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Casali, R. 2008. ATR harmony in African languages. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2/3 : 496–549.

De Korne, H. 2007. The pedagogical potential of multimedia dictionaries. Lessons from a community dictionary project. The 14th annual stabilizing indigenous language symposium in Michigan on 1-3 June 2007. Consulté le 1er février 2012 sur <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILR/ILR-11.pdf>.

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EXPLORING THE ROLES OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS TEACHING IN THE PROCESS OF EFL LEARNING IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

For EFL students to become responsible and independent learners, the ability to think critically and analytically is a lifelong skill. It is common to find students having a lot of problems of writing a coherent and logical dissertation and to defend their own ideas about a given topic because they lack critical thinking skills. This study has been designed to contribute effectively to the teaching of critical thinking in EFL classes. To this end, it attempts to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Beninese EFL teachers of the Roles of critical thinking teaching in EFL classes so as to find out the effective ways and means to teach it. Quantitative and descriptive research methods have been used to conduct and collect data for this research work. A questionnaire is designed and sent to a total of 50 randomly-selected secondary school EFL teachers including 35 males and 15 females. Moreover, 10 EFL teachers have participated to an interview and 4 EFL classes have been observed. The analysis of the data reveals that Beninese EFL secondary school teachers have positive perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching of critically thinking. In addition, they believe that critical thinking teaching allows EFL learners to communicate effectively. It also helps EFL learners to develop speaking fluency and accuracy. This study recommends EFL teachers to give students opportunities to work in pairs or in group during classroom activities instead of spoon-feeding them. EFL teachers should be trained about how to motivate learners to develop critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Perceptions, Critical Thinking, EFL classes, Teachers.

Résumé

Dans le souci d'aider les apprenants à devenir responsables et indépendants, la formation de leur pensée critique et analytique doit être permanente. Souvent, les apprenants rencontrent d'énormes difficultés à produire des textes cohérents et défendre leur point de vue sur un sujet donné en raison de leur faible capacité à exercer la pensée critique. Dans le souci de contribuer efficacement à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage de la pensée critique, la présente étude a été initiée pour examiner les perceptions et attitudes des enseignants d'Anglais langue étrangère du rôle de l'enseignement de la pensée critique dans le processus enseignement-apprentissage de la langue anglaise. Une approche mixte quantitative et descriptive a permis de collecter des données pour répondre aux questions de recherche. 50 enseignants d'anglais choisis au hasard dont 35 hommes et 15 femmes ont reçu des questionnaires et 10 autres sont soumis à une interview. De plus, 4 visites de classes d'Anglais ont été organisées. L'analyse des données révèle que les enseignants béninois d'Anglais des collèges d'enseignement général ont une perception et attitude très positives de l'enseignement de la pensée critique car elle permet aux élèves de communiquer librement et soutenir efficacement leur point de vue. Cette recherche recommande aux enseignants de privilégier les techniques d'apprentissage telles que les travaux individuels, en pair et en groupes. De même, les enseignants d'Anglais doivent être formés à motiver leurs apprenants à exercer leur pensée critique en classe et dans la vie quotidienne.

Mots-clés: Perceptions, pensée critique, cours d'anglais, enseignants

Introduction

I. I. Problem statement

The aim of education is to help learners develop thinking skills for it is human's nature to think and the ability of all human's life depends on the quality of his thoughts. Critical thinking is viewed crucial for human rights education for tolerance and the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance adopted by UNESCO in 2016 affirms that "education for tolerance could aim at countering factors that lead to fear and exclusion of others, and could help young people to develop capacities for independent judgement, critical thinking and ethical reasoning"(p. 16).

In Beninese republic, a meta-analysis of the literature on teaching effectiveness in secondary and higher education was undertaken in 1995. The study noted concerns from higher education, politicians, and business that higher education was failing to meet society's requirements for well-educated citizens. It concluded that although faculty may aspire to develop students' thinking skills, in practice they have tended to aim at facts and concepts utilizing lowest levels of cognition, rather than developing intellect or values. The study suggested a comprehensive reform of the whole national educational system with new learning objectives. Precisely, it recommended the implementation of a student-centered teaching approach (Datondji, I. 2017).

