

## **From Passive Learning to Critical Thinking**

The Twelfth Skills Conference  
The American University in Cairo  
January 23-25, 2007

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The Date of Acceptance 9/5/2007

### **Abstract**

Many Iraqi students are reluctant to actively participate in the English language classroom. This reluctance is attributed to a number of factors, above which is students' lack of thinking skills necessary to express their points of view. This eventually results in passive learning, a real problem in English language learning in Iraq.

A need for educational reforms and innovations seems essential. These involve developing relevant teaching materials, adopting learner-centered approach, promoting learner autonomy, and enhancing critical thinking.

This study is hoped to assist teachers of English to initiate change and foster the expansion of thinking, and adopt various new strategies to increase classroom participation. The paper also aims to enable Iraqi students to be active thinkers rather than passive attendees.

- Learning process;
- The precarious situations in Iraq.

Students' classroom attitude is the first problem facing language teachers. Students were taught to view teachers as the embodiment of knowledge. Contradicting the teacher's opinion was often considered an offence; Cam Le (2005:2) refers to this unequal classroom relationship as "an inherent cultural disposition", which can be found in many Eastern societies.

Further, language instruction approach in Iraq is teacher-centred at all levels which makes the teacher dominate the whole scene; students are mere recipients. Accordingly, the authority and control language teachers exercise can discourage and hinder students from expressing their opinions freely or communicate and participate effectively.

### **Introduction**

Beginning, there is a prevailing belief among English language teachers in Iraq that many of their students are reluctant to actively participate in the English language classroom by questioning ideas or expressing their opinions. Their reluctance could be attributed to a number of factors like students' passive classroom attitudes, lack of thinking skills necessary to express their points of view and the like. This will definitely result in passive learning. There are, on the other hand, very few bright students who seize every opportunity to engage in discussions and are brilliant thinkers.

Among the factors which impede active participation and critical thinking are:

- Students' classroom attitude;
- Instruction approach;

educators believe it is high time for a renaissance and a rebirth of thinking in the curriculum. For today, in the age of information, Iraqi students like students all over the world need to be equipped with skills that enable them to think for themselves and be self-initiating, self-modifying, and self-directing in order to make up for the previous painful decades of wars and sanctions. They need to require the capacity to learn and change consciously, continuously and quickly. It is hoped that this will enable them to function effectively and reach high standards of achievements. They deserve the best.

Curriculum is definitely the most important component of school reform. Costa (2001) points out that it is the central focus around which all other variables are constructed including student achievement, professional development, teacher evaluation, textbook and media selection, and assessment. Curriculum changes require education to develop individuals with the knowledge, problem solving skills, cognitive processes, and habits of mind necessary to engage in lifelong learning. The major aim must be to make learning and instruction more reflective, more complex, and more relevant to society's and students' diverse needs and interests now and in the future. This means that students must require skills that cannot be gained by learning content alone, or solving fixed problems. Rather, they must anticipate what might happen and search for creative solutions, (ibid). Hence, if teachers taught mere academic subjects, and students were evaluated on how well they learned the minute sub-skills in those content areas, all efforts would be misguided and schooling would be aimless.

Furthermore, there is a great need in this society for the new

The other factor is students' improper learning process, namely, their dependence on parroting information of their textbooks which hinders active or critical thinking. Teachers' handouts which sometimes replace the textbooks are learnt by rote for classroom participation, and for the examinations with the main goal to get a good grade.

The last but not the least factor which is somehow recent but it affects active learning and critical thinking in Iraqi educational institutions, and which is beyond remedy at least for the coming few years, is the precarious circumstances surrounding the learners beginning with bombing and shooting all day long and ending with kidnapping, threatening, and forced emigration from one's own house, quarter or town. Similarly, the inconsistent attendance of the students because of blocked streets, threatened schools, and scared parents have profound influences on classroom participation and active thinking abilities of Iraqi students.

Regardless of this passivity, how reserved students are, and the precarious situation in Iraq, teachers of English are invited to overcome this problem and adopt some new strategies to increase classroom participation and critical thinking, since the classroom and the materials "play crucial roles in exposing learners to the language" (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998:171).

