Nourishing Critical Thinking Skills using Neuro-Linguistic Programming

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Abstract

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a widely used approach, introduced by *Bandler* and *Grinder* (1970). In this study, the researcher explores different techniques involved in NLP, which can be utilized by teachers in teaching different genres of literature such as drama, prose, etc. In this quasi-experimental research, the researcher selected two groups: one experimental group consisting of 108 students, and the other a control group consisting of 141 students, enrolled in the Master's Program in English Literature and Linguistics. The sample was selected through random sampling. The experimental group was taught Drama using NLP techniques, whereas the control group was taught using Lecture Method. Data was collected by providing three critical questions of equal marks and the teacher evaluated them on a scale of 1 to 30. The findings reveal that NLP is a more effective technique. Students who were instructed through NLP produced better critical responses and interpretations with confidence. They exhibited better attitudes in comprehending their critical views and modifying their ways of looking at the literary texts than students of the control group.

Keywords: Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Critical Thinking, Literature, Pedagogy, Eclecticism

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Introduction

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) is practiced all over the world for improving standards of human learning and understanding. It is practiced widely for the treatment of various psychological disorders such as bi-polar disorder, memory loss, psychosomatic illnesses, and learning disorders. The main objective of this self-development technique is to help individuals develop understanding of their own thought processes, build better understanding of relationships and resolve issues related to professional development through various techniques. NLP can be effectively used in classroom. By understanding different techniques of NLP, the teachers can structure their lessons that would help them learn from various stimuli and shape their representational system and perception.

NLP allows to build a bridge between personal representational system and perception of belief and reality of an individual. It is significant in understanding and comprehending literary texts. Literature cannot survive without language. Language serves as a medium to record our intuitive needs by remaining conformed to the basic linguistic rules. It helps us record our personal experiences and comprehend our wit and intellectual thinking. It is to acknowledge that a truly deep expression of experience, for instance, does not depend on the

verbal associations of a particular language but rather rests securely on an intuitive basis that underlies all linguistic expression. On other-hand, literary expressions are personal and concrete, but this does not mean that its significance is altogether bound up with the power of language to transfer the messages so that people can relate their personal experiences with the literary experiences of the people but also providing broader perspective of looking at various experiences of life.

Diverse NLP techniques can be an effective instructional tool kit that can be beneficial in allowing students to form a connection between the external stimuli (i.e. the literary text) and the language and thought processes; making students develop understanding of the literary texts from a broader vision. This phenomenon is termed as "Critical Thinking". Critical thinking is a psychological strategy in the field of Thinking and Perception that allows the thinker to improve his quality of thinking by skillfully utilizing effective analytical assessment techniques for reconstructing a solution or concern for a problem.

In most of the universities and colleges, university professors and instructors use lectures as method of instruction of literary texts. They believe that it provides quick exposure to the teaching material, facilitating larger classes in limited time with more class control but modern lecture method encourages the use of eclectic approach towards teaching. Traditional lecture method is criticized for encouraging one way communication in classrooms, discouraging students in developing critical thinking in literature classrooms. Therefore, this study is aimed at bringing out the effectiveness of NLP as useful classroom technique in promoting critical thinking among students.

The objectives of the study are:
1. To reveal the impact of NLP techniques in promoting critical thinking among students in classrooms.
2. To bring out the effectiveness of NLP as effective method of teaching literature than Traditional Lecture method.

The current research brings out the diversity in using NLP in developing critical thinking among students. It highlights the strategies that will help instructors in utilizing various NLP techniques for teaching of various genres of literature. It will also promote autonomous, self-organized, self-guided and corrective thinking among them. It will help teachers inculcate effective communication skills and problem-solving skills. It will also be helpful in cultivating the ability to understand egocentrism. This study will facilitate the teachers to create learner-centered classrooms, encouraging the learners to think not just about their selves but also develop sensitivity towards others.

