

Students' Performance in Critical Thinking Activities in English

Maria Cora E. Cabacang

Doctor of Arts in Language and Literature, Assistant Professor III
College of Arts and Communication, University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar, Philippines

Abstract: *The study primarily aimed at evaluating the performance of the students using activities in English posited by Ustunluoglu in language teaching through critical thinking and self-awareness. It drew the profile of the students in terms of age, sex, and type of secondary school. It ascertained their performance in critical thinking by expressing their perceptions, assumptions, prejudices, values, breaking habits, constructing a new point of view, and evaluation. This study made use of quasi-experimental method since no randomization was done on student-subjects. Specifically, the non-equivalent control group design was used. Three sections in English 111 classes were used as participants in the study. Their responses made in actual interactions were measured by counting the lines. The results of the study showed that the students were sixteen years old, female, and from public secondary schools. Both groups had the same fair level of performance which means that they had the same characteristics and level of critical thinking skills before the conduct of the study. The activities were found to be very effective in eliciting opinions on prejudices, values, breaking habits, and constructing a new point of view.*

Keywords: performance, critical thinking skills, prejudices, breaking habits, constructing a new point of view

1. Introduction

Ustunluoglu in 2004 emphasized that critical thinking should be highlighted in designing and improving language curriculum because the world we live in is getting more complicated to understand and that language classes are appropriate for teaching critical thinking because of the richness and availability of materials and the interactive approaches used. He added further that language teachers can activate critical thinking in the language classroom by highlighting self-awareness. Students can actively respond to the activities presented using the target language like English. Language classes should center on the use of language as mostly language teachers cater to the principle that it is primarily speech. Performance of the students should be based on how they actually use the language and not just rote learning.

Activities like perceptions, assumptions, prejudices and values can help students be aware of themselves and that the use of language orally is maximized. They will have great chances of knowing themselves and at the same time learning the language hence, this study.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempted to evaluate the performance of the students in critical thinking activities in English.

More importantly, it sought to:

- 1) Determine the profile of the students in terms of:
 - a) Age,
 - b) Sex, and
 - c) Type of secondary school;
- 2) Ascertain the performance of the experimental and control groups as to:
 - a) perceptions,
 - b) assumptions,
 - c) prejudices,
 - d) values,
 - a) breaking habits,

- b) constructing a new point of view, and
- c) evaluation;
- 3) Find out the level of performance of the experimental and control groups before the conduct of the study; and
- 4) Ascertain the level of performance of the experimental and the control groups after the conduct of study.

2. Methodology

The study made use of a quasi-experimental method specifically the non-equivalent control group design. The population consisted of freshman students from the College of Education and College of Arts and Communication in the University of Eastern Philippines enrolled during the first semester of school year 2008-2009. The respondents were one complete section in experimental group and another complete section for control group.

At the start of the experimental study, a student questionnaire was distributed to the student-subjects to determine their age, sex, and type of secondary school they graduated from. Scores in the English Placement Test were required to ensure that they passed the examination and that they could be admitted in English 111 class. Drawing of lots was done to select the experimental and the control groups. Pretest then was given to both experimental and control groups. The researcher was the one who conducted the activities in English for seven (7) sessions for each class.

The study used Ustunluoglu's seven (7) sample activities for developing thinking skills in English teaching and their effect on the performance of the respondents. The data of this study were obtained from audio-taped classroom interaction or responses in English teaching. The tapes were transcribed and the lines or responses of students in the teacher-student or student-to-student interactions were counted, computed and tabulated and the total averages and percentages were based on that formulated and used by Bautista in her descriptive study titled "Questioning-

Responding in Pilipino and English: Classroom Interaction in Philippine Literature Classes” in De La Salle University.

3. Findings of the Study

Profile of Students

The profile included age, sex, and type of secondary school where the students graduated from. These are grouped and presented in Table 1.

Age

Fifty seven (57) or 59 percent were sixteen (16) years old. Nineteen (19) or twenty (20) percent were seventeen years old. Nine (9) or nine (9) percent were eighteen (18) and there were 12 or 12% nineteen years old and above. This indicated that most of the students enrolled in college right after their high school graduation. They were found closer to each other in terms of age.