This study attempts to discuss this problem in some detail and present some recommendations for both Iraqi teachers and learners.

### **Educational Reform**

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the current quality of education, and a need for educational reforms and innovations seems essential. The reconstruction of education in Iraq is an enormous challenge. Professional

EFL materials, nationally produced, focus mainly on the local culture and experience of the students. It is believed that relevant contexts encourage students to show interest, and allow teachers to deliver more effective lessons. Many researchers like Stevick (1976), Brown (1994) and Dat (2003) support using localized English teaching materials because they present students with real-life and culturally familiar language context. However, it is believed that exposing students to materials that focus on the cultures of English speaking countries is also helpful because it gives the opportunity to compare and contrast the two cultures, expand the students' background knowledge, and affect their curiosity and motivation to explore new things, (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999, cited in Cam Le, 2005).

Alptekin (2002), is in line with this view and points out that learning a foreign language is "a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers." One goal of foreign language instruction is to expose students to new languages and new cultures in order to prepare them to become global citizens in the future, who value human diversity of other cultures, races, religions, sectarians, and political and economic views. Hence, involving students in discussions, where they compare and contrast their own views against those of the books' will help create an entertaining educational environment, and employ clear and respectful dialogue to solve problems in peaceful ways .

To what extent have these concepts been realized in the Iraqi schools? It is regretful that language teachers ignore giving students chance or time to activate their curiosity or

graduates to value truth, goodness, tolerance, balance, creativity, interdependence, and collaboration. Hence, the new curriculum must be open and flexible enough to accommodate the new perspectives. It has to encourage critical understanding and open-mindedness and waken interest and kindle enthusiasm especially after these long years of wars and sufferings which have almost destroyed people's minds and souls.

To achieve these aims, four key areas seem to emerge suggesting an agenda for action in moving towards a more "thought-full" curriculum for a more "thought-filled" world. These areas involve relevant teaching materials development, learner-centered approach, learner autonomy, and critical thinking. Each of these areas will be discussed in relevance to the Iraqi situation.

### **1. Relevant teaching materials developments**

The study of English as a foreign language in Iraq is compulsory, starting from the age of 11 through 18, at the rate of forty minutes four times a week at the primary level and five times at the intermediate and preparatory levels. The English language materials used are of two categories: (1) nationally and locally produced teaching materials for primary, intermediate and preparatory stages, and (2) mainly British and American produced materials with original works of literature for undergraduate and post graduate levels for the Colleges of Education, Arts and Languages. The textbooks have not been changed for almost three decades, except for the primary level which witnessed a little change in the last four years. The Structural Approach to teaching and learning is followed at the intermediate and preparatory levels, and lecturing in higher education.

introducing new textbooks once every three or four years, giving the teacher more freedom in teaching his subject by adding or skipping some material, and giving the students the opportunity to participate and develop their cognitive skills.

Regretfully, the same scenario continues at the university. Passing the examination and getting a certificate is the students' main concern. However, the situation is different here; the graduates are going to be mainly language teachers. Although their control of the target language is essential and prior, they must require the capacity to be creative, open minded, and decisive. In short they have to learn to act as teachers. For achieving these two goals, college teachers have to find ways of helping students to enhance their learning process by connecting what is in the book to what is in their minds, i.e., to express and exchange ideas, to think of and to analyse situations. This can be achieved by supplying activities to help make the language learning process a more affective experience, keeping in mind that students are feeling individuals who have a need to express and exchange opinions and not just recipients of others' views or the books'. Works of literature, Carn Le (2006) suggests, could be manipulated to experience not only the beautiful language but also to sympathize with characters, and to engage with the emotional situations that relate to students' actual life. This will help students to react to moving experiences by exploring their feelings and personality. Hence, teaching materials should be carefully selected for their cognitive and emotional stimulation. In addition, literary books, i.e., novels, dramas and poetry used as textbooks need to be replaced by other works perhaps once every two or three years. The aim behind this change is to avoid