As a result, this learning objective has been reproduced through the Competency Based Approach (CBA) or curriculum in EFL classes in both primary and secondary schools where teachers are to help their students not only develop communicative abilities but also assist them in using appropriate skills likely to allow them solve problems through a critical thinking process (Minanflinou, E. 2018). According to this approach, EFL teachers have to understand the principles and practices of critical thinking (CT) before engaging themselves into any pedagogical actions. They must also be capable of helping their students better their critical thinking skills so as to be able to analyze their own ideas, to draw a reliable conclusion, to be curious and make reasonable judgments, to ask relevant questions, to invent new ways of solving problems, to be able to connect new knowledge to the existing information, to apply their knowledge to new situations (Beninese National English Language curriculum, 20020).

In beninese secondary schools where English is taught and learnt as a foreign language, EFL teachers are confronted with a variety of problems which do not allow them reach their pedagogical goals. Some of these difficulties include lack of teacher training and motivation as well as their difficult living and working conditions (Iwikotan, E. 2018). Besides, an ever-increasing number of Beninese EFL students end up their secondary school education without being able to write a coherent and logical argumentative text when they

are assigned to perform such an activity during either different texts or exams whereas some are incapable of defending their own ideas about a given topic (Kabilan K. , 1999:52).

In order to help EFL students to become responsible and autonomous, their ability to think critically should be considered as an essential component of the learning skills matrix defined in the national curriculum. In this sense, as learning to think analytically and critically is a lifelong skill, EFL students 'capacity to make a link between concepts, solve problems, think critically, and manage his knowledge in a language has far reached implications for learning of formal educational systems (Kabilan, K. 1999).

Based on these observations and realities , in order to develop EFL students' communicative abilities and critical thinking skills this study has been initiated to examine EFL teachers 'perceptions and attitudes of the roles and the importance of critical thinking skills teaching in the EFL learning process. It will also help EFL teachers to find out the practical ways and means for its effective teaching in Beninese EFL classes as a whole.

I. 2. Significance of the study

According to Majorana (1992), critical thinking aims at achieving understanding, and evaluating different perspectives and solving problems. It is especially in the perspective to solve this issue that this study has been undertaken to explore EFL teachers and their learners' difficulties related to the teaching and learning of critical thinking in EFL classes. This study is significant in the sense that it helps EFL teachers to improve the thinking skills of students and thus better prepare them to succeed in the world.

I. 3. Research questions

The present study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes of the roles of critical thinking teaching in EFL classes?
2. How can critical thinking skills be taught and evaluated effectively in EFL classes?

2. Literature review

Regarding the challenges faced by EFL teachers and their learners while dealing with critical thinking, many researchers decided to investigate its roles and advantages in the teaching and learning process. Let's analyze the findings and recommendations of some of them on the issue.

2. I. What is critical thinking?

According to Beyer, L. (1985), critical thinking entails the ability of an individual to gather, evaluate, and use information effectively. It also involves thinking skills such as

understanding, evaluating of different points of views, judging, posing, and solving problems. For Smith, M. (1990), "critical thinking has to do with reflecting, arguing and proposing different alternatives of solution to problems"(p. 36). In other words, critical thinking implies not to blindly accept ideas and opinions of others, but it helps to examine them in order to be able to make effective decisions. In the context of EFL teaching and learning, teaching critical thinking skills aims at developing learners' ability to evaluate different points of views, to solve problems, to argue, to analyze thoughts in meaningful and logical sequence. That is the reason why EFL students must be constantly guided by their teachers to focus more on the critical aspects of the given language through teaching techniques and other activities.

Brookfield, S. (1991), states, "critical thinking involves recognizing and searching assumptions that undergird thoughts and actions. (p. 17)". Stenberg (1986) has endeavored to explore the issue from a cognitive and psychological perspective and he concluded that critical thinking improves "the mental processes, strategies, as well as people's representations necessary to solve problems and make effective decisions" (p. 3). This conception of critical thinking ability as a set of discrete skills is valuable in showing how critical thinking can interfere with personal and situational constraints.

According to Ennis, R. (1993), critical thinking is "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 180). To elaborate what critical thinking entails, he further proposes a comprehensive list of thirteen critical thinking dispositions and a set of critical thinking abilities or skills. Ennis, R. (2015) declares that "it is not enough to just have the requisite critical thinking skills to clarify, to judge well, and to infer wisely". As a matter of fact, an ideal critical thinker must have the tendency to employ these skills willingly in order to interact actively not only within and outside the classroom but also in the society.

