

Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills Through Socratic Seminars in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This article highlights the importance to enhance Critical Thinking (CT) skills within EFL Colombian settings through the implementation of Socratic Seminars. In this regard, the authors carried out a bibliographical review in which several resources were consulted in research databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate and both international and national journal repositories, reviewing a total of 90 articles, 20 books, and 10 academic webpages. After that, 16 articles, 14 books, and 2 academic webpages were considered to sustain this research work. This article includes contributions from critical pedagogy, a taxonomy of the cognitive domain and an expert consensus of CT which support and help to comprehend these cognitive skills. Likewise, the main reason for the implementation, advantages, and limitations of CT are explained in detail in order to show how this strategy can be used in the EFL classroom. Finally, it is demonstrated that Socratic Seminars can be used by EFL teachers as a strategy to enhance CT skills among students. In point of fact, the Seminars are deemed to help students not only develop their higher order thinking skills but also to obtain other benefits in their language learning process.

Keywords: bloom's taxonomy, critical pedagogy, critical thinking, EFL

1. Introduction

Current pedagogy in higher education emphasizes the need to work on some particular skills which might help learners to face different situations in life and have a greater impact in society. In this regard, Rao (2003) highlighted what the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states: “Higher education institutions should educate students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyse problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities.” (p. 22). Hence, Critical Thinking (CT) is one of the skills educators and administrators might consider since it is an essential component that learners need to develop and enhance for them to become socially responsible citizens that contribute to positive changes in society. Thus, students must be educated to be critical thinkers from early stages; Facione (2013) stated that CT experts have proposed an important educational reform requiring curricular, pedagogical and assessment strategies correlated to CT skills at all levels of education.

On their part, Chaux, Lleras and Velasquez (2004) remarked that critical thinking is part of the citizen competences (cognitive competences) which are set of cognitive, emotional and communicative knowledge and abilities which make possible that the citizens behave in a constructive manner in society. Likewise, CT is defined as the capacity to question and evaluate the validity of any belief, affirmation or source of information in order to question what happens in society, identify the current reality and how it could change. Thus, the National Ministry of Colombian education (2006) stated that including citizen competences in the teaching-learning process is not a matter of withdrawing from teaching the specific knowledge or components of each subject; on the contrary, it refers to take advantage of the topics and opportunities of interaction to contribute to the citizen education.

Nowadays worldwide EFL educators intend to include CT in their teaching practices since they notice its importance in the educational domain. Asgharheidari and Tahriri (2015) found that EFL Iranian teachers’ attitude and knowledge about CT is positive. Nevertheless, most of the teachers expressed that EFL Iranian students’ lack of the ability of thinking critically. As for Colombia, Nuñez & Téllez (2012) expressed that there is a lack of students’ willingness to express their points of view when participating in EFL Colombian classes. In this regard, teachers could include CT which might be adapted to communicative trends in language teaching. This might not only contribute in the teaching/learning process but also in the individual and social growth.

2. Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy (CP) has been grounded on the foundation of Critical Theory. The leading author of this educational prospect in South America has been Paulo Freire, in his book entitled “pedagogy of the oppressed” written in 1970, he emphasized the need to find a different education that attempts to free human beings of social oppression which prevent them of addressing social inequality and injustice. Nevertheless, through time CP has not been easily defined; for Shor (2012), CP or empowering education as he defined it, is “a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for

multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other” (p.15). Thus, an empowering education plays a role inside and outside classroom. It places learners as active participants that should recognize and respect others in their diversity and multiculturalism not only in the school but in society itself.

McLaren (2014) pointed out that school perpetuate or reproduce social relationships and attitudes. Therefore, concerns that exist in the outside world such as intolerance, disrespect, injustice or discrimination in gender, race, age, sexual orientation etc. prevail inside the school and eventually they persist outside it. In this subject, McLaren (2014) stated that “Critical pedagogy attempts to provide teachers and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools actually play within a race-, class-, and gender-divided society (...)” (p.189). By his part, Giroux (2004) named CP as Radical Pedagogy which is seen as a kind of political intervention that attempts to create possibilities for social change seeing learning as an opportunity in which knowledge can struggle for individual and society’s rights and justice. In the language teaching domain Crookes (2012) proposed that CP is a perspective in curriculum and instructional practices from which language teaching can be grounded to advance promoting social justice.