invite them to ask questions or elaborate the context. Moreover, many teachers forget the importance of developing students' self-esteem or self-confidence as language learners and users, (Macintyre, Dornyei, Clement, and Noels, 1988). Their major focus on teaching the academic subjects and preparing their students for the examinations take all their time. Consequently, they ignore providing entertaining and educational environment or creating life-long learners of English, (Schindler 2006). Teachers are always complaining of shortage of time and the detailed material they are teaching. It is true that they are being pressured for immediate, measurable results on standardized performances as Colvin & Helfand (2000) explain, but the present instruction which implies parroting information, as equivalent to language acquisition, results in graduating students who lack any control of the target language, and are uninformed and unskilled. This problem is getting worse and worse every year.

Viewing students as absorbers of knowledge, and giving them textbooks, handouts, exercises and lectures to help them learn the content, is consistent with Ausubel's (1968) approach to receptive learning in which the student must master a body of knowledge from a textbook in a meaningful manner and his main goal is a good grade. Unfortunately this is the image of the Iraqi learners in the last two decades.

However, this misguided efforts of increasing reliance on completing the textbook, or on test scores, are the antithesis of the desire to make learning and instruction more reflective, more entertaining, and more relevant to society's and students' diverse needs and interests. The solutions for this dilemma as seen by the researcher can be achieved by

classrooms by informal language and hence increasing collaboration, discussion, and self-expression.

Finally, the introduction of a department notice board where EFL students write and display their own articles, comments, poems, or advertisements can be another source for purposeful writing and communication. A newsletter with contributions from the teachers and students is a further method for encouraging communication which Iraqi students badly need.

### **Enhancing Language Learning and Teaching**

Approaches to language teaching and learning have changed. There are several modern approaches available for teachers and learners to utilize and adapt. Bruner, 1996 (cited in Lipton and Wellman, in Costa, 2001) argues that "different approaches to learning and different forms of instruction – from imitation, to instruction, to discovery, to collaboration– reflect differing beliefs and assumptions about the learner –from actor, to knower, to private experiencers, to collaborative thinkers." These changes in approaches tried to shift classrooms from language learning to language acquisition environments (Krashen, 1981). Furthermore, the internal processes of second language acquisition are consistent with constructive models of learning (Met, 1995). Students are builders of knowledge –not recorders of information– and learning is a holistic, meaning-making process. The new model of teaching needed in the classroom values risk-taking, welcomes conjecture, and sees error making as inevitable and necessary (Corson , 1999 cited in Rojas, 2001)

Nun (1995), on the other hand, offers teachers advice on creating a new teaching/learning environment:

giving the students the opportunities to rely on handouts of the previous years and use them for memorizing the events or characters. Teachers of literature also need to widen their views by teaching a range of works rather than sticking to the same books every year. The classic novels *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence and *Hard Times* by Dickens, for instance, have been used as textbooks by college students for more than 40 years now. Testing, another issue, seems awkward since the teacher finds himself repeating almost the same questions every year.

The other important factor that involves language students in the learning process and helps them enhance their language learning and communicate in English is the inclusion of informal discourse features such as colloquial language, comments, and the like, (Cam Le, 2006). This will help learners experience the type of natural conversation that happens regularly in social situations and prepare them to be active participants in conversation inside and outside the classroom. There are many sources available nowadays from which both teachers and students can utilize, including satellites programmes, the internet, and the radio. It is helpful to listen to some discussion expressing views and counterpart views, or participate in the internet discussions on certain topics of interest to the learners and record the material for further discussion in the classrooms.

Visiting lecturers can be another source for natural conversation, as well as social meetings to celebrate certain occasions like first-year welcome party and fourth-year graduation party. Such activities help to give the students the opportunity to replace formal language which typically dominates language

is the means and end of the process (Mahmoud, on-line). The teacher's traditional dictatorship gives way to the learner's natural rate and route of learning. This shift was caused by the emergence of the "Communicative Language Teaching Approach" which had some implications for how the roles of learners, teachers and materials were seen. Learners were no longer considered as passive recipients of knowledge; they were viewed as active participants who were involved in various stages of teaching and learning. Teachers, on the other hand, were to adopt the role of "communication facilitator" instead of being the source of information. This, in effect, has led to the development of a learner-centred approach, in which information by and from learners is used in planning, implementing, and evaluating language programmes.

