
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Instructional Strategies and Integration of Critical Thinking Skills of Preservice English Teachers

NAOMI PANGANORON-JABONETE

Samar State University, Philippines

Corresponding Author: NAOMI PANGANORON-JABONETE, **E-mail:** naomijabonete@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Retaining quality teachers and declining numbers of language programs that will help students reach the goal of high proficiency levels for their success in today's world has been a challenge in recent years. Language teachers have a great role to play in addressing the 21st-century learning needs of the students, e.g., critical thinking skills, which greatly rely on their innovative teaching pedagogies. This current study aimed to investigate the preparedness and effectiveness of the preservice English teachers with their instructional strategies in integrating critical thinking skills in language instruction. The population of the study was comprised of preservice English teachers assigned in secondary schools during their practice teaching stage. A modified researcher-made questionnaire-checklist was developed and validated with items on a four-point Likert Scale used to evaluate the strategies employed in integrating critical thinking skills in English language teaching through consecutive actual classroom teaching observations by the two (2) groups of mentors and by the preservice teachers themselves. The data revealed that based on the three (3) raters, the preservice English teachers have extensively integrated critical thinking skills in language instruction through the use of the higher-order- level of questioning along with analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The reported highest mean was in creating, and the lowest was in evaluating. The PSETs' extent of integration of critical thinking skills was secondly manifested through the provision of communicative tasks. The PSETs have signified three (3) communicative tasks that obtained the highest mean scores: [24] role plays (mean=3.53), [25] paired-shared activities (mean=3.52), and [19] small group work (mean=3.51). Likewise, they have identified the three (3) communicative activities with the lowest means, namely: [23] keeping a diary (mean=2.54), [6] interviews (mean=2.55), and jigsaw activities (mean=2.62). It was concluded that the preservice English teachers have extensively integrated critical thinking skills in English language teaching though there are instructional strategies along with questioning strategy through the use of higher-order-level of questions and the provision of communicative tasks that garnered low mean scores which recommend preservice English teachers to enhance maximum utilization of these teaching skills for effective integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction and eventually cater the learning needs of the 21st-century language learners. Hence, a capability enhancement program or training on the integration of critical thinking skills to preservice English teachers was also recommended based on the findings of the study.

| KEYWORDS

Communicative Tasks, Integration of Critical Thinking Skills, Preservice English Teachers, Questioning Strategy, 21st Century Learning Skills

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teacher's knowledge and skills are pivotal in addressing students' 21st-century learning needs, e.g., critical thinking skills, which require higher order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which can be applied in doing communicative tasks in language classrooms for learners' success in today's world.

The lack of critical thinking skills utilized within the classroom greatly diminishes the students' chance, for the central purpose of education is learning to think. Students around the globe are then required to possess critical thinking skills that need higher-order questioning skills (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) for their work and life to succeed, and communicative language tasks require critical thinking. A teacher can teach languages without giving any thought to including elements of critical thinking. For example, rote learning with its 'listen-and-repeat' patterns requires no critical thinking, and at beginner levels, the focus can only be on acquiring a basic vocabulary on which to build (Irfaner, 2006, Qing, Jing, & Yan (2010). However, as soon as students enter any task using the target language, which contains elements such as personalization, investigation, and problem solving, then they must think critically. In modern language methodology, these kinds of communicative tasks are commonplace because they engage the student in authentic communication. Success in such tasks – as in life - requires the effective use of language along with some measure of critical thinking (Partnership, 2014).

