

ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING COMPETENCE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH TEACHING HAIKU POETRY

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Abstract: *Critical thinking is one of the most important competencies of high-quality human resources. Enhancing this competency must be the vital objective of Vietnam's education. However, in reality, the critical thinking competence of high school students is still low, and the development of this capacity for them has not been paid attention to in teaching Literature. Haiku poetry, which is a traditional genre of Japanese poetry, has great potential in developing critical thinking competence thanks to its characteristics. Thus, it is appropriate, and necessary to associate teaching Haiku poetry with enhancing critical thinking for students. In this article, we propose several measures to enhance critical thinking competence for students through teaching Haiku poetry.*

Keywords: *Critical thinking, Haiku, Teaching, enhancing, high school students.*

1. Introduction

Critical thinking is one of the core competencies of global citizens in the context of the rapidly developing technological revolution. Developing this competence for learners to meet the requirements of the times is one of the issues that need to be concerned by education. Teaching Literature in general, teaching reading comprehension of Haiku poetic texts in particular has great potential in developing students' critical thinking competence. However, the critical thinking competence of high school students is still low, and the development of this capacity for learners has not been paid enough attention to in the process of teaching Literature.

Thus, it is appropriate, and necessary to associate teaching Haiku poetry with training critical thinking for students. Accomplishing this task can make an important contribution to meet the new requirements of education, and help learners to become more interested in learning Language Arts - the humanity subject.

2. Theoretical issues

2.1. Critical thinking

Inheriting various existing concepts about critical thinking, we propose the concept of critical thinking as follows: Critical thinking is the competence to discover problems, consider problems from various angles to propose valid conclusions, evaluate to choose

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the optimal solution, and correct the problems in necessary cases. Critical thinking competence is structured by various component skills: Discovering problems and making coherent questions about the problem; Making multi-dimensional judgments to solve problems; Searching for multi-dimensional information from various angles as a basis for proposing judgments to solve problems, and clarify judgments; Evaluating judgments to choose the optimal solution; Correcting judgments when unsuitable points are discovered, prejudice, and pretense [4]. This is the vital competence helping students in studying, working, and having better life.

2.2. Haiku poetry and teaching Haiku poetry in high school

Haiku is a unique genre of Japanese poetry. According to Nguyen Thi Mai Lien (2019), this is a genre of poetry that contains the profound philosophy of life, closeness, the spirit of compassion and optimism of Zen Buddhism and poetic art bearing the imprint of Zen Buddhism [4].

Currently, Haiku poetry is being taught in the book *Connect knowledge with life - grade 10*. The authors introduced in this book are Matsuo Basho, Chiyo, and Kobayashi Issa [1]. Besides, implementing *The 2018 general education curriculum*, teachers can propose other Haiku poetic texts in reading comprehension practice activities.

2.3. Haiku poetry has great potential in enhancing critical thinking for students

Haiku poetry is considered as one of the most condensed poetic genres, showing the most expressive and multi-meaningful nature. Reading Haiku poetry, readers need to recognize the profound implications of the text based on the layer of words through the process of interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, etc. According to Facion (2009), the important skills of critical thinking competence are: interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, and especially interpretation [2]. Therefore, the process that teachers guide students to read texts can help students to practice the constitutive skills of critical thinking.

According to the Reception Theory, text is an "event" and meanings are constructed by the reader in the process of interacting with the text. These layers of meaning are influenced by readers' cultural values, knowledge, experiences, beliefs, aesthetic views, feelings, emotions, etc. Each reader has a dynamic and creative recipient. The reading comprehension process bears its imprint [3]. Poetry Haiku evokes various meanings. Therefore, the process of deciphering Haiku poetry is also the process in which readers respond to the pre-existing readings.

Thus, the development of critical thinking capacity and the activities of guiding students to read Haiku poetry texts have a two-way relationship. Teaching Haiku poetic texts helps learners to develop critical thinking competence. At the same time, by developing critical thinking competence, learners can discover more profound meanings of the texts.

3. Measures to enhance high school students' critical thinking competence through teaching Haiku poetry

Based on the proposed structure of critical thinking capacity, it can be seen that in reading and understanding Haiku poetry, the component skills of critical thinking are specifically expressed as follows: Discovering problems in Haiku poetry and raising those issues into coherent and challenging thinking questions; Making multi-dimensional judgments about the meanings of problematic aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry; proposing judgments on the problem of aesthetic signs; Evaluating judgments explaining the problematic aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry to choose the best judgment; Correcting judgments interpreting problematic aesthetic signs in the text of Haiku poetry in necessary situations.