*While the learner-centred curriculum will contain similar elements and processes to traditional curricula, a key difference will be that information by and from learners will be built into every phase of the curriculum process. Curriculum development becomes a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners will be involved in decisions on content selection, methodology and evaluation.*

*(Nunan, 1989:19)*

term 'learning-centred' rather than 'learner-centred' on the grounds that 'the learner is only one factor in the learning process'; there are other factors such as the class time available, and the specific purpose of learning as perceived by the teacher or the material designer. They rightly point out that there is no truly a 'learner-centred approach' since most learning takes place within 'institutionalized systems' where the ingredients of the teaching/learning process are predetermined. They explain that the term 'learning-centred' is to include the learner and any other factors affecting the teaching/learning process, and the

- gather information on students' readiness and cognitive styles,
- provide learning options and choices,
- design open-ended problems around key concepts,
- organize learners to work collaboratively in mixed groups,
- use various sorts of assessment options, and
- coach rather than teach.

It is obvious that these processes concur with "learner-centred" view of second language teaching which will be the focus of the next point.

## 2. Learner-centred approach

In the Traditional Language Teaching Approach, the teacher is the means and the student is the end of the teaching/learning process, but in the Learner-centred Approach, the learner

Ellis and Sinclair (1989) point out that the field of language teaching and learning has been influenced by the ideas of those who call for "respect for the individual in society". Such respect entails learner autonomy and his role in decision making. In other words, the learner should be allowed to choose what he wants to learn, when he should be taught, and the way in which he wants to learn, (ibid). Hence, learner-centred approach includes choice in objectives of learning, rate of learning, method or style of learning, and content of learning.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), on the other hand, prefer to use the

department they have never dreamed of.

### A. Teacher Training

Adopting the Learning-centred Approach in Iraq requires teachers to adopt new roles. Training, then, is needed to change the teacher's role from "the great leader, imparter of knowledge and ... the centre of all activity," (McGreal, 1989, cited in Mahmoud, on-line) to be a designer, facilitator, and manager of the classroom, (Morrison & Lowther, cited in Costa, 2001). As a designer, the teacher has to create integrated lesson plans and develops new ideas with his students; as a facilitator, the teacher has to help students solve problems and find answers; and as a manager the teacher has to manage the classroom environment to keep the students on tasks and noise at an acceptable level.

Teacher training is also required to establish a strong relationship between curriculum change and teacher change. Nickerson, 1988 states that curriculum change cannot truly occur without teacher change, (cited in Martin and Michelli, in Costa, 2001).

The priority in training will be to prepare teachers to apply methods of inquiry to classroom teaching, to offer students opportunities to reflect on, analyze, and apply higher-order thinking operations to real issues and problems and to subject matter. Preservice and inservice teacher-education programmes have to incorporate the dimension of teaching thinking and problem solving into the curriculum for preparing teachers. Knowledge base alone is not sufficient for preparing proactive teachers. The infusion of thinking skills must cut across the teacher-education curriculum not only into coursework

term 'learner-centred' may refer to the focus on the learner; his learning strategies, and their contribution to the teaching method.

Accordingly, 'learning-centred' seems a more convenient term to apply in a situation like Iraq where the teaching/learning process is centralized, the objectives predetermined, and the content unalterable. The other issue is that the students' abilities of choosing the objectives of learning, method of learning and content are questionable. This may lead to the following question: At what age are learners capable of choosing learning objectives, methods, and contents? The researcher believes according to her long experience in language teaching that only postgraduate students in Iraq may possess this ability. However, many of them still lack access to resources like recent books, journals or even the internet. They also do not have the slightest idea about what other students in the other countries are studying. Conversely, students in Western countries who are nurtured under different educational systems are more open, independent, and creative. They are exposed to experiences and encouraged to be risk takers and problem solvers from their childhood. They are, therefore, more likely capable of choosing what to study, how and when.