Sex

Thirty six (36) or 37% were male and 61 or 63% were female, implying that the majority of those who entered BSEd, ABLLT, and Development Communication program were female. This finding supported Laodenio’s study when he pointed out most female students go for teaching course like BSED.

Type of Secondary School. A great number of students graduated from public secondary schools. Eighty or 82% came from public schools while only 17 or 18% came from private schools. It showed that majority of the students preferred to enrol in public schools because of the government’s free basic education program rather than in private schools where they had to pay tuition. This is consonance with Loverita’s finding that the majority of the students enrolled in the University of Eastern Philippines came from public schools.

Table 1: Students’ Profile as to Age, Sex, and Type of Secondary School

Profile	Frequency	Percent
Age		
Sixteen	57	59
Seventeen	19	20
Eighteen	9	9
Nineteen & above	12	12
Total	97	100
Sex		
Male	36	37
Female	61	63
Total	97	100
Type of Secondary School		
Public	80	82
Private	17	18
Total	97	100

Performance of Students in Critical Thinking Activities

The activities for critical thinking are referred to as perceptions, assumptions, prejudices, values, breaking habits, constructing a new point of view, and evaluation.

Perceptions. Shown in Table 2a is the student’s perception both of the experimental and the control groups. In the experimental group. Only two (2) students or 4.08% had an excellent performance. Twenty-one or 42.86% performed very well but the majority of the student-subjects had a good

performance or 22 or 44.90%. Four (4) or 8.16% performed poorly. This indicates that almost half of the class did not respond very well to the discussion while others did very well. Only a few performed excellently. In the control group, 21 or 48.84% performed very well and 19 or 44.19% had good performance. Only three (3) or 6.97% got poor. This indicates that more than half of the class had a hard time discussing very well their perceptions through the use of visual materials while almost half of the class did very well in giving their views on seeing things differently.

Table 2 (a): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups’ Perceptions

	Experimental Group									
	Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)		Poor (2.5-4.4)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Perceiving optical illusions using pictures of the words: liar life a large bird.	2	4.08	21	42.86	22	44.9	4	8.16	49	100
Activities	Control Group									
	Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)		Poor (2.5-4.4)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Perceiving concepts of the words: man life woman										

Assumptions

Table 2b shows the assumptions of the experimental and control groups. There were four (4) or 8.70% who got excellent performance; 15 or 32.61% very good performance; 18 or 39.13%, performed “good”; eight (8) or 17.39% poor and only one (1) got a very poor performance. This indicates that the majority of the students were not really aware of their assumptions even with the use of visual materials. There were few who performed very well and discussed excellently, where the use of visuals was very

helpful to them. Also shown in Table 2b is the frequency distribution of the students’ assumptions in the control group. Only three (3) or 9.09% were rated excellent in this activity. There were six (6) or 18.18% who performed very well. The majority or twelve (12) or 36.36% were rated good; 11 or 33.33%, poor; and one (1) or 3.03%, very poor. This means that the students could not formulate their assumptions and could hardly answer the questions raised in this activity with or without visual materials.

Table 2(b): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups’ Assumptions

Activities	Experimental Group									
	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Poor		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)		(2.5-4.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
A story was read and the questions were asked: What would you do to ascertain that the house belonged to the girl? Have you made wrong assumptions lately?	2	4.08	21	42.86	22	44.9	4	8.16	49	100
Activities	Control Group									
	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Poor		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)		(2.5-4.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
A story was read and the same questions were used (lecture).										

Prejudices

Presented in Table 2c is the result of the experimental and the control groups’ prejudices. In the experimental group, more performed very well, 33 or 68.75% of the total number of students. There were some who excelled-four (4) or 8.33%; while 11 or 22.92% had good performance. This only shows that use of visual materials was effective in

soliciting students’ prejudices. In the control group, 19 or 45.24% were good performers but those who performed very well dominated the class with 18 or 42.86%, plus (5) students or 11.9% who excelled in this activity. It means that the majority of the students in both groups were aware of their prejudices with or without visuals.