Literature Review

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is term given to a strategy that involves connection between mind and body through the effective use of language. "Strategy" is defined in NLP as a set of external and internal experiences shaped through the linguistic practices. Richard Bandler and Grinder came up with this strategy in the late 1970s in order to improve human behavior. This strategy is based on T-O-T-E model. That is, Test-Operate-test-Exist. This model allows the psychologists to practice various techniques that would help in positive thinking. This model allows the teachers to make use of diverse teaching approaches that would help modify their ways of teaching vital texts. In literature in language classrooms, it is very important for teachers to develop critical thinking. Facione (1990) defined "Critical thinking" as Contextual considerations that allows analysis and assessment of any text and context based on purposeful and self-regulatory judgment. Critical Thinking was further explained by Rudd, Baker, and Hoover (2000) as "reasoned, purposive, and introspective approach to solving problems or addressing questions with incomplete evidence and information for which an incontrovertible solution is unlikely" (Paulsen, et.al, 2015). Rudd (2004) comprehended three facets of critical thinking:

1. Cognitive Maturity: It referred to student's ability to use opportunities to reason with confidence.
2. Engagement: It referred to student's intellectual need to know the real.
3. Innovativeness: It referred to student's awareness and openness to people's opinion and attitude (Sulaiman, 2019).

Stedman and Andenoro (2007) further explained that developing critical and problem solving skills is integral part of developing students' temperament and leadership. Constant encouragement reinforces the student to develop critical thinking skills (cited by Boureaux, 2015).

NLP as Instructional tool in Pedagogy

Pedagogy is dynamic process. Teachers make use of different methodologies that would help students in acquiring knowledge. Teaching and learning is a two-way process. Teaching is done keeping in view the class objectives and learning is outcome-based. Teachers make use of diverse teaching methods in classes. In Pakistan, mostly teachers use lecture method for teaching at graduate and post-graduate level. Lecture method is seen as convenient and fast method for teaching. NLP is a new method for teaching. Neuro-linguistic programming can be effectively used in pedagogy. NLP follows eclectic approach that draws on multiple models and strategies from a wide range of sources. NLP approach to teaching and learning allows us to see the teacher-learner relationship in a "cybernetic loop", a vibrant process in which the student learns to construct meaning through equivalent feedback; it is not one way transfer of knowledge and information from one individual to another. It develops analytical approach of how people act according to the way they understand and represent the world.

NLP provides understanding of the perception of events through various senses such as auditory, kinesthetic, visual senses, internal mental processes and linguistic and behavioral responses. The internal representation connects ideas and provides a map for linguistic and behavioral responses. NLP explains how internal representations are structured and how an individual intend to respond various aspects of stimuli such as the location, size, brightness, movement etc. NLP assumes that the structure of internal representation shows regularities for, and is unique to, each individual. NLP provides a panoramic picture of systematic relationships between this structuring and that individual's language and behavior. It highlights learner's internal representations and processing being reflected, in various ways, in their language and their external behavior (e.g. non-verbal behavior). These skills and internal representations are termed as "Mental Syntax" or "Strategies". The internal representation has two parts: conscious part and unconscious part. The conscious part includes your external experiences through VAKOG- Visual, Auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory senses and unconscious part includes memories, beliefs, decisions, perceptions, ideologies and language. Through the learning processes, these internal representations are acquired and learnt. Individual's learning depends on his neuro-physiological state (i.e. his ability to be ready to learn and transform his skills, beliefs and aptitudes). His transformation is directly dependent on his communication and interaction with his teacher and co-learners. The learner's linguistic choices and behavioral patterns are subjected to teacher's effective teaching and learning. It will allow him/her to modify his internal representations of experiences on two levels. Firstly, he understands the subject matter or topic in discussion and secondly reshapes his beliefs about the world.

The core context of the whole discussion is that teaching is a dynamic process that involves creation of "states" that are conducive to learning; and that facilitates the learners in exploring and enhancing their internal representations. It also leads them towards the desired goal or outcome of the context. Bandler and Grinder's work regarding NLP helps in understanding and modifying cognitive processes and language patterns that involves teaching and learning.