One example may illustrate the situation in Iraq. Students are distributed among colleges of Medicine, Sciences, Education and the like in accordance with their scores in the State Examination. This distribution is centralized and made by the Ministry of Education. However, the parents would make the choice according to what they think is appropriate for their sons or daughters. Accordingly, students may attend colleges they do not like or a

thinking skills and strategies amid these pressures? One way is to consider higher thinking skills and strategies as a means to achieving higher test scores, higher standards and improved achievement. The goal means that rather than putting emphasis on academic knowledge of facts—although they are important, it is equally or more important for tomorrow's graduates to know how to find information, how to create it, how to criticize it and how to evaluate it. It is not easy work but it is a challenge to take.

### B. Students Training

As the emphasis on learner involvement started to gain ground in education, and with the new understanding of teaching and learning process, training is required for language learners as well as for teachers to employ new strategies. Students need training to be active participants in various stages of teaching and learning, and to develop the ability of undertaking responsibilities for their own learning. They have to realize that the main task in language learning is learning to learn. It was argued that learning should be seen as an "individual act."

*The act of learning something must always be a personal, individual act. No-one can learn the meaning of a word for me, though, of course, others can help me towards that end.*

(Dickinson, 1987:9)

However, the impracticality of expecting learners to adopt this new role of taking responsibility for their own learning was immediately noted: The knowledge and personal qualities that learner involvement requires cannot be taken for granted, and needs to be developed over time. Training is

but also into practice work, state Martin and Michelli (ibid).

The goals of the English teachers and instruction should be to

- make students feel competent and confident while learning English;
- provide a safe environment for students to share what they are thinking;
- follow their thinking;
- teach the questions rather than the answers
- provide a safe place to make mistakes and learn from them;
- value risk-taking and welcome conjecture;
- recognise the students' accomplishments
- apply credible evaluations
- wait for them to elaborate responses
- create long-life learners of English.

According to Goodlad, 1999 (ibid) teachers must be about much more than merely preparing youth for a job. Goodlad endorsed the idea of developing students' intelligence in a variety of ways. Teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are required to be leaders willing to spark permanent and positive change and create a safe climate for thinking in the classroom which encourage students to take risks, solve problems, experiment, collaborate, raise question, raise discrepancies, value ideas and create dilemmas.

However, teachers and school administrators do strive for demonstrating strong achievement results for their students and often focus on test results on an ever-expanding amount of material. It is also true that the public overtly judge schools and teachers by the students' test score alone. Therefore, how can students be encouraged to develop



research papers, books review, summaries of stories or films, and the like, and then presenting the findings of their research or their assignment in the form of written projects which fulfil academic standards. Much of the work is to be done outside the class and by the learners themselves. As a result, students develop self-confidence in working on their own as well as learning to take responsibility for their own learning

The researcher believes that if Iraqi university students at all grades were trained to carry out research papers and assignments continuously on classroom issues that are raised in the class, or curriculum content that is meaningfully related to students' lives or to the larger society or global issues about which students express concern, the benefit would be enormous. This strategy means that students will not depend on memorization, or copying answers to the exercises which are provided at the end of the textbooks, or skipping lessons for exam preparation, or postponing their exam. Rather, they will deepen their knowledge by seeking the information, analyzing it and reaching conclusions and be more ready and relaxed for evaluation.

The researcher totally agree with Paul, (cited in Costa, 2001: 428) that students today have very little school experience in thinking strategies like reasoning within opposing points of view. In fact, students today have little experience with reasoning at all. They do not know what inferences are or what it is to make assumptions or what it is to reason from an assumption to one or more conclusions.