3.1. Enhancing the skills discovering problematic aesthetic signs in Haiku poems and formulating coherent questions that challenge higher-order-thinking on the issue

Thinking is activated only when problems arise. Therefore, to activate thinking, firstly, students must find out problem. Defining the problem is the manipulation that motivates and determines the next stages of the thinking process. In reading Haiku poetry, the problem often lies in aesthetic signs because they carry aesthetic messages. Therefore, detecting problematic aesthetic signs is not only an operation in reading but also an important first skill that needs to be practiced to enhance students' critical thinking competence.

Aesthetic signs are symbols that carry aesthetic values, and contain the author's ideological messages. Problematic aesthetic signs are multi-meaning, ambiguous, and allegorical. They can be viewed in a multi-dimensional way. Readers may create various different and even contradictory interpretations. They can also be signs that combine the inheritance and creation of old motifs leading to new sensations. They are strange signs, too.

In the Haiku poetic texts, the problematic aesthetic signs are usually the following types of signs:

(1) Structure: structure of Haiku has various gaps because of its condensed words and unexpected associations images.

(2) Artistic time: this is the symbol appearing in the poem Haiku with important meaning. The time element is most evident in *kigo* - the words indicating the season. That is, the direct quarter language is the name of the season and the indirect precious language is the typical image of the season (cherry blossom, lark, cicada, maple leaf, etc). An important feature of time in Haiku poetry is the present time - which is the actual present moment of life. This feature represents the characteristics of Zen colors in Haiku poetry because Zen Buddhism values the moment of reality

(3) Artistic space: the space in Haiku poetry is rich and precious - the theme of nature is an important feature of Haiku poetry. Nature in poetry Haiku habitually favors

idyllic and simple images with sparrows, fireflies, apricot flowers, cherry blossoms, boats, stars, trails, etc. Places appearing in Haiku poetry are authentic images, close to Japanese people.

(4) Image of poetry with multiple meanings: Haiku poems have small capacity, so, images in Haiku poetry can evoke various layers of meaning. Although the images are simple, realistic, and closed to daily life, they can evoke various profound associations, and philosophies.

Teachers guide students to ask and answer the following questions by themselves to detect problematic aesthetic signs:

Have any questions or concerns, or doubts about this aesthetic sign in this poem?

What are the special features of this aesthetic notation in the poem?

What does the poet mean by using this aesthetic sign?

For example: *On a leafless branch/ A crow/ autumn dusk*

Have any doubts about the symbol of dry branches? What's so special about this image?

Does the space in the poem evoke any strange impressions?

Is there anything worth noting in the appearance of autumn dusk?

The above question system can be used in combination with reading comprehension strategies.

Teachers can use “think-aloud” technique to help students to find problematic aesthetic signs and name problems that they sign aesthetic effect posed during the reading of a text. “Think-aloud” is technique that the reader says aloud what's going on in the head while reading the text. This reading comprehension strategy enhances the effectiveness of building on meaning of text by helping students focus their thinking while reading the text. In the process of implementing the strategy, students can self-assess their reading comprehension process. By speaking out loud all thoughts about the text, all the doubts, assumptions, and judgments of the reader are revealed. As a result, learners can propose various valuable issues, and at the same time initially self-assess the proposed problems.

Towards the goal of detecting problematic aesthetic signs, in the process of implementing the “Think-aloud” technique, teachers should ask students to make questions about the strangeness, inheritance, creation, and the multi-meaning of the aesthetic sign.

Speaking out loud while reading a text will help students focus on potentially problematic aesthetic signs, to make initial judgments while approaching the text. In addition, students initially know how to evaluate symbols used as information for the process of arguing, defending, or refuting judgments. Oral expression can also help students find a clear, coherent, and effective way of expressing questions and doubts as soon as they come to mind. As a result, students can develop problem-solving - one of the most vital constituent skills of critical thinking.

3.2. Enhancing the skill proposing ways of interpreting, and evaluating multidimensionally the meaning of aesthetic signs in Haiku poetic texts

Judgment in the process of analyzing aesthetic signs is about the artistic intention, aesthetic message, the poet's research, acquisition, and innovation conveyed in that sign. The judgments that interpret the aesthetic sign in the lyrical texts may not coincide, even contradict each other but they can still coexist at the same time. In the process of guiding students to make judgments, teachers need to note that students make various multidimensional judgments, and ready to accept conflicting judgments.

Here are some measures what teachers can guide students to make valuable multidimensional judgments after deciphering problematic aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry texts.

3.2.1. Instructing students to ask and answer questions that suggest judgments

For students to initially make judgments about the meaning of aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry texts, teachers can guide students to ask and answer the following questions by themselves:

What does this aesthetic sign mean? Is it possible to draw valuable judgments and evaluations about this notation? What does the author mean by using this notation?

