

Al Ghazali's Dialogue: A Case-Based & Critical Thinking Communicative Language Teaching Approach

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Abstract

Named after Imam Al- Ghazali, a prominent and influential Muslim scholar during his time, the Al- Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication is a subject created specifically to emphasize on building students' communicative abilities in the English language where they can discuss, argue, and defend their thoughts based on selected case studies. The subject was introduced to address an important call made by the Ministry of Education through the Introduction of the English Language Roadmap which aims at producing not only students who are confident communicators, but to also integrate leadership skills in the teaching of languages at present (National Education Blueprint: The English Language Roadmap, 2019). In addition to the ability of students to develop their leadership, problem solving and presentation skills, with the incorporation of Aqli and Naqli, this paper offers a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the subject by relating it to two core concepts which has been explored extensively including; Case-based learning as well as Critical Thinking skills. The paper outlines the effectiveness of the subject in terms of its relevance towards these two core concepts by actively citing previous reseaches and studies. The paper also further explores a specifically designed framework and how this proposed framework supports all three concepts discussed effectively: Communicative Language Teaching, Case-Based Learning and Critical Thinking Skills.

Keywords: Analytical tools, Aqli & Naqli, Case study, Critical thinking, ESL.

I. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of modern languages along with globalisation has transformed the role and status of the English Language by becoming one of the most important languages in the world. In Malaysia, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was introduced with the aim to equip pupils with language that they will use to communicate in their daily lives. This is aligned with Shift 2 in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) which intends to ensure that every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English

language (MOE, 2011). However, most Malaysian primary school pupils face troubles in their speaking skills and are obsessed with examinations that the purpose of studying is not to gain knowledge anymore (Mihat, 2015). Zaki, Yunus, & Hashim, (2017) agreed that Malaysian public standardised assessments focus on reading and writing at large, often leaving out the other two skills which are listening and speaking. English at tertiary levels on the other hand have specifically been focused on interventional pedagogy whereby the focus has been very much on the needs and niche areas of each university. Although there

is constant emphasis on improving students' overall communication skills, recent studies reveal that most Malaysian undergraduates still fail to secure good jobs and positions due to their lack of confidence and poor communicative abilities (Zaki, Yunus & Hashim, 2017).

1.1 The research subject; Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication

Introduced as a subject at the tertiary institution, the Al-Ghazali's Dialogue is a subject that focuses on improving students' overall communication skills along with leadership qualities as they are exposed to various real-life situations in which the students are expected to apply core problem solving and decision-making skills. The subject itself is inspired by the philosophical teachings of the famous Imam Al-Ghazali, who's core teaching principles were very much focused on the concept of *Aqli* & *Naqli*, being a pioneer English Language Subject to have integrated these two core concepts into its main course outcomes and teaching principles. *Naqli* or Revealed knowledge (Quran and Sunnah) and *Aqli*, acquired knowledge (worldly knowledge) is the philosophy of the Islamic Science embedded into the course outcomes of this subject (Abdullah et al., 2019). Students are expected to engage actively, discuss, and apply various skills namely problem solving and critical thinking skills over a wide selection of case studies and caselets via individual and group presentations that focus heavily on both their language and presentation skills.

The main significance of the subject is to introduce the concept of confidence in speech, however without having to actively compromise on overall proficiency. The subject upholds the importance of training students to become competent and confident speakers by exploring skills and using case-based learning as an approach along with the application of critical thinking skills in their communicative learning process. The main aim of this paper is therefore to explore the effectiveness of Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication, by exploring the relevance of both the Case-Based Learning and Critical Thinking Skills as core

concepts. The paper will compare previous studies which have integrated these concepts and hence imperatively suggest the effectiveness of the suggested framework which supports the importance of introducing these key concepts into an English Language Skills Teaching approach, in this case speaking via the Communicative Approach.