Role of NLP Techniques in Developing Critical Thinking

The teacher can utilize various techniques of NLP that can be helpful in making students learn to respond critically. In this section, the researcher will explain how these techniques can be effectively used by the teacher in the classroom for the teaching of literary texts. The present study is delimited to the following techniques:

1. Anchoring
2. Pattern Interruption
3. Loop Break
4. Framing
5. Meta Model and Mirroring

The very first technique is Anchoring. In this technique, a stimuli which can be physical gesture or word or sentences from a literary text that may be used by the teacher to arise certain emotions or sentiments is used as an anchor. This technique develops the interest of the students to look into a particular direction and stay focused on the development of the story. The teacher may start the lecture with an anchor even without close reading of the text by the students. For example, while teaching Shakespeare's Hamlet, the researcher consistently used his famous soliloquy:

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them: (Act III, Scene 1)

In order to highlight the inner conflict of the protagonist and build the sympathies of the audience towards the main character. To bring out how unfortunate Hamlet was and how does his own hamartia works hand in hand against his fortune. Usually, the author of the literary texts also makes use of certain words that may serve as an anchor. For example, in order to bring out the role of Hamlet's Uncle Claudius as a villain in the plot, the instructor may frequently use:

> The serpent that did sting thy father's life
> Now wears his crown. (Act I, Scene V)

The instructor may also refer to the hasty marriage of Hamlet's mother Gertrude with his uncle Claudius as "foul incest". These anchors help the students to think and develop their responses for or against different characters. It makes the teacher to take charge of the directed and controlled perception of the students. In order to use this technique the teacher must have read the text carefully and must be aware of the key lines from the text.

The second effective NLP technique is Pattern Interruption, which can be useful for storage of words into learner's cataleptic mind. This techniques allows the learners to reveal the sub-conscious mind through the patterns of reveal inner monologue of the character portrayed in the story. In literature, dramatist usually make use of the literary devices such as use of chorus, dramatic monologues or soliloquies in order to reveal the next conscious step of the protagonist. The teacher can utilize this to arouse the curiosity of the reader or the student to know more and what happened next in the story. Pattern Interruption requires proper organization of content to be taught in the classroom. Otherwise, the students studying longer literary texts such as novel or drama may find it monotonous and boring. The teacher may make use of this technique by narrating the plot of the story that may allow students to share and respond to various events and acts of the play. For example, while teaching Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, the researcher utilized this technique by making the students read at least 15 pages before each class and then discussed major events in the play and also used anchors in order to develop

students' perception and opinion about various characters and events of the play. The researcher asked them questions that would reveal their mental aptitude and raise their confidence in sharing it with the class with special reference to the context. For example: They were asked the following question:

Is Dr. Faustus misinformed by Lucifer, or is he malignly sightless to the reality of his situation? Explain your views with suitable references from the text.

The students shared their views and supported it with references from the texts. Usually in lecture method, the teacher is the charles in-charge and teaches with only his/her perspective and students remain passive. But this technique encourages active involvement of the students by providing them with an opportunity to share and provide their perspective on various themes discussed in the literary texts.

The third NLP technique is Loop Break. This allows the teacher to consciously change or stop any unconscious process going on in the mind of the students. It works by breaking a loop process that enters higher alpha brain states and students relate it to their real life experiences. While having discussion, the teacher becomes aware of the mental processes of the students and their perceptions regarding a particular issue or theme discussed in the play. The teacher may serve as a counselor and control their perception through the NLP technique consciously. This technique leads the teacher to use Framing, another NLP technique which serve as an emotional amplifier or de-amplifier. For example, in my classroom before discussing about the life of Dr. Faustus. The teacher narrated a random experience of a person regarding his beliefs regarding self-actualization and black magic and extracted their opinion about how and why and what could be done to improve them. The students came up with their views about it and suggested solutions for securing oneself from necromancy and false beliefs. While reading Faustus they could easily relate Dr. Faustus' story with the story which was framed in their minds to compare and contrast. Framing allows the user to use their memories or experiences to create a stronger impact on the mind of the students. The teacher can lessen or increase the emotional impact through careful use of linguistics and neuro-sciences.