Up to now, authors have variously defined CP but they all have agreed on its main purpose, which is to cause a greater and better impact on the personal growth and eventually on society.

2.1 Critical Thinking

According to Garrison and Loredó (2002) thinking was defined as the organization and modification of information gathered in the memory so as to generate new information. For example, thanks to thinking, words that are gathered in our memory can be combined to produce new sentences never said before. Therefore, the thinking process is present in everyday life of human beings.

Nonetheless, it is important to differentiate between merely thinking from critical thinking. Since the former might refer to every thought that cross people mind such as desires, fears, experiences, wishes, ideas etc., which are not necessarily well-structured or well-founded thoughts while the latter refers to structured thinking supported of beliefs, ideas, affirmations, arguments and assumptions that have been considered and most importantly assessed thoroughly by the own thinking. Thus, Garrison and Loredó (2002) classified thinking in goal-directed and undirected thinking. The former is an attempt to achieve a particular purpose, so through this kind of thinking people solve problems, formulate and follow rules and establish and struggle to accomplish goals. The latter consists of thoughts that cross the mind without focusing on a purpose or plan; examples of this kind of thinking are fantasies, illusions, desires, etc. Consequently, CT might be an example of goal-directed thinking.

The origin of CT possibly goes back to ancient times when wises and philosophers worked on cultivating knowledge and understanding how it can properly emerge. On this subject, Yousefi and Mohammadi (2016) mentioned that Socrates realized that people had an “empty

rhetoric” when expressing their claims to knowledge. They had inappropriate evidence, confused meaning or self-contradictory beliefs. Hence, he considered essential that people could seek evidence, closely examine reasoning and assumptions, analyze basic concepts and consider implications of what is said and done and avoid accepting everything as true. For this reason, Socrates created a method of questioning called Socratic questioning from which he pointed out the need in thinking for clarity and logical consistency.

Through time, experts have not agreed on a unique definition of CT. Ennis (2011) stated that “Critical thinking is reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do.” (p.10) In other words, he expresses that CT is constituted of rationality or the search for reasons and reflection in order to make decisions that will have an impact in the own perceptions and actions. On their part, Paul and Elder (2006) expressed that CT is analyzing and evaluating thinking itself so as to improve it. In other words, CT is a process that considers information gathered in human beings’ mind to manipulate it so as to support beliefs or actions. Davies (2015) added that CT is much more than having skills to infer, reason, and evaluate including dispositions as a very significant aspect of CT since this is part of human beings’ attitudinal aspects or affective states which demonstrate that people assume a position as well as motivate and prepare themselves for thinking critically. Some examples of dispositions are: respect for alternative viewpoints, a desire to be well-informed, open mildness, intellectual humility etc. therefore, being a critical thinker also implies to have CT disposition or attitude to adjust habits that will contribute to think critically.

After trying to define CT, one common aspect is that CT is the thinking process guided by well-structured reasoning. Nevertheless, to understand how this concept has been included in the teaching – learning process, it is necessary to address a taxonomy of the cognitive domain and CT as a statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction.

2.1.1 Bloom’s Taxonomy

Huitt (2011) summarized the component of Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy in the table below which includes the cognitive component (level), definition, sample verbs, and sample behaviors:

Table 1. The cognitive components of Bloom’s taxonomy (Huitt, 2011, p.1-2)

LEVEL	DEFINITION	SAMPLE VERBS	SAMPLE BEHAVIORS
KNOWLEDGE	Student recalls or recognizes	Write	The student will define the 6 levels of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain.
	information,	List	
	ideas, and principles in the	Label	
	approximate form in which they were	Name	
	learned.	State	
		Define	

COMPREHENSION	Student translates, comprehends, or interprets information based on prior learning.	Explain Summarize Paraphrase Describe Illustrate	The student will explain the purpose of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain.
APPLICATION	Student selects, transfers, and uses data and principles to complete a problem or task with a minimum of direction	Use Compute Solve Demonstrate Apply Construct	The student will write an instructional objective for each level of Bloom's taxonomy.
ANALYSIS	Student distinguishes, classifies, and relates the assumptions, hypotheses, evidence, or structure of a statement or question.	Analyze Categorize Compare Contrast Separate	The student will compare and contrast the cognitive and affective domains.
SYNTHESIS	Student originates, integrates, and combines ideas into a product, plan or proposal that is new to him or her.	Create Design Hypothesize Invent Develop	The student will design a classification scheme for writing educational objectives that combines the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.
EVALUATION	Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria	Judge Recommend Critique Justify	The student will judge the effectiveness of writing objectives using Bloom's taxonomy.