Table 2(c): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups’ Prejudices

Activities	Experimental Group							
	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Open-ended sentences on these concepts: School or School is a place where I ____. Women or Women should _____. Teachers or Teachers are _____. Marriage or Marriage is never ____. Education or Education is _____.	4	8.33	33	68.75	11	22.92	48	100
Activities	Control Group							
	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Open-ended sentences using the same 5 concepts (lecture/ no visual materials used).	5	11.90	18	42.86	19	45.24	42	100

Values

Presented in Table 2d are the values of the students in the experimental and the control group. In the experimental group, the majority of the students performed very well in the discussion. Three (3) or 6% had an excellent performance, while 42 or 84% performed very well. Only a few had “good” performance- (5) or ten (10%) only. This implies that the students were very much aware of their values and

expressing their thoughts and ideas in English aided by the visuals presented in the activity. In the control group, the majority of the students performed very well- 28 or 68.29%, five (5) or 12.20% excelled and eight (8) or 19.51% performed “good”. This indicates that the use of the traditional lecture is effective in teaching the students their values. Through this activity, they were made more aware of their values and easily expressed them in English.

Table 2(d): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups' Values

Activities		Experimental Group						Total	
		Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)			
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Students were asked to give 5 values and ranked them from most important to the least. Rank 1-God Rank 2-Parents Rank 3-Friends Rank 4-Education Rank 5-Money		3	6	42	84	5	10	50	100
Activities		Control Group						Total	
		Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)			
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Students were asked of the same activity (lecture). Rank1-God Rank 2-Parents Rank 3-Studies Rank 4-Money Rank5-Friends		5	12.20	28	68.29	8	19.51	41	100

Breaking habits

The result of activities on breaking habits is shown in Table 2e. In the experimental group, there were three (3) or 5.88% who excelled, 38 or 74.51% performed very well and only ten (10) or 19.61% performed "good". This shows that using visual materials in talking about breaking habits is very effective since the majority discussed very well their

interests and appreciations in an English class. In the control group, only one (1) or 2.5% excelled. The majority or 26 or 65% performed very well and thirteen (13) or 32.5% who did well in this activity. It implies that the use of the traditional lecture had a very good effect in eliciting responses among students as regards breaking habits or seeing things differently.

Table 2 (e): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups' Breaking Habits

Activities		Experimental Group						Total	
		Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)			
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
O Students were asked to complete open-ended sentences: I like English lessons because ____. I appreciate my family because ____. I love the way my friend speaks with me because ____. I enjoy school because ____.									
Activities		Control Group						Total	
		Excellent (8.5-10)		Very Good (6.5-8.4)		Good (4.5-6.4)			
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Students were asked to complete the same open-ended sentences but without the use of visual materials.								40	100

Constructing a new point of view

The students' activity result is presented in Table 2f. Eight (8) or 18.18% excelled. 21 or 47.73% performed very well while only 15 or 34.09% had "good" performance. The students discussed their ideas excellently in English with the aid of visual materials. Also in the same table is the result of the control group's performance. Three (3) or 8.33% excelled. 17 or 47.22% performed very well, 13 or 36.11%

had good performance and three (3) or 8.33% performed poorly in this activity. It shows that the majority of the students performed very well using the traditional lecture even without the use of visuals. They gave very good responses in English thus presenting their new point of view. Both groups performed very well in discussing their points of view.

Table 2(f): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups’ Point of View

Experimental Group									
Activities	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Total		
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)				
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
The class was grouped into 3 and each group was given a belief to discuss and to give their verdict as a jury. Visuals were used in this class.	4	8.33	33	68.75	11	22.92	48	100	
Control Group									
Activities	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Total		
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)				
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Students were grouped into 3 and given a belief to discuss and to give their verdict as a jury in a given situation. No visuals were used.							40	100	

Evaluation

Table 2g presents the students’ evaluation in the experimental and the control groups. In the experimental group, the majority, 20 or 42.55% had “good” performance fifteen (15) or 31.91% performed better and seven (7) or 14.89% had poor performance. Five (5) or 10.64% had an excellent performance in this activity. This shows that the students had a hard time answering the analysis, hypothesis, and evaluation questions which are higher order thinking

skills even with the aid of visual materials although some had evaluated the narrative read thoroughly. The performance of the students in the control group is also shown in Table 2g. Three (3) or 7.5% performed excellently, eight (8) or 20%, had very good performance, 15 or 37.5% had a good performance, 13 or 32.5% had poor performance and only one (1) or 2.5% had a very poor performance. It shows that both groups responded poorly to the questions raised after reading a narrative using the traditional lecture.