Another therapeutic technique that can be used in the teaching of Drama is NLP Meta Model in order to understand the relation problems and issues by deconstructing what is said and what is happening. The teacher can ask the students to perform important scene from the play so that the students can easily deconstruct the meaning of lines given in the texts. The teacher may also make use of mirroring. Mirroring is another useful technique. It allows teachers to create inspiration and motivation. Mirroring, offers teachers to develop an understanding with the students. These techniques can be utilized by the instructors, according to their needs and objectives of pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

Eclecticism allows the teachers to incorporate various teaching techniques based on the needs of the discipline and pupils. The term "Eclectic Approach" refers to the ways the teacher utilizes different and methods in order to teach in the classroom. It is based on problem solving approach towards teaching. It allows both teachers and students a diverse teaching learning environment. It helps teacher resolve the problems of the students in a particular course. According to Bandler (2018), this approach allows borrowing and adaptation of various teaching methods and techniques in language classrooms. Classroom reality is that in these days, students want to invest less time in studies. They want to invest less and achieve more. Eclectic Approach provide learner centered classroom allows the use of different teaching methods and schemes of study that arouses interest in learning and encourages them to achieve teaching objectives (Emaliana, 2017).

Eclectic Approach provides flexibility to the teacher to utilize multiple techniques that promotes creativity and dynamism in the classroom. The students learn to be more expressive and competitive in the class. The diversity and variation in classroom strategies improves learner's autonomy and thinking abilities. It motivates them to think on various aspects of one perspective. Combining methods provides a useful way of validating ideas. The weakness of one method can be used as strength in another class. It provides teacher skill development in multi-cultural and multi linguistic classrooms, making the teacher vigilant in being aware of students' needs, problems and understanding of human behavior.

The eclectic method of learning started to be practiced in the beginning of 1990's and is trending these days in most language classrooms. Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2000) defined, 'Eclecticism' as a process that "describe a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language learning teaching" (p.1). It allows the teacher to integrate a variety of language learning activities. The two theorists believed that different components of language such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are taught together (Kumar, 2013). The eclectic method is effective as it promotes learner-centered teaching. This method effectively works for all kinds of learners, irrespective of age, and standard. It makes the learning experience more conducive and enjoyable. It brings clarity of meaning in the learner's mind. The salient features of this method are multiple tasks, high interaction, goal-oriented learning, objective correlative, and quick results.

This approach allows the researcher to use NLP in classroom. It allows the use of NLP techniques in versatile and dynamic teaching method. In this study, the researcher utilizes the T-O-T-E model in drama class to highlight the significance of NLP techniques in developing critical skills among students.

Research Method

Keeping in view the Eclectic Approach, an experimental research was conducted. The researcher selected two set of students. Experimental Group was taught using NLP techniques. In the meanwhile, control group was instructed through Lecture Method. Experimental group consisted of 108 students and control group had 141 students studying Literature and Linguistics at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad (NUML) in Masters' program. Students of each group were taught two plays: Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and Shakespeare's Hamlet for two months (i.e. 18 credit hours). After that the students were evaluated. They were provided with three critical questions as class test, which they had to answer in the period of two hours. The questions were such that students had to provide critical responses to it. Content validity was checked for the standardized test so that more reliable results could be gathered.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study reveals the fact that eclectic Approach in today's teaching, allows the instructor to be active and diverse in his / her method of teaching. NLP offers a set of techniques for the teachers that may involve less time but achieve more. It provides an opportunity to the teachers to strengthen integration of content, construction of knowledge, reduce prejudices and make the students improve mental processes. The mean score of the students taught with the NLP technique was 17.24 whereas the mean score of the students taught with Lecture Method was 11.14. Both data samples show a difference in the mean score. The difference in the mean of scores visibly indicate that NLP is more effective in teaching Language and Literature than Traditional Lecture Method as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Results

Research Groups	No. of Participants	Teaching Method	Total Scores	Mean Score
Experimental	108	NLP	1862	17.24
Control	141	Lecture	1572	11.14