Bloom's taxonomy starts from the most basic cognitive skill which is getting to know a specific content and finishes with the most challenging thinking skill which is evaluating. Now, to have a better understanding about how Bloom's taxonomy connects to CT is important to address a statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction in CT.

2.1.2 Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction

Many scholars and experts have intended to include CT in educational settings' curriculum as an essential aspect that should integrate education. In this regard, a group of 46 experts from philosophy, education, and social science fields was congregated so as to work on a consensus of CT regarding the educational assessment and instruction. This was carried out through a qualitative research methodology named as Delphi Model in which experts should participate answering several rounds of questions thoughtfully. From this process, recommendations on both the cognitive skill and dispositional dimension of CT as well as on its instruction and assessment resulted including the development of CT curriculum.

Facione (2013) explained the following remarkable aspects of what was agreed in the consensus:

- Not all thinking is CT. In fact, along with creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, etc. CT is a form of higher-order thinking skill since it requires more complex cognitive processing than others.
- Two dimensions are proposed: a skill dimension and a dispositional dimension of CT.
- Interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation are the core cognitive skills of CT.
- Experts agree one can develop one's own CT in different ways, examine and evaluate the own cognitive processes through metacognition, learn how to think objectively and increase one's information and life experiences.
- To evaluate the acceptability of a CT assessment, strategy or instrument validity, construct validity, reliability, and fairness should be considered.

This consensus has helped institutions to clarify and define aspects when including CT in their curriculums since teachers and students can invigorate not only the cognitive process but dispositions that will help them to act beyond the scenario present in the classroom transforming their personal and civic lives. In this regard, Facione (2013) claimed that people with dispositions have been likely to apply CT skills appropriately in their personal and civic life more than those who have just worked on CT cognitive skills omitting the dispositional aspect.

Thus, a critical thinker must be curious regarding different concerns and issues that surround him; seek opportunities to use CT; look for significant information to support his arguments; be well informed, open-minded, flexible, fair, honest, persistent, prudent; demonstrate self-confidence when reasoning; apply criteria, among others. Therefore, being a critical thinker suggests developing the appropriate CT skills and dispositions.

2.1.3 CT Activities in the EFL Classrooms

Finn (2015) took into account Crookes and Lenher's principles regarding the purpose of CP in ESL/EFL classroom which is about "the simultaneous development of English communicative abilities and the ability to apply them to developing a critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters." This means that through CT, EFL students not only will foster communicative skills but most importantly will develop critical awareness to address issues of society. For this reason, teachers might need to be informed and learn about how to include CT in their practices. Certainly, the ideal CT instructor will create a propitious environment when integrating CT instruction in any subject.

According to Facione (2013), there were several ways in which we could teach CT skills, explicitly or implicitly. For example: in an explicit sense, the teacher could describe how procedures of activities are going to be applied and executed, explaining and modeling their correct use, and justifying their application. Besides, learners could be exposed to different

situations where the desired procedure is evoked and teacher could provide learners with constructive feedback. Therefore, CT activities must elicit the participation of students and give the opportunity to interact expressing their points of view, making judgments, inferring and identifying arguments in order to address social issues or concerns that are present in their settings and worldwide. To this end, Socratic Seminars might be included in EFL classrooms as tools that can help students enhance CT skills.

