the debating activity. In addition to this, during these activities the teacher gave opportunities to think, ask, and problem-solve:

- هب أنك غني جدا، ماذا ستفعل بالمال؟
- ركبت مع سائق سيارة أجرة، وبدأ يذكر لك فقره ومشكلاته الإجتماعية ليطلب منك نقودا زائدة على أجرة السيارة، حاول أن تتهرب منه بلطف، وهات حوارا؟
- Debate: في تربية الأولاد أيهما أهم في تطوير و تطور التربية: هل المدرسة أم العائلة؟

E. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that the participant who's a Moroccan AFL teacher targets students' critical thinking. This AFL teacher uses some ways to help improve learners' critical minds, which are presented in the following themes:

1. Theme I: Teacher's Roles

To help students to develop critical thinking skills and to take critical actions, teachers need to remain open to challenges by students, not representing themselves as the sole source of knowledge (Smyth, 2000). The results yielded by theme one reveal that the teacher's role should be that of a guide instead of a source of knowledge. The educator should avoid offering "how to do it approaches" and be prepared to listen to voices that originate in the classroom and to use students' personal experiences as starting points for gathering information (Smyth, 2000). As a result, the teacher's role here is a mediator for the students to gain knowledge and think about it critically.

2. Theme II: Teacher's Ways of Motivation

Developing higher-order thinking has immense value in the learning process as all the levels of thinking are addressed. For example, to be able to infer and analyze, students must understand and comprehend. Higher-order thinking prepares learners for

the outside world. It is about making students able to function in real-world applications as problem solvers as well as critical thinkers (Conklin, 2011). Educators should make some efforts in ways that promote higher-order thinking more than lower-order thinking so that learners become motivated to learn (Mc Lnerney and Etten, 2001).

The results got from Theme II present that the teacher used two ways to motivate his learners. First, through giving positive comments, and second by repeating their answers in front of their classmates. The two ways had positive effects on students' behavior and participation; they become more active, enthusiastic, and excited to share their ideas that were creative, and unexpected. According to Smyth, teachers have to encourage students to take critical action through motivation. When students learn to use democratic processes inside the classroom, they can transfer these situations outside the classroom (2000.)

3. Theme III: Teacher's questions and activities

To some extent, the types of activities and questions set by the teacher can give an idea about whether students' critical thinking is stimulated or not. In both observations, the teacher used activities and questions that encourage students to question and challenge existing beliefs, structures, and practices by asking them clear and open-ended questions. Additionally, the teacher provided opportunities for inquiry by giving students time for planning, processing, and thinking critically. This was through varied activities that promote thinking, questioning, and problem-solving:

- The imagination activity
- The poor taxi driver activity
- The debate activity

F. Conclusion

This work has shown the ways a Moroccan AFL teacher targets students' critical thinking. First, adopting critical thinking roles, which are the role of a guide and mediator, instead of a source knowledge teacher. Second, using two ways of motivation, which are the use of positive comments and repeating learners' answers. The third way was implementing activities and questions that help students not take everything for granted. The questions used by the teacher were clear and open-ended. Concerning the activities, they were varied and required the students to use their higher-order thinking skills instead of the lower ones.

Two main pedagogical implications can be extracted from the findings of this study. First, this research paper might serve as guidance for AFL teachers in raising their awareness of the role of critical thinking in developing the higher-order thinking skills of AFL learners. Second, it can also direct educators' attention toward the use of other effective ways to target students' critical thinking.

Appendix1: Research Instrument and Representative Examples (Ethnographic Observation)

The researcher observed and took detailed notes about:

*Teacher's behavior

*Teacher's questions: Open-ended

Uses action verbs

Clarity of the questions

Variation of the questions

Freedom to answer

Teacher's encouragement to answer

*Teacher's activities: Variation of the activities

Opportunities to ask

Opportunities to think

Opportunities to problem solve

Opportunities to create

Opportunities to make inferences

*Teacher's ways of motivation

*Teacher's feelings: Sad/Happy/Active/Neutral/ angry (why?)

*Students' feelings: Sad/Happy/Active/Neutral/

Angry/Interested/Excited/Focus (why?)

*Students' Behaviour

Representative Examples:

Key Concepts	Representative Examples
Critical Thinking	-Formulating thoughtful, penetrating questions. -Developing well-reasoned, persuasive arguments, and evaluating and responding to counterarguments.
Motivation	-Students enjoy learning.

	-Positive competition within the class.
	-Active participations
Behavior	-Students appear highly involved in the learning process.
	-Asking open and unexpected questions.

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