Table 2 (g): Frequency Distribution of the Experimental and Control Groups’ Evaluation

Experimental Group												
Activities	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Poor		Very Poor		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)		(2.5-4.4)		(0-2.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			F	%
A story was read and the students were asked using analysis, hypothesis, and evaluation questions such as: Why have native people been losing their land? What would happen if foreign companies continue to invest? Is it logical or illogical for native people to work for foreign bosses?												
Control Group												
Activities	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Poor		Very Poor		Total	
	(8.5-10)		(6.5-8.4)		(4.5-6.4)		(2.5-4.4)		(0-2.4)			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			F	%
A story was read and students were asked the same questions. No visuals were used.	3	7.5	8	20	15	37.5					40	100

Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups before the conduct of the study

A summary of the level of performance before the conduct of study (pretest) using frequency distribution and percentage for both the experimental and control groups is shown in Table 3. In the experimental group, there were 38 or 74.51% had fair level of performance and 13 or 25.49% had good level. In the control group, only one (1) or 2.17%

had a good performance. The majority performed fairly-45 or 97.83%. These resulted in the same fair level of performance for both experimental and control groups implying that the student-subjects, before the conduct of the study had the same level of critical thinking skills, thus paralleling Bumanglag and Penida’s result in their pretest where both groups had the same level of performance.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of the Level of Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups before the Conduct of Study

Level of Performance	Experimental Group Frequency %	Control Group Frequency %
Excellent (30-35)	1325.49	1 2.17
Very Good (25-29)	3874.51	45 97.83
Good (20-24)		
Fair (10-19)	51100.00	46 100.00
Failed (0-9)		
Total		

Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups after the conduct of study

As shown in Table 4, the summary of the posttest level of performance of the experimental and control groups showed that in the experimental group 46 or 90.20% percent had excellent performance and five (5) or 9.8 percent had very good results in the posttest. In the control group, there were 36 or 78.26% percent who excelled, eight (8) or 17.39%

performed very well and two (2) or 4.35% had a fair performance. This indicated that after the conduct of the study the students' use of critical thinking skills in both experimental and control groups improved. This finding confirms Balanga's study on interactive and conventional teaching for critical thinking skills where both the interactive and conventional teaching were found to improve the performance of the students as shown in the posttest result.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of the Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups after the Conduct of Study

Level of Performance	Experimental Group Frequency %	Control Group Frequency %
Excellent (30-35)	46 90.20	36 78.26
Very Good (25-29)	5 9.8	8 17.39
Good (20-24)		
Fair (10-19)		2 4.35
Failed (0-9)		
Total	51100.00	46 100.00

4. Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results and findings of this study, the following conclusions and implications were discussed:

The profile of the freshman students of the University of Eastern Philippines for 2008-2009 showed they were young, predominantly female and came from public secondary schools implying that the respondents enrolled in the course right after they graduate from high school. That there were more freshman students coming from public schools is because of the free secondary education program of the government.

As to the students' performance in critical thinking activities in English: students had a very good performance in discussing their perceptions. Almost half of the class did very well in giving their views on seeing things differently. However, more than half of the class had a hard time discussing very well their perceptions through the use of visual materials. It can be deduced from their oral responses that they lack time in analyzing the pictures given and that most students could not easily grasp the idea being shown in the pictures. It can be attributed to the fact that it was their first time having the activity. They were still hesitant and feeling nervous talking to the class.

As to assumptions, majority of the students were not really aware of their assumptions even with the use of visual materials. They had a hard time formulating their assumptions and could hardly answer the questions raised in this activity with or without visual materials. They might be still confused of the activity and how to go about it and share with the class their assumptions.