For that reason, Halpern, D. (2007), former president of the American Psychological Association (APA), defines critical thinking as, "the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. . . where desirable is defined by the individual, such as making good career choices or wise financial investments". A deep analysis of Halpern's assertion leads to the understanding that critical thinking is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed; it is the type of thinking used in problem solving, determining probable outcomes, formulating inferences, and making decisions in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about oneself or the world.

Schafersman S. (1991:12), describes critical thinking as a reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skilful thinking that is focussed on deciding what to believe or to do. For Schafersman, S. , children are not born with the power to think critically nor do they develop this ability naturally beyond survival- level thinking: critical thinking is a learned

ability that must be taught. Critical thinking cannot be taught reliably to students by peers or by most parents. Trained and knowledgeable instructors are necessary to impart the proper information and skills.

Ennis, R. (2015) suggests that “students should be assisted in the engagement of thinking that is reflective, reasonable and directed on what to believe or do”. Ennis views critical thinking as “the correct assessing of statement”, and notes that an individual who is able to think critically has the skills to evaluate statements (Ennis, 2015, p. 82).

Michael S. and Richard P. (2006), believes that critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, and/ or evaluating information gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

According to them, critical thinking is an art of analyzing and evaluating a thinking process with a view to improve it. In short, critical thinking is a self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective activity which allows individuals to reflect on their own behaviors and decisions and those of other people.

2. 2. Importance of thecriticalthinking

According to Reynolds, M. (2011) "students who know how to analyze and critique ideas are able to make connections across disciplines, see knowledge as useful and applicable to daily life and understand content on a deeper, more lasting level". This means that the teaching of critical thinking enables young learners to see beyond, not judge, and learn how to understand other factors which can influence decision-makingprocess. In order to enjoy a meaningful life and to structure our lives, people need to explain, justify and think on their values and decisions. And critical thinking providespeople the ways and the meansfor this process of self-evaluation. In other words, critical thinking teaching allows students not only to solve daily problems, but also to come up with new and creative ideas to do so.

However, Atkinson, D. (1997:72) expresses doubt about the feasibility of teaching critical thinking to EFL learners. According to him, critical thinking is a “social practice (p. 72) inherent in Western culture and can only be acquired through an unconscious process of socialization during childhood”. Rather than being a strong argument for rejecting critical thinking instruction, Atkinson’s (1997) skepticism about the teachability of critical thinking maybe seen as a caution about the difficulties of developing critical thinking in EFL classes or as a call for exploring more effective critical thinking pedagogies.

2. 3. Strategies for teaching critical thinking in EFL classes

Students who are able to think critically grow into lifelong problem solvers and this is the ultimate goal of every teaching experience. So, developing critical thinking in classroom is essential to creating a classroom full of excited and motivated learners. But how can critical thinking be developed in EFL classes? Below are some simple strategies suggested by researchers to promote and develop critical thinking skills.

2. 3. 1. The techniques of questioning.

Questioning is an essential tool to stimulate students to think critically. Teachers' questions can be classified into two categories known as lower-level questions and higher-level questions. The lower-level questions are factual or literal questions such as call for recognition or recall of factual information previously presented by the teacher. Higher-level questions require students to manipulate previously learned information to create a response; these questions go beyond memory and factual information and require students' greater effort to infer, analyze, and evaluate. According to Orlich, D. et al. (2013, p. 38), "the level of students thinking generally relates to the level of questions that the teachers pose; if teachers systematically raise the level of their questions, students tend to raise the level of their responses accordingly". According to the author, while developing questions that require students to dig deeper, teachers should ask open-ended questions instead of giving "yes" or "no" questions which limits students' thinking skills. For instance, instead of asking students, "is learning important?" ask "Why is learning important?" In fact, open-ended questions provide students with the opportunity to examine their own knowledge on given topics.

2. 3. 2. Active and cooperative learning strategies

Active and cooperative learning are other strategies used by teachers to develop critical thinking skills. They mainly focus on student participation and interactions. According to Slavin, R. (2011, p. 54), "active group interaction provides students chances to exchange ideas, take responsibilities, and become critical thinkers". Some of the strategies proposed by (Dennicka, R. & Exly, K. 1998) include "Role-Play/Simulation, a group teaching technique in which students act out a real-life situation". In the same vein, (Campbell, M. 2015; Slavin, R. 2011) recommend teachers to adopt a battery of classroom activities which favor students' critical skills development comprising "group research projects, a method which involves investigations or surveys about a certain topic and the reporting of the findings in various ways"; presentations, newspapers, plays, skits, debates.