2. Literature Review

From all the skills in ESL learning, speaking is categorised as the most difficult skill (Heng, Abdullah, & Yusof, 2012). Some of the difficulties related to speaking skills faced by students are such as low self-confidence to talk in the target language, difficulty to express themselves clearly and fluently, and most of all low proficiency in the target language (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014). Apart from the difficulties mentioned, the problem faced by students is difficulty to understand the context of the materials given to them. For instance, students find it difficult to talk about a particular topic if the context of the topic used in the speaking classes is unfamiliar to them. Perhaps because the students do not have background knowledge about the topic. Therefore, it is important for the instructors to choose a topic that is closely related to students' real-life context. By using this kind of topic, at least students will have background knowledge and can relate to their own experience in discussing the topic. In communicative language teaching, it is emphasised for a teacher to use authentic materials (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013) for the teaching and learning processes.

Communicative Language Teaching started back in the 70s based on the perspective of communicative approach theory. Compared to other conventional language teaching methods, it focuses on the importance of communicative competency, apart from the mastery of the linguistics part of a target language. In order for learners to master a language, they must also be competent in their communication skills. In the classroom, the teacher will be responsible as a facilitator to promote communication among

learners through the use of authentic materials. Teacher's role is to facilitate students' activities and observe their communication skills in class. Students will have more meaningful communication by using real-life-situation-related topic (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). Discussing about familiar things can also reduce student's level of communication anxiety (Heng et al., 2012). One approach that apply authentic materials related to real-life situation is through Case-Based Learning (CBL).

2.1 Case-based Learning (CBL)

As stated in the Basic Teaching Manual for Lecturers in Higher Education Institution (Asas Pembelajaran dan Pengajaran Pensyarah Institusi Pengajian Tinggi) (Penerbit UTHM, 2012), one of the methods that can be utilised in student-centred learning process is through case-based approach (Pembelajaran Berasaskan Kes). Case studies used in CBL should be based on a real-life situation, contain authentic problems and questions, and detailed issues for learners to provide solutions or outcomes (Brand & Rogers, 2010). In terms of CBL approach in education, many research have proven that the use of case study as teaching methodology is able to improve student's thinking skills (Brand & Rogers, 2010; Harman et al., 2015; Kantar & Massouh, 2015; Yoo & Park, 2014) and motivate students to perform better (Hong & Yu, 2017; Kantar & Massouh, 2015; Yoo & Park, 2014) in the particular course.

Based on the previous scholarly works related to CBL, different terms are used to describe CBL (e.g. such case studies, CBL environment, CBL setting, case method, cased-based instruction). The term 'case-based learning' is commonly used in medical, nursing and engineering fields. For business studies, the term 'case-based instruction (CBI)' is familiar to be used. Meanwhile, 'case method' is frequently used as reference to CBL in language research (Jackson, 1997; Esteban & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Hsu, 2016; Guiyu & Yi, 2017).

Historically, case method was first introduced in 1870 in the Law School of Harvard University in order to teach legal principles (Jackson, 1997). Actual court cases were used by law instructors in class "to guide the students to the predetermined "right" answers or decisions" (Jackson, 1997, p.2). It is an active (Diwan, Sanghavi, Shah, & Shah, 2017; Gholami et al., 2017), interactive (Diwan, Sanghavi, Shah, & Shah, 2017), and student-centred learning (Yoo & Park, 2014; Sankeshwari et al., 2016; Gholami et al., 2017) using cases that is based on real-life situations that promotes authentic and meaningful learning. Many researchers stated that CBL comes from problem-based learning (Hanifah, Febrianti, & Suraya, 2018; Harman et al., 2015; Sankeshwari et al., 2016). CBL combines Jerome Bruner's constructivism and John Dewey's experientialism (Yoo & Park, 2014; Kantar & Massouh, 2015; Mohammad Gholami et.al, 2016).