Accordingly, language teachers and students need to develop two vital thinking strategies, which may be considered the new basics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the improvement of

required to help learners deepen their understanding of language learning and develop their ability to play an active and self-directive role in their language study. Thus, in order to help learners develop this ability of undertaking responsibilities for their own learning and work towards the goal of becoming autonomous learners, the concept of learner training was developed. Tudor defines this new concept as follows:

*Learner training could be defined as the process by which learners are helped to deepen their understanding of the nature of language learning, and to acquire the knowledge and skills they need in order to pursue their learning goals in an informed and self-directive manner.*

(Tudor, 1996: 37)

Learning to learn will, in effect, promote the development of learner autonomy and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and eventually become independent learners, the two major demands of academic study in university education. Dickinson suggests that this can be achieved by providing learners with opportunities to practise language for communicative purposes:

*"Many teachers using such (communicative) methods are, consciously or not, involved in helping their students to learn how to learn."*

( Dickinson, 1987: 34)

Explicit training in these strategies may be carried out by taking Iraqi students through the stages of conducting continuous academic

conscientious students who are acculturated to receiving information passively and awaiting directions before acting will study and memorize what teachers tell them is important. Robbing students of the opportunity to discern for themselves importance from trivia can create a well-managed classroom at the expense of a transformation-seeking classroom. Consequently students who are taught in such a way which promoted dependence will be ill-equipped to apply their school-learned knowledge and skills to the world beyond the classroom. From this we may recognize that the role of the teacher in promoting autonomy may be central to its success. McGarry (1995:1) sums up the essential arguments for autonomy "Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given control over what, how and when they learn are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new situations, evaluate and assess their own work, and generally, learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future." (ibid).

Training in learning to learn is essential. Trim (1988:3 cited in McCarthy, 1998) believes that

*"No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledges and the skills they will need in their active adult lives. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself or herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn."*

just one type of autonomy. The use of authentic materials, texts and experiences, which match their needs and interests are by far the richest source of language. McGarry (1995:3) notes that authentic texts from a

teaching and learning, namely, learner autonomy, and critical learning.

### 3. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. The term 'Learner autonomy' was first coined in 1981 by Henri Holec. It concerns foreign language learning especially when talking about life-long learning skills. Autonomy has been considered as a personal human trait, or as an educational move. This is due to the fact that autonomy is seen either (or both) as a means or as an end in education. (Gardner and Miller, 1999).

One of the key aspects to consider in defining Learner Autonomy is whether we view it as a means to an end (learning a foreign language) or as an end in itself (making people autonomous learners). These two options do not exclude each other, both of them can be part of our views towards language learning or learning in general, (Wikipedia, on-line).

Little (1991:4) argues that learner autonomy is "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. Hence, it is not one specific thing and like any other capacity it will grow with practice and be lost through inactivity." Brooks and Brooks (cited in Costa, 2001:151) note that

Practical training in dictionary use and the phonetic alphabet, for instance, empowers the students and gives them a sense that they can find out anything they might want to, in the absence of someone to consult. This is

whether willingly or unwillingly, a sense of autonomy and this learning process is satisfactory. Some of the students who face some sorts of difficulty in coming to school or college have the permission now from the Ministry or the university only to attend the mid- and final-year examinations. This means that they have to depend on their own in studying the textbooks.

#### 4. Critical thinking

Critical learning can be defined as "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief or action," Scriven and Paul (2004, on-line). Critical thinking is based on universal intellectual values including: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness, (ibid).

Critical thinking occurs, when students question their own beliefs or what they are told, (Marshall and Rowland, 1998 cited in Cam, Le., 2005). Others see critical thinking as the ability to distinguish between facts and opinions, judgements and inferences, and objective and subjective impressions. Critical thinking is also a key feature for improving teaching and learning process. This is because we are living in an era of advanced technology and widespread expansion of information and each individual needs to be a critical thinker to uncover bias, prejudice and misinformation.

The internet, for instance, Hay explains (cited in Costa, 2001) brings easy access to information in quantities that boggle the mind; yet, not all the information is accurate or relevant.

magazine or a periodical "can play a key role in enhancing positive attitudes to learning, in promoting a wide range of skills, and in enabling students to work independently of the teacher." With the Internet access and more particularly the World Wide Web, students have a massive body of information ranging from facts to raw data that they can analyze to generate new knowledge. They can have free subscription to Network news, or particular newsletters. Students can have no end of authentic materials if they are given explicit training in where to look in the Web, and what to select and implement. Hence, current technology helps change emphasis from a focus on the content (mastery of a subject) to a focus on the process of learning and thinking. Although the Internet is not a library for a number of reasons which go beyond the scope of this study, it is definitely offering Iraqi students, especially of higher studies, vast opportunities to have access to information which they may not get from libraries in the precarious circumstances surrounding them.