This highlights and encourages teachers to integrate 21st-century skills, e.g., critical thinking skills, to develop students to reason effectively, use systems thinking, make judgements and decisions, and solve problems by enabling innovative learning methods which employ higher order thinking skills into their classroom practice. Due to declining numbers of language programs and existing programs that are not helping students reach the goal of high proficiency levels, our educational system is not fulfilling its role in preparing students for the world beyond the classroom (American Council of Teaching Foreign Languages, 2011). In this aspect, teacher education institutions have to prepare language teachers well during the preservice teacher phase because it is through this that teachers take the rudimentary steps to become professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Smith, 2005) and gain more confidence in their teaching (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Higher education institutions are responsible for developing qualified and competent teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

2. Review of Literature

One of the primary goals of education is to prepare students to contribute in meaningful ways to society (Partnership, 2009). Consequently, make it a challenge to know how best to prepare students for the future society in which they will live. Shakirova (2007) stated that critical thinking skills enable students to deal effectively with social, scientific, and practical problems. Simply put, students who are able to think critically are able to solve problems effectively. Merely having knowledge or information is not enough. So, to be effective in the workplace and in their personal lives, to solve problems, and make effective decisions, they must be able to think critically. Students need the essential skills to succeed in work and life, so they must possess critical thinking skills that require higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Partnership, 2014).

Forehand (2005) to make the original taxonomy more relevant for the 21st century, the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) of Krathwohl & Anderson (2001) made a distinction between the kind of knowledge students learn and the cognitive processes they use to gain this knowledge. The remaining nouns in the original Bloom's Taxonomy were then transformed into verbs in the cognitive process dimension to emphasize the actions involved in thinking. To sum up, the order of the original Taxonomy from lower order to higher order thinking was: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; had shifted to become: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Hughes (2014) stated that in developing critical thinking skills, emphasis should be placed on analyzing, evaluating, and creating is the most complex stage for many language learners, as it requires higher order thinking skills (HOTS), while other sub-skills are considered lower order thinking skills these definitions suggest that critical thinking involves specific skills that are applied to making judgments, as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the critical thinking process. Thus, part of the 21st-century pedagogy focuses on the shift from LOTS to HOTS (Partnership, 2014). It is believed learners can gain good command over language skills if they are properly given exposure to language development activities (Watkins, 2007). Communication is a vital activity by which people relate to one another and combine their efforts (McCroskey, 2009). Creating activities that require critical thinking can be done in several ways. Activities that engage students in critical thinking typically start with a topic or text (Gaskaree, Mashhady, & Dousti, 2010), engaging students in an investigation, pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts. Hence, integration of critical thinking skills in an English language classroom is necessary since it has long been recognized as a valuable skill, both in education in general and within the world language teaching field specifically. In recent years, critical thinking has been identified as one of the 21st-century skills that students need to succeed in modern society (Partnership, 2009). Similarly, critical thinking has often been discussed in the literature as having great potential to facilitate language learning and particularly to develop language proficiency (Gaskaree, Mashhady & Dousti, 2010).

This current study investigated the preservice English teachers' instructional strategies and their extent of integration of Critical Thinking skills in English language instruction to ensure their preparedness and effectiveness in addressing students' 21st-century

learning needs for their success in today’s world. This current study evaluated the following: 1) Extent of PSETs’ integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction as assessed by themselves, cooperating teachers, and instructors of Teaching Strategies subject in consecutive classroom observations; 2) Extent of PSETs’ integration of Critical Thinking skills in their language instruction through the following: 2.1) higher-order-level of questioning categorized as analyzing; evaluating; and creating; and 2.2) providing communicative tasks in language instruction; 3) Significant difference in the assessment of preservice English teachers, cooperating teachers, and instructors of Teaching Strategies subject in consecutive classroom observations on the following: 3.1) PSETs’ extent of integration of critical thinking skills through the higher-order-level of questioning; and 3.2) PSETs’ extent of integration of critical thinking skills by providing communicative tasks in language instruction; and 4) A capability building program/training design for the Preservice English Teachers which can be generated based on the findings of the study.