3. Advantages and limitations of implementing CT in EFL classrooms

3.1 Advantages of implementing CT in EFL classrooms

3.1.1 Interaction

According to Shor (2012), one advantage is that the classroom becomes a scenario of “free speech” because it allows students to express in all ways exchanging thoughts, feelings and experiences carrying out a critical study of themselves, their society and their academic subjects. He added that “In a participatory, collaborative class, conflicts and complains can be expressed openly and negotiated mutually, which increases the possibility of solving them or at least maintaining a working relationship in the group” (p.24). Consequently, communication and interaction are the core of the class that might be useful even at the moment of solving problems and differences that might be present among students and teacher-students’ relationships.

For instance, in Colombia, a research project called “Critical Thinking in the EFL Classroom: The Search for a Pedagogical Alternative to Improve English Learning” was carried out at “Universidad Externado de Colombia”. In the study, some English teachers designed and implemented units that comprised CT activities. Once they were implemented, some positive aspects were noticed: the tasks promoted more interaction and students were more motivated to speak (Pineda, 2004).

3.1.2 Enhancing Thinking and Language Skills

According to Oxford (2001), an ideal ESL communication is present when listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interwoven during the teaching-learning process. This integration can be possible with Socratic Seminars since learners have the chance to read in order to prepare their interventions in the seminar, to speak and listen during the dialogue in the seminar, and to write a reflection after it. Therefore, apart from working on the four language skills inside the EFL classroom Heard et al. (2020) explained that teaching CT in EFL classrooms can allow learners to enhance and improve core critical thinking skills such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation.

3.1.3 Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation and Values Development

Bearing in mind another benefit, students can become autonomous of their own learning through self-assessment and self-regulation. Similarly, CT might unite and congregate students with different points of view which promote values as respect and tolerance (Facione, 2013). This additionally will promote a propitious environment when learning.

3.2 Limitations of Implementing CT in EFL Classrooms

3.2.1 Negative feelings

The implementation of CT can also cause negative impacts and if these are not addressed, they might hinder educational purposes. One of this is anxiety and defensiveness that can result from the speaking event in the seminar that might take place in the classroom (Shor, 2012). Nevertheless, to overcome this situation, teachers might include strategies and activities that produce a non-threaten environment; for example, speaking pair and group work can be included (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Thus, learners can feel less anxious and defensive interacting with their peers before doing it in front all the class.

Also, in CT instruction, topics of discussion are fundamentally issues which include normative, moral, ethical or public, and political dimensions (Facione, 2013). Accordingly, teachers must be careful when deciding what topics to choose if not students might find them boring and lack of interest in the classroom. Thus, teachers need to know their students and negotiate which kind of topics could be addressed so that they can feel comfortable when carrying out the pre, during, and post-seminar tasks and activities.

3.2.2 Low English Proficiency Level

Another limitation might be that students do not have the appropriate language skills to carry out the tasks or activities proposed. As a reaction to this, teachers must include different types of tasks and activities bearing in mind students' needs and skills so that pupils can work on them progressively. In fact, Kumaravadivelu (2003) expressed that particularity is a key aspect in a post-method era since teachers must consider the context where the teaching-learning process takes place.

3.3.3 What is the panorama in EFL Colombian academic settings at the moment of enhancing CT?

Currently, Colombian government has directly adapted standards from the Common European Framework (CEF) evidently created under different circumstances and purposes from Colombia intending to achieve "bilingualism" (MEN, 2006). In this regard, Ayala and Álvarez (2005) claimed that academic administrators have tried to adopt some international standards related to foreign language teaching and fit them into the Colombian context regardless the real conditions in Colombian institutions.

For instance, in Colombian primary school students are exposed to English one hour a week and in some schools, there is not time assigned to it. In secondary school students are exposed to two or four hours a week assuming that during this period they can achieve the standards proposed (MEN, 2006). But, it might not be useful and beneficial at the moment of learning English language. Considering this issue, Lightbown & Spada (2013) asserted that no matter how long a learner has spent in learning a foreign language since the time devoted is little to get an appropriate proficiency level. Thus, a learner might feel discouraged because their efforts are poor and fruitless.