According to Sankeshwari et al. (2016), cases act as stimulus and motivate the learner to think critically and gain knowledge in the presence of a facilitator. A case can assume many different forms depending on the setting and content of instruction such as "in business education, a case may be a large corporation experiencing a major merger in the market; in law a case can be a specific court case; and in the health sciences, a case can be a patient with a certain diagnosis or presenting symptoms" (Nelson, 2010, p.6). This is somewhat important as students are able to relate to the situation or problem and are able to provide their opinion when discussing the issues. According to studies done by Cattaneo (2017), the benefits of CBL among students are:

- i. develop critical thinking skills
- ii. learn through decision-making and role-playing situation,
- iii. increase confidence in defining, confronting, analysing, and solving problems through interactive discussions
- iv. exercise and develop skills in public speaking and group problem solving

In ESL classroom, many studies done related to CBL are on Business English (Tatzl, 2015; Hsu, 2016; and Ilyasova & Nilova, 2018). The studies conducted focused more on descriptive and conceptual studies. None of them suggested any teaching module that could be used in class in teaching English using case method. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study on the use of case method in English courses with the integration of CT skills.

2.2 Critical Thinking Skills (CTS)

Critical thinking is not limited to tertiary levels in terms of the applications. In the 21st century working environment, employees are required to equip themselves with CTS, as well as communication skills. In a report by the World Economic Forum (2016), a survey done with 371 leading global companies stated that among the top ten skills required in their employees is critical thinking skill, which was ranked No.2 after complex-problem-solving skill (Gray, 2016). It is one skill that the youth must acquire in preparation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (I.R 4.0).

This need is a concern not only at the international level; Malaysia is experiencing the similar needs of CTS. The needs to hire employees with advanced level of critical thinking skill have increased from year to year. Those who portray advanced critical thinking skill are able to show behavioural dispositions which is acknowledged in academic and vocational environment (Zare & Othman, 2015). As stated by the CEO of Talentcorp Malaysia, Johan Mahmood Merican, the graduates are still lacking in CTS (Cheah, 2016).

Apart from low proficiency in the English Language, Malaysian fresh graduates are not well equipped with soft skills, which include creativity, communication and CTS (Hazlina Aziz, 2018; NST Education, 2019). The inability of students to practice critical thinking skills during their undergraduate years has led them to not be able to practice critical thinking skill once they enter their professional world. They have limited capability in problem solving as well as decision making.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

One framework that can be used in assessing student's thinking level in education is Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which was created by committee of educators headed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 (Krathwohl, 2002). Thinking levels in Bloom's taxonomy starts with level one; knowledge, level two; comprehension, level three; application, level four; analysis, level five; synthesis, and level six; evaluation. The higher the level, the more critical a person needs to be in his/her thinking.

Later, the taxonomy was revised and changes were made to the original taxonomy. The taxonomy was revised to suit the "more outcome-focused modern education objectives" (Huitt, 2011, p.2), which included the changes on the names of the levels, and switching the order of two highest levels. Apart from revising the cognitive dimension of the original taxonomy, Anderson and Krathwohl added another dimension to the taxonomy. The Revised Taxonomy consists of two-dimensional framework. They are Knowledge and Cognitive Processes (Krathwohl, 2002). The taxonomy table is used to combine the Knowledge Process and Cognitive Process in order to classify objective, activities, and assessments. This will provide a clear, concise, visual representation of a particular course.

Under Cognitive Process dimension, there are a) Remember, which is recalling and remembering the facts and details; b) Understand, which is explaining and classifying the information; c) Apply, which is executing the information in a new way; d) Analyse, which is breaking the information into its main parts; e) Evaluate, which is making decision based on in-depth reflection; and f) Create, which is creating new information.

Apart from the Cognitive Process dimension, the other is the Knowledge Process dimension. There are four categories under the Knowledge Process. They are a) Factual Knowledge – knowledge of terminology and specific details; b) Conceptual Knowledge – knowledge about interrelationship among basic elements in a structure; c) Procedural Knowledge –

knowledge of different processes and procedures; and d) Metacognitive Knowledge – awareness and knowledge about one’s own cognition and thinking. Table 2.3 is the Taxonomy Table that consists of the Cognitive Process and the Knowledge Process based on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy.