Project work is another suggestion for learner autonomy. Students may be asked to work in groups of their own choosing, on topics of interest to them, or on a topic chosen from their programme once a week, for instance. This will provide reinforcement and allow language students to work independently of the teacher. Ellis and Sinclair (1989), and Willing (1989) present some useful ideas and excellent suggestions.

It is said that need is the mother of invention. In Iraq we may rightly believe that the precaution circumstances have forced Iraqi students to become actively involved in the process of their own learning, to work independently of the teacher, and to select the strategies best suited the occasion. In short, they have realized,

(Talebinezahd, 2003 cited in Cam Le, 2005).

Another way is asking questions that get beneath the surface of the topic and reveal its complexity and subtlety. This means asking wh-questions that require students to think deeply and use complex language to respond, as opposed to ask questions that can simply be answered with yes or no.

### Conclusion

Students of English language have a variety of reasons for not actively participating in the classroom. The dreadful situation, the teaching materials and approach, the teacher and the students are in one way or another responsible for this passivity in learning.

Materials development is one way to overcome this problem. Teachers need to create a safe environment for students to intimately join knowledge and thinking, engage them in active reasoning about concepts, and coach rather than teach them. Students, on the other hand, have to be involved in the teaching/learning process, be responsible for their own learning, and develop some strategies on learning how to learn to promote their thinking.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Iraqi students are hoped to become independent learners, active participants, and critical thinkers. The challenge is great but we have to take it up and stand against the changing winds.

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Some consider the internet as a huge library but in fact the Internet differs from a library where there is, at least, a double selection process for what goes into a library. That is, for books or magazines to be published they must undergo the scrutiny of at least a publisher and editor, and most often several outside readers, and further in order to be in a library, they must be selected by a librarian. However, publishing on the web often means throwing stuff up on a site. There is no selection process. Hence the internet is the largest compendium of unfiltered and unsorted information ever assembled. This means that students need to master the skills necessary to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the information they get. In other words they need to be critical thinkers.

Similarly, several years ago, when a university student was asked, for example, to write about a particular topic, the challenge was to find 10 to 15 references on that topic. The challenge now is to select 10 to 15 references from among the thousand that may appear on a list. A research-based curriculum, for instance, will equip students with the ability to access, evaluate, and use information to create new understanding. Consequently, to enable students to be good thinkers and effective users of information, the process of conducting research provides rich opportunities for students to develop essential life-skills.

To promote critical thinking, Paran, 2003 (cited in Cam le, 2005) believes that incorporating elements of critical thinking into teaching material encourage learners to raise questions and problems and add linguistic value to the textbook and classroom. As a result, teachers are advised not to let questions and answers become only one-way activity, i.e., questions from teachers and answers from students

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**الخلاصة:**

لا يرغب قسم كبير من الطلبة في المشاركة الفعلية في اللغة الانكليزية داخل الصف وعدم الرغبة هذه تعود الى عوامل عديدة وعلى رأسها ضعف القابليات الفكرية للطلاب وعتدته على التعبير عن وجه نظره مما يؤدي الى التفكير السلبي والذي يعتبر مشكلة حقيقية في تعلم اللغة الانكليزية في العراق، لذا فالحاجة الى الاصلاح التربوي والتطوير ضروري وهذا يشمل تطوير المواد الدراسية واستخدام طريقة التركيز على الطالب وتطوير تفكيره العلمي.

تهدف هذه الدراسة لمساعدة الاساتذة على احداث التغييرات وتبني استراتيجيات حديثة لزيادة المشاركة الصفية لتمكين الطلبة العراقيين ليصبحوا مفكرين نشيطين بدلا من كونهم طلبة خاملين.