2. 3. 3. Group discussion

Discussion, as opposed to traditional lecture method is *“a teaching that involves an exchange of ideas, with active learning and participation by all concerned”*(Orlich, D. et al. , 2013, p. 244). Group discussion has been regarded as an effective way to facilitate deep learning and critical thinking development, because discussions require students to think through and clarify their ideas, and they also provide students with the perspectives and insights of others through exchanging ideas (Dallimore, E, Hertenstein, J. & Platt, M. 2008).

2. 3. 4. Debate

Debate, as a form of active leaning that induces students to research a topic deeply, ask cogent questions, indentify contradictions and errors, and formulate evidence-based arguments. Halvorsen, A, (2005:65) recommends using debate activities in ESL/EFL courses. In his view, choosing controversial issues for students to debate can not only increase student participation and language use, but also facilitate critical thinking development.

2. 3. 5. Collaboration

In a language class, one of the most important aspects of critical thinking lies in students' ability to ask questions and analyze responses. So, when students collaborate with their peers, they take ownership of their work, which promotes independence and critical thinking. That is the reason why, EFL teachers are to allocate enough time to their students throughout their lessons in order to allow them converse with their peers and share ideas. In this way, they will learn from each other, which can eliminate confusion and misunderstandings. Collaborating also expands students' thinking by demonstrating that not everyone has the same thought process.

2. 4. Other relevant activities to teach critical thinking in EFL classes

Critical thinking can be presented in all classroom areas. Schafersman, S. (1991) proposes five (o5) effective techniques that can be implemented in EFL classes to improves students critical thinking skills.

2. 4. 1. Lectures

Critical thinking can be enhanced during lecture by periodically stopping and asking students questions about a previously-presented material. Once the question is asked, teacher must wait for a while to give students an appropriate time for them to respond. He/she should not immediately answer such questions by him/herself. Teachers must learn students' names as quickly as possible and ask the questions to specific students he/she calls

upon by name. If an individual cannot answer a question, teachers can help them by simplifying the question, and leading them through the whole process. Teachers ask students data they need to answer the question, suggest how the data can be used to answer the question, and then have students use this data in an appropriate way to come up with an answer. After lecture but before the class ends, students are asked to write one-minute paper on the most significant thing they learned in class today and what single thing they still feel confused about. In class, encourage questions from students. Always respond positively to questions; never brush them off or belittle the questioner. Instead, praise the questioner.

2. 4. 2. Homework

Writing allows learners to organize their thoughts and think critically about a situation. Teachers are advised to ask their students to write short papers about relevant topics, review science articles, even paraphrase news articles and textbooks chapters.

2. 4. 3. Examinations

Examinations should require that students write, at least, short and long-answer essay questions. The exam that tests the ability of students to analyze information and draw conclusions must be encouraged. This technique helps to teach critical thinking. Large class sizes and student expectation of impartial grading are the two primary reasons or teachers' relying on multiple-choice questions. However, multiple-choice questions can serve to enhance critical thinking if they are designed correctly. The multiple-choice "think question" simply asks that the student read the information provided in the question, examine the alternative answers, and perform one or more acts of reason in addition to any memorization necessary. Choosing among alternatives in multiple-choice exams, as in real life and any other intellectual pursuit, should involve more than memorization.

2. 4. 4. Group discussion

To encourage corporative learning, students will, in small groups, discuss the meanings and use the key terms related to the subject. Classroom discussion: the members of each group will report their findings to their classmates and discuss together their effectiveness. This will help students to compare and contrast opposing points of view.

3. Research methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, a mixed research method is employed for data collection, including a questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers, class observations, a focus groups and phone interviews with EFL teachers via WhatsApp.

The present study took place during the academic 2020-2021, a few months after the outbreak of Covid19. In addition, the participating EFL students and teachers are from diverse economic, social backgrounds, which may influence their perceptions of critical teaching and learning in EFL classes.

This study samples one hundred (100) EFL teachers including 70 males and 30 females. All these teachers are currently teaching in five (05) state-owned secondary schools in the Mono region, southern Benin (Ceg Lokossa I, Ceg Lobogo, Ceg Comé, Ceg Grand Popo and Ceg Athiéomé). Prior to the study, the researcher got a permission from the school authorities who allowed him explain to the EFL teachers the objectives of the study during their weekly meeting. The sample population were the EFL teachers who had attended the meeting and contacted him later and expressed their willing to participate to the study. They were immediately sent a sample of the questionnaire via email or WhatsApp. The participants' responses were also sent back to the researcher through email or WhatsApp. In all, 70 (seventy) EFL teachers received questionnaire samples and all of them sent back their responses. The remaining 30 (thirty) teachers were contacted a week later either for an interview or for a class visit.