The study also brings out the fact that NLP provides better mental exercise for the students. It allows them to rethink about themselves and the world. The tests conducted on the two groups indicate that the percentage of scorers who achieved $2/3^{rd}$ or more of the total score i.e. equal or greater than 20 out of 30 were greater for the Experimental group. 87.03% of the respondents from the Experimental Group obtained a score greater or equal to 20 whereas the participants of the control group with scores of 20 or greater were 45.36%. The students being exposed to NLP techniques performed critically better than the students of the controlled group, as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Percentages of Scores

Research Groups	No. of Participants	Participants with Percentage of Scores <20	Participants with Percentage of Scores >20
Experimental Group	108	12.97	87.03
Control Group	141	54.64	45.36

In their feedback report, the evaluator of the tests pointed out the fact the students who were taught through the NLP techniques had strong problem solving abilities, knowledge and critical thinking aptitude while answering the questions. Whereas, the control group who was taught through the lecture method produced pet responses as found in class notes and lectures. They could not critically evaluate the situations provided to them. The results of the study also indicate the percentages of the students who scored more than 20 and less than 20 in the tests. The percentage of the Experimental group establishes the fact that students who were instructed through NLP techniques achieved more marks than the students of the control group. The study does not diminish that Lecture Method should not be used but provides the proof that in order to make the students critical in the target language; NLP techniques may effectively be used in the classrooms. It encourages the use of these techniques in the Literature and Language classrooms to improve critical thinking of the students, making students more responses to different situations and experiences.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

Thinking is a natural process in human beings. They shape their thinking on the basis of their experience, observations, and reasoning. A good critical thinker should be able to:

1. Raise vital questions arising out of problems.
2. Evaluate and assess information gathered through senses.
3. Think broadly while exploring alternative systems of thought.
4. Produce critical responses based on logic and reasoning.
5. Communicate effectively with people around them.

According to Clark and Paulsen (2016), it is essential to develop and nourish critical thinking skills of students especially in the higher education (p.75). This experimental research brings to light significant value of developing critical thinking skills by utliizing modern advancements in psychology and education such as the use of NLP techinques. This will allow learners to learn to apply, conceptualize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information through observation, reading, reasoning and communication. According to Kumar (2013), students produced better results in objective examination because they are not taught to use the language subjectively. They are not taught through communicative approach in the class. He argued that eclecticism allows use of variety of techniques, enabling the teachers to make use of diverse

teaching techniques, making learning "fun and innovative"(p.1). The present study reflects upon the need to utilise NLP techniques by the teachers mentioned earlier to bring clarity in their ideas, deliverance, relevance in discussions and sound reasoning in their learning and communication, which has also been highlighted by Larser Freeman and Mellow (2000). NLP can be effectively used for teaching literary texts. It enables teachers to make their learners think more critically about the context of study and communicate through critical responses in classrooms. Students find a lot of difficulty in understanding literary texts due to linguistic barriers, poor understanding and lack of comprehension abilities (Işıklı and Tarakçıoğlu, 2017, p.82). NLP resolves these issues and engages students to improve their responses. Whereas, lecture method, on the other hand, facilitates the teachers to covers syllabus in specific time. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to incorporate NLP techniques such as mirroring, metamodel and so on in Literature and language classrooms in order to develop critical thinking skills.

The study reveals that NLP can be used as an effective classroom technique that can be used for teaching Literature and Language in classrooms. Using literary texts in language classrooms can bring in vitality and broadening in the ways students think and understands the language and the world. It offers them an opportunity of critically looking at the experiences of others, providing insight into people's world and wisdom. NLP was earlier believed to be used as a technique in psychology but this research brings to light NLP techniques such as mirroring, parallelism or anchoring to provide teachers' guide in using NLP and encouraging the teachers to use it in classroom to make the students think in a particular direction (Casale, 2008). The results of the study show that students improved their ways of looking at the literary texts when taught through these techniques. The study also explains that teachers use lecturing while teaching because they are time-bound to teach a particular prescribed syllabus in limited time. This study in this regard, is of significant value because the study offers support to the instructors in acquiring knowledge about NLP strategies which are not just beneficial but also effective in terms of time, money and text size. This study provides gateways for further research in the way modern technology can be invested in classrooms for better pedagogy.

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