3. Methodology

This study employed the descriptive-correlational method of research. The population was comprised of three groups, in total enumeration of (81) preservice English teachers themselves from identified teacher-training institutions of Samar and Leyte islands of the Region who were assigned in public secondary schools in their practice teaching stage, and other two (2) groups of mentors, their cooperating teachers; and their instructors of teaching strategies subject who evaluated the PSETs through the use of a modified researcher-made questionnaire-checklist in which both have two (2) parts with the same items like, Part 1 consisted items for the respondents’ profile, Part II of the questionnaire consisted items on the integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction through questioning strategy using Bloom’s HOTS question stems on analysing, evaluating, and creating; and the providing of communicative tasks that was developed and validated with items on four- point Likert Scale: 3.25-4.00 *Very extensively integrated*; 2.50-3.24 *Extensively integrated*; 1.75-2.49 *Moderately integrated*; and 1.00-1.74 *Fairly integrated* used to evaluate the strategies employed in integrating critical thinking skills in English language teaching during the three (3) consecutive actual classroom teaching observations. The collected data were generated according to the objectives of the study using frequency, percentage, and mean. After the administration of questionnaire-checklists as a method of gathering the data, the responses were tallied and analyzed. Frequency, percentage, and mean were used.

4. Results and Discussion

I. Extent of PSET's Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Language Instruction as Assessed by Themselves, Cooperating Teachers, and Instructors of Teaching Strategies Subject

Presented in Table 1 are the extent of PSETs’ integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction as assessed by themselves, cooperating teachers, and instructors of Teaching Strategies subject in consecutive classroom observations.

Table 1. *Extent of PSET's Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Language Instruction*

Extent of Integration of CT Skills	PSETs		Cooperating Teachers		Strategies Teachers	
	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration
Classroom Observation 1	3.14	EI	3.11	EI	3.24	EI
2	3.09	EI	3.11	EI	3.23	EI
3	3.16	EI	3.10	EI	3.26	EI
OVERALL	3.13	EI	3.11	EI	3.24	EI

II. Instructional Strategies of PSETs' Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Language Instruction

A. Extent of PSET's Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Language Instruction Through the Use of Higher-Order Level of Questioning

Table 2a shows PSETs’ extent of integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction through the use of the higher-order levels of questioning as assessed by themselves, cooperating teachers, and teaching strategies instructors

Higher-Order Level of Questions	PSETs		Cooperating Teachers		Strategies Teachers	
	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration
Analyzing	3.14	EI	3.11	EI	3.24	EI
Evaluating	3.09	EI	3.11	EI	3.23	EI
Creating	3.16	EI	3.10	EI	3.26	EI
OVERALL	3.13	EI	3.11	EI	3.24	EI

B. Instructional Strategies of PSETs' Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Language Instruction through the Provision of Communicative Tasks

Table 2b. Extent of PSET's Integration of Critical Thinking Skills through the Provision of Communicative Tasks

Communicative Tasks	PSETs		Cooperating teacher		Strategies teachers	
	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration	Mean	Extent of integration
1. Debates	2.87	EI	2.88	EI	2.69	EI
2. Discussions	3.49	VEI	3.30	VEI	3.29	VEI
3. Games and Puzzles	3.03	EI	3.15	EI	3.04	EI
4. Grammar Drills	2.82	EI	3.04	EI	3.09	EI
5. Information Gap Activities	2.74	EI	2.78	EI	2.79	EI
6. Interviews	2.55	EI	2.75	EI	2.75	EI
7. Jigsaw Activities	2.62	EI	2.74	EI	2.77	EI
8. Journal Writing	3.08	EI	2.70	EI	2.83	EI
9. Problem-Solving Tasks	2.86	EI	2.78	EI	2.80	EI
10. Decision-Making Tasks	2.96	EI	2.79	EI	2.73	EI
11. Real-World Tasks	3.11	EI	2.98	EI	2.84	EI
12. Projects	3.34	VEI	3.15	EI	3.10	EI
13. Opinion Exchange	3.13	EI	2.97	EI	2.90	EI
14. Reading Logs	2.70	EI	2.68	EI	2.80	EI
15. Scenarios and Case Studies	2.79	EI	2.65	EI	2.70	EI
16. Seat Work	3.20	EI	3.15	EI	3.10	EI
17. Service Learning	2.63	EI	2.71	EI	2.74	EI
18. Simulations	3.04	EI	2.87	EI	3.02	EI
19. Small Group Work	3.51	VEI	3.14	EI	3.19	EI
20. Summarizing a Text	3.25	VEI	2.80	EI	2.90	EI
21. Translation	2.80	EI	2.63	EI	2.59	EI
22. Worksheets	3.32	VEI	3.05	EI	3.07	EI
23. Keeping a Diary	2.54	EI	2.79	EI	2.86	EI
24. Role Plays	3.53	VEI	3.23	EI	3.32	VEI
25. Pair-Shared Activities	3.52	VEI	3.17	EI	3.34	VEI