3.1 Description of the research instruments

Four (4) research instruments are used to collect data in this study.

Questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers - The questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers is composed of twenty-four (24) statements about EFL teachers' perceptions of the importance and the roles of critical thinking skills in the process of teaching and learning EFL as well as the techniques and strategies to teach them efficiently to intermediate learners.

For the purpose of analyzing the gathered data, the respondents were allowed to rate each item on a scale of options which were numerically coded as 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (disagree); 3 (neutral); 4 (agree); 5 (strongly agree).

Classroom observation - During this research work, ten (10) intermediate classes were visited to see how teachers EFL address the issue of critical thinking skills during their daily teaching practices and how they make learners participate in the different activities so as to help EFL learners to enhance their thinking ability.

Interview - In order to go further in our investigations, ten (10) EFL teachers were randomly selected to participate to an interview which aims to better understand their perceptions of critical thinking skills teaching and the strategies that can be used to teach them effectively to EFL learners.

Structured focus group - 5 randomly-selected teaching inspectors and 5 teaching advisors participated to a structured focus group. This focus-group with these teaching inspectors and advisors was specially based on how the English teaching syllabus which is currently used in Beninese secondary schools addresses the issue of critical thinking teaching in EFL classes.

Methods of Data Analysis - Data collected from questionnaire were analyzed using (SPSS) in the form of means and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The interviews and structured focus group were recorded and thereafter the data was transcribed and analyzed—these facts and opinions are combined with evidence from literature to answer the research questions.

4. Presentation and discussion of the findings

4. I Presentation the data collected

This presentation includes the data collected through the questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews and structured focus group.

4. I. I. Responses to the questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers

In order to collect data about EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles and the importance of critical thinking skills teaching and learning in EFL intermediate classes and the effective strategies to help students develop these skills, a questionnaire containing seven (24) statements was distributed to seventy (70) EFL teachers in 5 state-owned secondary schools in the Mono region. Below is the table displaying data collected.

Rank	Item	Means	Standard deviations	Estimation levels
1	critical thinking teaching is very important in EFL intermediate learners	4. 70	0. 80	Very High
2	Activities based on critical thinking enhances foreign language learning in EFL intermediate classes	4. 68	0. 78	Very High
3	Critical thinking changes foreign language learning culture.	4. 67	0. 77	High
4	The teaching of critical thinking usage in intermediate EFL classes makes learning more interesting and more convenient.	4. 62	0. 68	High
5	the critical thinking-based activities provide the chances of learning English language.	4. 59	0. 72	High
6	critical thinking-based activities are good opportunities to have discussion in EFL intermediate classes.	4. 55	0. 64	High
7	The use of critical thinking skills by EFL students improve communication among teachers and students.	4. 54	0. 62	High
8	Critical thinking skills help EFL students become independent learners	4. 53	0. 61	High

9	Critical thinking skills can improve students' language skills.	4.50	0.58	High
10	critical thinking-based activities help students to contact and interact with classmates	4.48	0.73	High
11	I can help my intermediate EFL students develop their critical thinking skills through reading comprehension activities.	4.43	0.69	High
12	I can help my intermediate EFL students develop their critical thinking skills through reading comprehension activities.	4.42	0.57	High
13	I can help my intermediate EFL students develop their critical thinking skills through speaking activities.	4.39	0.62	High
14	I can help my intermediate EFL students develop their critical thinking skills through writing activities.	4.38	0.68	High
15	Critical thinking skills help intermediate EFL learners to increase their confidence level	4.35	0.55	High
16	Critical thinking skills are crucial in EFL students' daily life.	4.31	0.54	High
17	Classroom activities based on critical thinking skills help my students to learn collaboratively with those who have similar courses	4.29	0.53	High
18	Critical thinking skills enable my EFL intermediate learners to express their opinion and thoughts freely in face-to-face discussion with their instructors	4.18	0.60	High
19	students who develop effective critical thinking skills show a low level of shyness when communicating with other people	4.17	0.67	High
20	Critical thinking skills help students decode and understand written texts.	4.15	0.72	High
21	Frequent Implementation of activities based on students' critical skills development increases their academic performances	4.10	0.77	High
22	Activities based on Critical thinking increases students' capacity to be more convincing while writing or speaking	4.05	0.97	High
23	Preparing activities for developing students' critical thinking skills is difficult	3.90	1.12	Medium
24	The teaching of critical thinking skills is time-consuming in EFL intermediate classes. .	1.86	0.97	Very Low
	Total degree	4.32	0.36	High