Moreover, another negative condition that can be highlighted in Colombia is large classes

with a range of 25 to 50 students per class (British Council, 2015). On this subject, Ehrenberg et al. (2001) stated that “the number of students in a class has the potential to affect how much is learned in a number of different ways, for example, it could affect how students interact with each other—” (p.1). Therefore, this is a negative condition for students’ interaction, a very important aspect at the moment of learning a foreign language. Considering the previous information, EFL teaching/learning process in Colombia might be a difficult task when the expectations are very high and conditions are low. Therefore, the concern of working on specific aspects of the subject to get good results expected from Colombian government might prevent students and teachers to see the foreign language as a tool to include and enhance CT in EFL classrooms.

However, at the present time worldwide EFL educators intend to include CT in their teaching since they have realized how important in the educational domain it is. Thus, Asgharheidari and Tahriri (2015) argued that EFL Iranian teachers’ attitude toward CT is positive. Moreover, they discovered that teachers have a clear idea of what CT is and that they suggest receiving more training to foster their ability in teaching CT. Furthermore, they expressed that this matter is an essential aspect of EFL Teaching and that it should be included into the curriculum. Nevertheless, most of the teachers expressed that EFL Iranian students’ lack of the ability of thinking critically.

As for Colombia, there is a lack of students’ willingness to express their points of view when participating in EFL class. Likewise, they do not have the enough linguistic ability to carry out oral tasks that involve argumentation (Nuñez & Téllez, 2012); accordingly, Colombian teachers should include CT to work on the English teaching/learning process and to contribute with students’ individual and social growth. One tool to achieve this end could be the Socratic or Paideia Seminars.

4. Socratic or Paideia Seminars

To start:

“Socratic questioning is disciplined questioning that can be used to pursue thought in many directions and for many purposes: to explore complex ideas, to get to the truth of things, to open up issues and problems, to uncover assumptions, to analyze concepts, to distinguish what is known from what is not known, and to follow out logical implications of thought” (Paul & Elder, 2016, p.1).

For this reason, Socratic questioning has to be differentiated from just questioning since the former is deeper and well-organized and inquiries can be directed by involving clear thinking purposes expecting that people infer information, clarify judgments, analyze concepts, and so on. Paul and Elder (2009) added that Socratic questioning can be used for two main purposes in teaching. One of this is to probe student’s thinking as well as to help them be aware of what they know or understand and what they do not. The other is to promote student’s thinking skills through Socratic questioning so as to help them acquire tools of Socratic dialogue for inquiring themselves or others in their daily lives.

Paul and Elder (2008) argued that there are three categories of Socratic questioning:

spontaneous, exploratory and focused. Firstly, spontaneous questioning is related to unplanned inquiries that arise from dialogues elicited in the classroom especially when unforeseen situations occur. This is very useful when students are interested in a specific topic and they want to address it immediately; when they raise an important topic or when teachers notice that there is a need for clarification of some aspects. Secondly, exploratory Socratic questioning helps to find out what pupils know or think with regard to a variety of issues. So, it tries to help pupils explore deeply about a topic by defining or contrasting it. Thirdly, focused Socratic questioning is centered on specific topics, issues and contents or all parts of curriculum. Through this kind of questioning students can clarify, sort, analyze, and evaluate thoughts and perspectives. On these bases, teachers can use Socratic questioning in order to promote CT since through this tool, students can interpret, infer, analyze, evaluate, explain and even evaluate their own and others' thinking skills that are part of CT (Facione, 2013).

In order to help students to learn how to interact using Socratic questioning, teachers can include into their lessons Socratic Seminars currently named by some experts as Paideia Seminars. Roberts and Billings (2012) defined Paideia seminars as “a collaborative intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text (p.16)”. Thus, through seminars students and the teacher can interact dialoguing and posing questions that will lead them to think deeply about any subject. The objective of this seminar focuses on thinking and communication in fact:

“During the Paideia Seminar, participants practice intellectual skills by analyzing the ideas and values in the text. In this way, the Paideia Seminar is a process for modeling and practicing critical thinking. When engaged in a seminar, the individual participant is witness both to the thinking process of other individuals and to the collective thinking process of the group. Both of these can serve as educative models for clear, flexible, coherent thinking. The Paideia Seminar is also designed to support collaborative discourse, and therefore, requires that students practice complex social skills. Participants listen actively and respond respectfully.” (Roberts & Billings, 2012, p.17)

From this basis, Paideia or Socratic Seminar works on the cognitive dimension as well as in the dispositional dimension of CT (Facione, 2013), all in order to find a clearer, deeper and coherent thinking while working at the same time in some values.