In their discussions on prejudices, the use of visual materials was effective in soliciting students' prejudices. The students who were taught using traditional lecture were very good performers too and they dominated the class. It means that the majority of the students in both groups were aware of their prejudices with or without visuals. They started sharing their ideas and hesitations were no longer felt. Further, the activity sets no limits as to their ideas. They were inspired discussing the concepts given.

In the activity about values, both groups had an exemplary performance. They outnumbered those who are still hesitant to express their ideas. This implies that the activity is very effective in sharing student's feelings and ideas using the English language. They had the interest in discussing the most important things in their lives to the least. This activity generated awareness among the students of their five most important values in their lives and expressed them very well.

As to the activity about breaking habits, it is very effective since the majority discussed very well their interests and appreciations in an English class. It implies that the use of visual materials and the traditional lecture had a very good effect in eliciting responses among students as regards breaking habits or seeing things differently.

In constructing a new point of view, both groups performed very well in discussing their points of view. The activity is effective in defending their assigned beliefs. This means that they had the confidence in using the English language in expressing their ideas whether they believe personally or not in the belief given to them. The students were used to oral activities thus giving them the confidence to talk and explain their side using English language.

As to the last activity which is evaluation, both groups responded poorly to the questions raised after reading a narrative. This means that the students had a hard time answering the analysis, hypothesis, and evaluation questions which are higher order thinking skills even with the aid of visual materials although some had evaluated the narrative read thoroughly. This implies further that that the activity using higher order thinking skills is not effective to the students. It can be attributed to the fact that that they were not used to it. They need more reading activities using higher order thinking questions like that in the study.

As to the performance of the experimental and control groups before the conduct of the study, they had the same fair level of performance implying that the student-subjects, before the conduct of the study had the same level of critical thinking skills. They were homogeneously grouped and that they both needed sharpening of their critical thinking skills. After the conduct of the study, both groups had an excellent performance in their post test. The student-subjects improved a lot after the conduct of the study. They expressed very well their ideas and feelings in the different activities given to them whether taught with visuals or not.

On the whole, the sample activities were effective in eliciting oral responses from the students. They were made to think critically and use the English language effectively so as to arouse others to share with the class their prejudices, values, habits and points of view.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Activities in prejudices, values, breaking habits, and constructing a new point of view which made the students interested in their oral discussions should be tried and resorted to by English teachers in English classes.
- 2) The seven activities in critical thinking skills should be included in English course syllabus so as to hone the student's critical thinking skills in English.
- 3) The use of visual materials in teaching English should be enforced for it is found to be very effective in eliciting ideas and feelings of the students.
- 4) The use of higher order thinking skills such as summary, hypothesis, analysis, and evaluation questions should be reinforced by language teachers in reading activities.
- 5) Students should be homogeneously grouped in language classes.
- 6) A similar study should be conducted by future researchers but this time focus more on writing.

References

- [1] Balanga, Gerald Jayson B. "The Effect of the Interactive Teaching Method on Literature Students' Critical Thinking." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Eastern Visayas State University, Tacloban, 2006.
- [2] Bumanglag, Joy Corpuz. "Content-based Instructional Materials Versus Literary Texts in Developing Critical Thinking Skills," Unpublished Master's Thesis, UP Diliman, Quezon City, 2001.
- [3] Cruz, Isagani and Daroy, Ester. How to Teach Literature: A Manual of Readings. Manila: De La Salle University Press. 1988.
- [4] Laodenio, Antonio. "Teaching Styles of Grade Six Mathematics Teachers and Computational Skills in the Four Fundamental Operations of Grade Six Pupils in Northern Samar." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Eastern Philippines, 2007.
- [5] Penida, Rowena Cardona. "Effect of Discovery Approach on Student's Critical Thinking Skills and its Relation to Achievement in General Science." Unpublished Master's Thesis, TUP Manila, 2000.
- [6] Scriven, M. and Paul. R. Defining Critical Thinking: A Draft Statement for the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction, 1996 <http://www.criticalthinking.org/university/universityclasses/defining.html>.
- [7] Thorpe, J. Methods of Inquiry Program, 1992. Available <http://academic.udayton.edu/health.html>.
- [8] Ustunluoglu, Evrim. "Language Teaching Through Critical thinking and Self-Awareness. Forum Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 2004).