Table I: EFL teachers' perceptions of the importance and the roles of critical thinking skills teaching in the process of EFL learning in intermediate classes. Table I shows that the total degree of EFL teachers' perceptions of the importance and the roles of critical thinking skills teaching in the process of EFL learning in intermediate classes was very high. The highest means was given to the item "critical thinking teaching is very important in EFL intermediate learners" which scored (4.70) followed by the item "Activities based on critical thinking enhances foreign language learning in EFL intermediate classes" scoring (4.68). The lowest mean was given to the item "The teaching of critical thinking skills is time-consuming in EFL intermediate classes" which recorded (1.86). The quantitative data above shows a high level of positive perceptions of the critical thinking skills teaching in EFL intermediate classes.

In addition, these data inform that critical thinking skills can be taught to EFL intermediate learners through a variety of activities such as reading comprehension (4. 42), speaking activities (4. 39) and writing (4. 38). Moreover, the analysis of the EFL teachers' answers to the questionnaire shows that "critical thinking skills are very crucial in EFL students' daily life" (4. 31) for these skills help them "develop abilities needed to reason and to analyze others opinions" (4. 05) , "decode and understand a written text" (4. 15). Furthermore, the EFL teachers' responses to the questionnaire indicate that classroom activities based on critical thinking development improve intermediate EFL students' persuasive capacities while writing or speaking.

4. I. 2. Classroom Observations

Ten (10) intermediate classes (5^{ième} and 4^{ième}) have been visited during our investigation process. These visits allowed to collect data about students' interactions among themselves and with their teachers. The classroom observation also aims at checking the effective teaching of critical thinking as well as the techniques used by teachers to make their learners participate in all the different activities. During the class observation, it was noticed that teachers rarely practice individual work, pair work and group work. They use to explain the lessons to their learners and together, they draw the expected answer. In this sense, it is noticed that there is a friendly atmosphere between teachers and their students. Moreover, some students are mostly shy and don't react. Some of them also fear making mistakes of pronunciation ; for this reason, they don't participate actively in classroom activities.

4. I. 3. Interviews

During the interview, two (02) questions were asked to the interviewees. The first question aims at revealing teachers' perceptions of the roles and importance of critical thinking skills teaching in the process of EFL learning whereas the second one investigated the different strategies that can be used by teachers to develop learners' critical thinking skills in EFL intermediate classes according to the participants.

Answering the first question, the interview also indicates a very positive EFL teachers' perception about the roles of critical thinking skills in EFL intermediate classes. According to an important number of them the teaching of thinking skills is very important for "our future society will require a different type of citizen capable of making effective decision". Other interviewees supported that "our students will need to function effectively in a high-tech, information-oriented society, which emphasizes and requires flexibility, decision-making, adaptation and lifelong learning. " According to a young EFL teacher "the importance of thinking skills teaching will increase as our society continues to change and becomes more reliant on technology".

As far as the second question is concerned, the large majority of the interviewees suggested that critical thinking teaching be reinforced through classroom techniques such as , writing and through reading comprehension learning activities. Some of their statements are: "teachers can help students develop their thinking skills by asking them questions such as "what do you notice?", "How are these alike or different?";" can you give me an example?"; "Why is this an example?" ; "Why does this relationship exist?" ; "What told you that?" ;"What would happen if...?" and a host of others.

Another interviewees supported that students' thinking ability can be enhanced by EFL teachers who make learners produce their own writing or answers to questions by avoiding asking students yes/no or right/wrong questions. According to them, EFL students gain various opportunities to develop critical thinking skills when they are allocated time to think deeply, to share their individual knowledge with their mates about a given issue.

4. I. 3. Analysis of the data of the semi-structured focus -group

A focus group is a group interview involving a small number of demographically similar people or participants who have other common traits/experiences. Their reactions to specific researcher/evaluator-posed questions are studied. In this study, focus groups are used to better understand EFL inspectors and teaching advisors' perceptions of the roles and importance of critical thinking teaching in EFL learning process.