III. Differences on the Assessment of the Extent of Integration of Critical Thinking Skills among Preservice English Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, and Instructors of Teaching Strategies Subject in Consecutive Classroom Observations

Table 3. Difference in the Assessment of PSETs, Cooperating Teachers and Instructors of Teaching Strategies Subject On the Extent of Integration of Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) in Language Instruction in Consecutive Classroom Observations

Respondents	Consecutive Observations Mean	CTS Mean
PSETs	3.80 ^b	3.10
Cooperating Teachers	3.94 ^a	3.06
Strategies Teacher	4.07 ^a	3.16
<i>F-value</i>	4.50*	1.20 ^{ns}
<i>p-value</i>	0.0127	0.3048

NOTE: Pair of means with different letters are statistically different based on Tukey's HSD test at $\alpha=5\%$

*-significant at 5% level of significance; ns-not significant

The abovementioned data revealed that all three groups of respondents agreed that PSETs have extensively integrated critical thinking skills in language instructions according to the self-assessment of PSETs themselves, cooperating teachers, and teachers of teaching strategies subjects. The extent of PSETs' integration of critical thinking skills in language instruction as assessed by themselves, cooperating teachers, and instructors of Teaching Strategies subjects have been found to be positive. PSETs have

extensively integrated the use of higher-order questioning in language instruction vis-à-vis analyzing, evaluating, and creating. However, questions on the level of evaluation have the lowest mean rating. Also, PSETs have extensively integrated a variety of communicative tasks in their language instruction along with the integration of critical thinking skills in language teaching; however, translation, scenarios and case studies, and other tasks which need an emphasis must be given more weight when designing an intervention program, since they acquired the lowest mean ratings on the same. While there is no significant difference in the assessment of preservice English teachers, cooperating teachers, and instructors of Teaching Strategies subject on the PSETs' extent of integration of critical thinking skills in English Language Instruction. And based on the findings of the study conducted, a proposed Capability Building/Training Program for the PSETs in Teacher Training University is necessary.

5. Conclusion

From the results of this study, it is concluded that the preservice English teachers have extensively integrated critical thinking skills in their English language instruction; however, there are certain indicators of their knowledge of instructional strategies in the application of the use of higher-level questions and the provision of communicative tasks which got lowest mean scores as evaluated by all groups of respondents, this seemingly needs enhancement on the part of the PSETs' extent of integration of CT skills by proposing an appropriate intervention program.

5.1 Recommendations

1. There is a need to sustain and enhance even more the preservice English teachers' preparedness and effectiveness in the integration of critical thinking skills in English language teaching, which require HOTS and the provision of communicative tasks in all teacher-training universities for the PSETs' preparedness and effectiveness in addressing language learners 21st-century learning needs as evidenced in the results of this study.
2. It is recommended that the teacher education program may develop all aspects that enhance further the preservice teachers' extent of integration of critical thinking skills explicitly, give more emphasis on some indicators in both using the higher-order questioning and providing communicative tasks which garnered a bit lower in the means scores, as the development of the critical thinking skills and communicative competence is a necessity in today's multi-lingual and techno-savvy societies. This is a frontline skill that is useful for an individual's survival. By doing so, they are improving the linguistics and communicative skills of language learners.
3. Finally, in light of the findings of the study, it is strongly recommended that a Capability Building Program for PSETs be implemented in Teacher Training Universities.

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