Facione’s Critical Thinking Model

Based on Critical Thinking Model, critical thinking process involves six (6) strategies. The strategies are; interpretation, analysis,

evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. The first step involves an individual to evaluate information or data by the process of interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference. Next the person applies critical thinking and states the results, justifies the procedures, and presents the arguments in order to reach his conclusions. Finally, the process is refined by self-examination and self-correction. The six core critical thinking skills as described by the panel of experts (Facione ,2007, p.5) are:

No.	Skill	Descriptions
1	Interpretation	“To understand and express the meaning of various experiences, situation, data, events, judgements, conventions, beliefs, procedures, rules or criteria.”
2	Analysis	“To identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other form of representation.”
3	Inference	“To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to reduce the consequences flowing from data, statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation.”
4	Evaluation	“To assess the credibility of statements or other representations that are accounts or descriptions of a person’s perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion; and to assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation.”
5	Explanation	“To state and to justify that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, and contextual considerations upon which one’s results were based; and to present one’s reasoning in the form of cogent arguments.”
6	Self-regulation	“Self-consciously to monitor one’s cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results educed, particularly by applying skills in analysis, and evaluation to one’s own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one’s reasoning or one’s results.”

3. Discussion and Findings

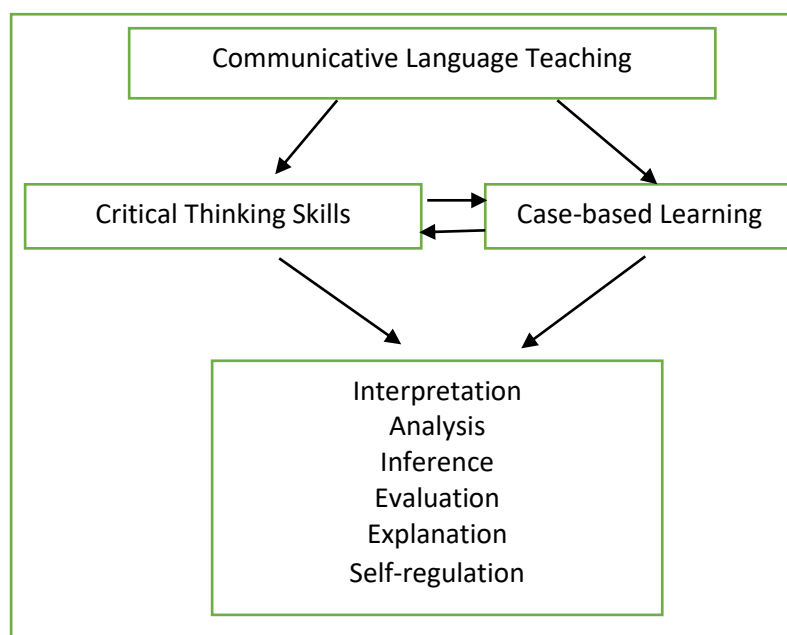


Fig 1. *Conceptual Framework*

Figure 1 is the conceptual framework used to conduct the teaching and learning process in Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication. The teaching techniques of Communication Language Teaching (CLT) is by utilising Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) and Case-based Learning (CBL). Both CTS and CBL are interrelated, whereby each component could not stand alone on its own. Using these two techniques will help the students with the interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2007) on the set of questions given to the students based on the caselet provided. Lee & Park (2016) conducted a study on 43 nursing students to investigate the effect of CBL on CTS, communication skills, problem solving skills and self-directed learning ability. A control group of 36 students participated in the study as well. The usual lesson was delivered to the control group, while the other group was given case studies to assist with the teaching and learning session. The result revealed that using case studies in the lesson enhanced their critical thinking skills and self-directed learning ability. Hence, CBL allowed the student to think critically.

In teaching and learning process, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has two kinds of approach which are direct and indirect approach (Richard, 1990). Both methods have been utilised in the classroom as students need to discuss and present within the timeframe given. The discussion is more to the indirect approach, while the presentation is the direct approach. According to Richards (2006), CLT has implied new roles for teachers and students. Classroom participation and listening to the presentation of other students are the primary concern of CLT. He also added the role of the teacher is to facilitate and monitor the students instead to correct the errors made by the students. Using CLT in English lessons can motivate the students to participate actively in the classroom. At the same time, students can show excitement and interest in the lesson that is taught even with lack of English proficiency (Yen, 2013; Fazil et al., 2018). Toro et al. (2019) investigated the use of CLT in the English classroom to 105 public school students using the mixed method approach: observation and questionnaire. The teachers emphasises on pair and group work as well as repetition and modelling. The study highlighted

that using CLT with various strategies managed to improve the students' oral skills.

Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) and Case-based Learning (CBL) are two teaching and learning techniques used in the Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication class. The major concern of including CTS is that we could teach the students how to think instead of what to think (Lochhead & Clement, 1980). In a study conducted by Miri et al. (2007) to the 57 high school students using the teaching strategies design in order to promote students' critical thinking skills, it was found that the critical thinking skills were capable of helping the students to deal with real-world problems and encourage the students to participate in the classroom discussion. Saputra et al. (2018) conducted a study examining the effectiveness of using jigsaw and problem-based learning models in developing students' critical thinking skills to 37 Indonesian students. It was found that the collaboration managed to improve students' critical thinking skills. Students were able to help each other in order to comprehend the subject matter and managed to involve actively in the discussion. McEwen (1994) examined 67 high schools business teachers in identifying effective strategies to teach critical thinking. The most effective strategy to teach CTS is by using case study or problem-solving techniques. It was deduced that by learning CTS, the teachers were involved in an open discussion promoting interactive learning, had more time to think, and improved themselves, especially in terms of thinking technique. CTS also depends widely on the base knowledge and experience owned by the students as one cannot think critically without sufficient background knowledge (Garside, 1996; Paul & Elder, 2002).

Kaur et al. (2014) explored the perception of CBL to the 80 undergraduate dental students. The students were divided into eight groups, and two CBL cases were designed and developed according to the relevant, context, knowledge and interest of the students. The discussion took place and students were given a set of questionnaire to identify their perceptions on using CBL. The study pointed out that CBL had led to deeper

learning and had motivated them to be more interested in the particular subject. In addition, using CBL can help them with their carrier in the future as they will develop the clinical decision-making skills and this is the best way to practice their clinical skills.

The findings of the study revealed that students taking the course using CLT would excel in their communication skills as this is the concern for the students who are undertaking the Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication. Here, an effective communication and presentation skills are required which involves public speaking, eye contact, voice projection, body movement, facial expression, dressing and confidence. Students should be able to deliver their presentation and engage with the audience. Their presentation will help to educate, inform and inspire their fellow friends that are also their audience. Good communication skills as well as presentation skills are needed to be excel in any profession and also the skills are important to gain a job upon graduation (Gustafson, Johnson, and Hovey, 1993). Thus, this is a good practice and learning experience for the students as there will always be room for improvement. Using CBL will allow the students to think critically. CBL and CTS are interconnected. In the Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication, the case studies are analyse using the analytical tools, fishbone or ishikawa diagram, as it can help to identify the solid action to the root cause of the problem (Liliana, 2016). Students are encouraged to think critically using the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Facione's Critical Thinking Model as the strategies needed to get a good judgement are interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation and self-regulation (Facione, 2007). Another available analytical tool is SWOT analysis as Gurel & Tat (2017) mentioned that SWOT analysis is an essential tool for situation analysis. They added that the tool is used widely in an organisation as it could help with the decision-making process and to analyse a situation.

However, background knowledge is essential in order the student to think critically (Garside, 1996; Paul & Elder, 2002) as students

must be able to use their knowledge, fact and all the data that are available so that they could gather all the information regarding the issues that they need to solve in the case studies.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication uses Critical Thinking Skills and Case-based Learning in conducting the lesson. Prior to that, an effective communication and problem solving skills are generated from enrolling this class. This subject has the whole package with its distinctiveness. It combines all the aspects needed.

Being unique, it is recommended that the pedagogy style of the Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication been introduced outside the university platform. It can be used for work training purposes or even for entrepreneur. A related language program can also be conducted using the teaching style. With its extraordinary quality, we hope Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication can inspire all the mankind.

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