The EFL teachers' responses during the semi-structured focus-group corroborated the fact that the teaching of critical thinking skills improved EFL learning in intermediate classes due to the levels of interactions among students and their instructors. They also support the idea that when intermediate EFL learners develop critical thinking skills, they become more comfortable with their classmates and teachers. As a result, fear and the communicative barriers are broken. Their overall responses and comments indicated that "critical thinking skills enable EFL students to express their opinion and thoughts more freely in face -to-face discussion with their instructor". Furthermore, the EFL teachers reported that "critical thinking skills helps their students to learn collaboratively with those who have similar courses in other schools.

The teachers' responses to the question related to the goals, roles and importance of critical thinking teaching and learning in EFL intermediate classes point out that 43% of the EFL inspectors believe that critical thinking skills teaching permits EFL intermediate learners to develop communicative ability. In addition, 37% of the EFL teaching advisors think that critical thinking helps students to choose "what to say, how to say it and when to say it " whereas 65% of the EFL inspectors declare that "critical thinking prepares EFL intermediate learners for communicative fluency and accuracy".

4. 2. Discussion of the findings

The present study explored the EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes of the roles and importance of critical thinking skills teaching in EFL learning process as well as the practical strategies and techniques for its effective teaching and learning in Beninese secondary schools. Two main results were found: a) According to the results, EFL teachers' perceptions of the importance and the roles of critical thinking skills teaching in the process of EFL teaching and learning are very high. b) classroom activities based on critical thinking skills development enhances EFL learning. c) critical thinking skills help EFL students develop communicative capacities. d) critical thinking skills can be taught through classroom techniques such as individual work, pair work, collective work, writing , reading comprehension learning activities. These results are important for the literature.

4. 2. 1. Importance and the Roles of Critical Thinking Skills Teaching in the Process of EFL Teaching and Learning Process

Although a great number of studies have been conducted on critical thinking skills development in different areas (Dewey, J. 1910; Walters, K. 1994 & Ennis, R. 2015), a limited number of studies have been conducted about EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles and importance of critical thinking skills in EFL teaching and learning process (Schaferman S. 2017). In addition, the present study is the first one on critical thinking skills teaching in beninese secondary schools which included EFL teachers, inspectors and teaching advisors.

According to the teachers' responses to the questionnaire, critical thinking skills play some crucial roles in EFL classes. First of all, these data indicate that classroom activities based on critical thinking skills enhance foreign language learning in EFL intermediate classes (table I ; item 2). These results were in line with Dewey, J. (1910), one of many educational leaders who recognized "that a curriculum aimed at building thinking skills would benefit the individual learner, the community, and the entire democracy". According to Dewey, all students must be given opportunities to do their own thinking, their own construction of knowledge.

Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaire, interviews, focus group and class visits reveal that "critical thinking skills help EFL students develop communicative capacities", which is corroborated by the high scoring of items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 (table I) and the EFL teachers statements during the semi-structured focus group such as "critical thinking skills enable EFL students to express their opinion and thoughts more freely in face -to-face discussion with their instructor", and "critical thinking skills helps their students to learn collaboratively with those who have similar courses in other schools". This finding is in accordance with the conclusion reached by Ennis, R.

(2015) who established that "Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action." This definition by Ennis is highly approved by (Siegel, H. 2013; Facione, P. 1993 and Kuhn, D. 2015).

In short, critical thinking is foundational to the effective teaching of any subject, and it must be the at heart of any professional development program for thinking in general and critical thinking in particular could be beneficial in all teaching domains.

4. 2. 1. Practical strategies and techniques for an effective teaching of criticalthinking skills in EFL classes

The present research work also tries to investigate some practical strategies and techniques for an effective teaching of Critical thinking skills in Beninese EFL classes. According to the data collected from the questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers, the interviews and the semi-structured focus-group with the EFL teachers, critical thinking skills can be taught through a variety of teaching techniques. One of them is concerned with questioning techniques as expressed through statements such as "what do you notice?", "How are these alike or different?"; " can you give me an example?"; "Why is this an example?" ; "Why does this relationship exist?" ; "What told you that?" ; "What would happen if...". This finding confirms the theory of Reynolds, M. (2011), who examined different techniques to teach critical thinking skills in EFL classes. According to Reynolds, the list of core critical thinking skills includes observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and metacognition. For him, an individual or group engaged in a strong way of critical thinking gives due consideration to establish for instance:

- Evidence through reality;
- Context skills to isolate the problem from context;
- Relevant criteria for making the judgment well;
- Applicable methods or techniques for forming the judgment;
- Applicable theoretical constructs for understanding the problem and the question at hand.