Teachers have to consider some steps so as to carry out Paideia Seminar. They are mentioned by Roberts and Billings (2012):

- Identifying objectives
- Identifying ideas and values
- Selecting a text
- Composing questions
- Designing pre- and post-seminar content activities

- Refining pre- and post-seminar process scripts
- Reflecting on the seminar cycle.

Therefore, teachers and students must consider the previous stages so as to carry out the seminar properly and have positive outcomes with regard to the objectives set. All in order to enhance CT and take advantage of other benefits it might provide.

4.1 Steps of Socratic or Paideia Seminars

According to Roberts and Billings (2012), in the first step intellectual, social and curricular objective were set bearing in mind the clear purpose of why carrying out the seminar. In the second step ideas and values will be included; they can be related to issues that are presented worldwide since CT addresses these kinds of topics, so some of the themes that can be included are: war, discrimination, poverty, etc. The next step is selecting a text referring to printed and non-printed materials like paintings, poems, essays, writings, etc. In the fourth step, open-ended, thought- provoking and clear questions have to be created. These questions can be used in order to clarify aspects, ask for evidence or supports, go in depth, consider relevant information, find out how logic is what is said, point out if it is an important concern, extend the perceptions or views, and evaluate oneself.

Once questions have been planned, the fifth step is designing pre- and post-seminar content. In this step, participants will need to prepare themselves for the dialogue. In the pre-stage there are two faces that include content and process. In the content face, this content should be associated with the objectives of the seminar. In the first place, the teacher introduces the objectives and the issue through a warm-up activity so that students can start thinking about it. Next, the teacher distributes the text and provides students with some strategies to interpret it. In the process face, students explore the text.

On one hand, pre-seminar content activities' purpose is that participants find information about: who, what, when, and where—so that “why” can be addressed during the seminar. On the other hand, post-seminar content activities' purpose is that students synthesize information expressed during the dialogue in the seminar. Hence post-seminar process purpose is that students work on comprehending and understanding deeply what has been addressed in the seminar expressing their own views.

After pre- and post-seminar content face, the sixth step is refining pre- and post-seminar process. In this part, students need to be organized facing each other probably in a circle so that they can make eye contact during the seminar. Moreover, names of participants can be written in some pieces of papers or cards so that everyone can see it; in this regard, students address each other by telling their classmates' names when necessary, promoting respect. As a ritualistic opening before every seminar the facilitator expresses the definition and purpose of the seminar and a full- description of roles and responsibilities of participants. Next, self-assessment takes place; students need to think how they should participate in dialogues whit large classes arriving at some conclusions, for example, one person speaks at a time. They can also set individual goals that can be included on a checklist; moreover, group goal or goals are displayed on a chart.

Post-seminar process final stage gives the opportunity to each participant and the group to self-assess at the end of the seminar. In this part participants should revise the goal that have set in the pre-seminar process and notice if they have achieved or not, then they should write a note about how they performed in relation to their goal. The facilitator also moves the post-seminar process onto a discussion about the common goal of the group to realize if it was or not achieved. In this stage participants can also express their personal assessment with the whole group. Finally, in this stage, the facilitator reminds students to think about their participation and how it can be improved for future seminars. It has to be highlighted that the facilitator has to take notes during the seminar regarding students' thinking, listening, and speaking making use of a map.

Then, when the teacher wants to grade the seminar, he should use pre- and post-seminar data. After all, the final step is teacher reflection. It starts by revising the objectives set for the seminar; in this stage participant self-assessments, post-seminar writing as well as the seminar mapping and notes will be considered. All the appreciations and conclusion need to be considered for next seminars (Robert and Billings, 2012). Therefore, for carrying out Socratic Seminars in the EFL classroom properly it is important to take into account the steps to be followed as well as the roles of participants in it.