That is the reason why, EFL teachers must focus on readings, activities and relevant questions that stimulate the mind to take ownership of key concepts and principles underlying the subject at hand.

In addition, EFL teachers recommend other classroom activities which can be implemented to teach critical thinking skills such as individual work, pair work, collective work, writing , reading comprehension learning activities (items I2, I3 and I4 ;tableI). The results of the class visits also show that some EFL teachers also devise some activities to help their student gain critical thinking techniques as it is displayed by Campbell M. (2015)

in her book entitled *50 Activities for Developing Critical Thinking Skills*. These activities include quick thinking, creative thinking, analytical thinking, endless questions, brainstorming

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the data collected during this study, some recommendations are made to EFL teachers, learners.

- To EFL Teachers

For an effective teaching of critical thinking skills in Beninese context, EFL teachers are recommended to practice with their students a wide range of activities designed for critical thinking skills development such as individual work, pair work and group work in order to help them find solution of the given problem instead of spoon-feeding them. They must also create productive and motivating learning atmosphere in which students feel more relaxed to interact with the teachers and among themselves. Moreover, teachers have to be concerned about their students' individual problem and try in a way or another to help them overcome these problems.

5.2 Recommendations to Learners

Like teachers, learners have some recommendations to follow in order to reach the common goal of teaching critical thinking skills: they have to concentrate themselves more on the critical aspect of the language by knowing that the goal of learning EFL is to be able to analyze, to discern the relevance of an opinion as well as its fairness. Learners should attend regularly English classes and show motivation to the subject. Learners must feel free while answering the given questions and not be afraid of making mistakes in the process of learning the foreign language

5.3 Recommendations to Government and to EFL Program Designers

In order to make teaching and learning process easier for both EFL teachers and learners, the government has an important role to play. They should: organize specific training sections for teachers about the teaching of critical thinking skills. Provide teachers with the necessary resources and support structures for effective implementation of critical thinking skills-based activities, which consists of teacher training and support system such as class observation and pedagogical inspections. Elaborate a curriculum and provide teachers with sufficient time to practice critical thinking skills teaching. Insist on the practice of thinking skill in teaching and learning of foreign language. Provide sufficiently schools with buildings to avoid overcrowded classes. Focus on critical thinking abilities and the fostering

of them as an important part of their agenda while designing curriculum in EFL teacher training courses.

Conclusion

As stated so far, it is clearly understood that thinking skills is the most important skill among the others. Thus, the current study is conducted for the purpose of investigating on the strategies of teaching critical thinking skills, identify areas in one's courses as the proper place to emphasize and teach critical thinking in EFL intermediate classes. As Nunan and Lamb (1999, p. 202) stated: critical thinking students are ones who are capable of monitoring, critiquing and defending their actions in life. Students who think critically are able to analyze and critique their own behavior and the behavior of others living around them. Teachers must look for strategies to conduct the implementation of this concept which is critical thinking in their classes. To better know the strategies and activities as far as the teaching of critical thinking in EFL classes is concerned, questionnaires are addressed to EFL teachers, a structured focus -group, classroom observations and interviews at different levels are the data collecting methods used in this study.

The findings of questionnaires help us to recognize the importance of critical thinking skills in Beninese EFL classes. The data collected through the questionnaire expose some obstacles related to an effective teaching and learning of critical thinking skills in Beninese EFL classes as raised by almost all the respondent teachers such as: the lack of time allocated to the subject, the lack of students and teachers motivation, the fear of making mistakes.

The findings of interviews also help us to have a deep insight about critical thinking skills teaching and learning which is a transversal competency according to the teaching advisors. From the interviews, we notice that critical thinking can be taught with any kind of activity if teachers are creative. So, while designing critical thinking activities in EFL classroom, teachers need flexibility and creativity to combine various strategies likely to help them develop alternative methods appropriate for their classes. In addition, they should motivate their learners to do the different activities that will be given to them. Furthermore, teachers have to involve themselves in their own training because teaching is a vocation.

Furthermore, the teaching inspectors and advisors have to initiate the reviewing of the English language curriculum and the time allocated to the teaching of critical thinking skills in Beninese context.

Recommendations are made for students and teachers about the best process needed to reach the goal of teaching such skill. All the same, recommendations are made to the government as they are also responsible for the success and failure in the school system and

mainly in the success of teaching a language, since they provide the needed teaching materials , the appropriate training systems and the required evaluation.

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