4.2 Roles of Participants in Socratic or Paideia Seminars

The facilitator and participants are the ones who carry out the dialogue. The former has certain responsibilities such as introducing the seminar, providing clear instructions, distributing materials which might occur days previous to the seminar. During the seminar the facilitator should budget some time for self-assessment (1-2 minutes at the beginning), listen carefully in order to ask follow-up questions, monitor the talk-distribution and map the discussion. In fact, regarding talk distribution Robert and Billings, (2012) highlighted Danielewicz et al. and Nystrand's statements in which "The sequence of talk in typical classroom discussion is: teacher-student-teacher-student, etc. In a dialogue, the sequence of talk is more like: teacher-student-student-student, etc. (p.54)." given more importance to interaction among students. One of facilitator's goals is that all participants experience better understanding of themselves, the text, and others.

Likewise, participants have responsibilities, they must actively read, take notes, generate questions, set personal goal, contribute to achieve group goal, be engaged in the dialogue process, self-assess and write the post-seminar work. Consequently, Socratic Seminars are an essential tool when thinking about including CT skills while at the same time students interact, integrate the language skills, self-assess, and promote values as respect and tolerance.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Once some literature about enhancing CT skills through Socratic or Paideia seminars has been addressed, it can be concluded that it is essential that teachers consider promoting and maximizing opportunities for learners to develop their abilities identifying and analyzing issues, posing and answering questions, arguing, explaining and expressing their opinions

through strong arguments, and interpreting, inferring and understanding others' points of view. Moreover, Abraham (2014) stated that in the 21st century teachers must think about the necessity to address a matter that not only has to do with enhancing language learning or thinking skills but that also implies the integral human development, educating citizens that might contribute to social transformation. To this end, teachers should include activities that will enhance CT skills like Socratic or Paideia Seminar. This tool allows students and teachers to interact through dialogues, addressing social issues. As a matter of fact, this not only will enhance CT thinking and dispositional skills but also will create an appropriate environment for teaching-learning by fostering some advantages such as improving interaction, integration of language skills, autonomy, self-assessment, self-regulation and promoting values as respect and tolerance while at the same time they raise social awareness.

However, Murawski (2014) explained that there are some limitations at the moment of applying CT in EFL classrooms. First of all, students can feel anxiety and defensiveness when speaking. Also, some of them cannot be engaged with the topics and some others cannot be able of interacting due to the lack of appropriate language skills. Even when it might happen, Socratic Seminars might be useful to overcome these concerns since in the first place it creates a propitious environment fostering the dialogue and not the discussion, promoting at the same time the importance of respecting and tolerating others. Besides, this tool allows both students and teachers to decide on the issue they want to address agreeing on which topic can be appropriated for them so that they can feel comfortable with it.

In addition, Pineda (2004) considered that in EFL Colombian classrooms learners of intermediate level will significantly profit using this tool since they might have the required language skills to interact properly being able to keep a dialogue on. This does not mean that teachers cannot implement it at beginner level; in fact, they can do it provided that they adapted it considering the context where learning is taking place and assuming that this will be more challenging for students and themselves.

For example: considering that in Colombian high schools few hours are devoted to English. This seminar might not be implemented at every opportunity but as an alternative assessment for a final assignment. However, teachers can make students start working in previous classes by including Socratic questioning on the lessons. Regarding large classes, at the moment of implementing the seminar students can form an inner and outer circle. In the inner circle students who are going to dialogue are placed. Therefore, they could be assessed considering their speaking skill. In the outer circle the students who are going to listen and take notes about their classmates' dialogue are placed, and they could be assessed considering their writing production in the post-seminar content activity.

In the next Seminar students will interchange positions; the ones who are in the inner circle in the current seminar are going to be in the outer circle in the next seminar and vice versa. Regarding the lack of appropriate language skills, the importance of this tool is that students can have the chance to prepare themselves for the seminar and that the teacher can serve as support to help them prepare properly. So, at the moment of interacting, they would feel more confident. In this regard, Socratic Seminars can be adapted, depending the context in which

teaching/learning process is taking place so that they can be useful in the EFL classroom.

After all, McLaren (2014) explained that critical thinking might not be considered as merely teaching or working on thinking skills. He expressed that the most important aspect is to take into account the purpose for what they are taught. Indeed, CT must empower learners to assume a role in society as individuals that work on transforming concerns and issues benefiting society itself.

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