With a different perspective, can I discover any new thing about the meaning of this sign?

Is it possible to make another judgment about the meaning, and significance of this sign?

Do these judgments contradict each other? Is it possible to accept these judgments together?

3.2.2. Instructing students to deduce to make judgments

Inference is a form of thinking that derives new judgments from one or more existing judgments. The structure of inference consists of two parts: the first part is existing judgments (premises), and the second part is new judgments (conclusions). There are three types of inference: deductive, inductive, and analogy. In reading, three types of inference play an important role in helping readers make new judgments about the meaning of aesthetic signs from background knowledge, and personal experiences. Teaching students to use reasoning techniques helps students make quality judgments.

3.3. Enhancing the skill finding information to judge, and clarify judgments

The information searching process can be differentiated into two stages. First, mobilizing the background knowledge that students already have before reading the text to make initial judgments. Then students can find new information to confirm or refute the judgment that they have already been made, and propose new judgments. Teachers can guide students to ask and answer the following questions by themselves:

Is it possible to base on any words/images/details... in the text to explain this aesthetic sign?

Has this aesthetic sign appeared in any other texts? What is the meaning of this aesthetic sign in that text?

Do I have any personal experience that could help explain this aesthetic sign?

What is the knowledge linking with the interpretation of this notation? (literary theory, genre poetry, literary history, language, culture, society, history, etc).

Does the collected information lead to conflicting judgments about the same aesthetic sign? Is further information needed to clarify or refute this judgment?

Is there any information that can lead to judgments that contradict the judgments already available?

From a different perspective, what new information will be needed to suggest a new judgment?

In searching for information, teachers guide students to pay attention in the unique characteristics of each aesthetic sign, so that they can find relevant and valuable information.

For example: *On a leafless branch/ A crow/ autumn dusk*

Have I ever encountered the crow sign in any other text? What is the meaning of this symbol in that text?

Have I ever seen the leafless branch image, what is the feeling then? Can this help explain the aesthetic sign?

What is the knowledge of literary theory, genre poetry, literary history, language, culture, society, history, age psychology, and creative psychology, etc links with the interpretation of the Crow image?

Directing students to find out more information, and perspectives to make new judgments can help students see multiple perspectives when solving problems - this is an important characteristic of people having critical thinking ability. Besides, this operation also promotes creativity in reading comprehension. Then, readers discover more unique, and new values of the text.

3.4. Enhancing the skill of evaluating arguments to identify the most valuable interpretations of aesthetic signs in Haiku poetic texts

In the process of making hypotheses about the meaning, and significance of aesthetic signs, the reader can make various judgments. After that, teachers need to orient students to choose the most convincing aesthetic sign interpretation, and eliminate inappropriate, forced, fallacious sign interpretations that reduce the value of the signed document.

3.4.1. Evaluating information as a basis for proposing judgments and interpretations of problematic aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry texts

Teachers direct students to ask and answer the following questions by themselves:

Is the information given to decipher the aesthetic sign in this Haiku poetic text sufficient? Is it possible to stand in another perspective to find more information?

Does this information ensure objectivity, and avoid prejudice?

Is the information given to decipher the aesthetic sign in this Haiku text correct? Can I provide more details on the source of this information?

Is the information given to decipher the aesthetic sign in this Haiku text appropriate/relevant to the judgment that needs clarification?

3.4.2. Evaluating inference

Teacher can guide students to evaluate logical errors in reasoning by providing students with the types of logical errors, and their signs. According to Domina Petric (2020), “Logical fallacy is the reasoning that is evaluated as logically incorrect and that undermines the logical validity of the argument and permits its recognition as unsound. Logical fallacy can occur as accidental or can be deliberately used as an instrument of manipulation” [6]. Guiding students to detect, and correct fallacies in reasoning, teachers need to ask them to have the flexibility and thorough analysis to exactly evaluate fallacies in accordance with the characteristics of Haiku poetry.

During the inferential assessment, the teacher guides students to ask and answer questions to identify fallacies:

Are these statements unconvincing?

Do these judgments lack any basis from the text of the Haiku poem itself?

Do these judgments stick to the theme of the text?

Are these judgments based on psychological, linguistic, cultural, and historical?

Are these judgments based on sufficient, and fairgrounds on the matter?

Have you considered other ways of thinking as I find new information?

In the process of reasoning, have I taken into account the specific characteristics of emotions and psychology in the reception of Haiku poetry?

3.4.3. Evaluating viewing perspectives

One of the important characteristics of critical thinkers is that they have a multi-dimensional perspective. They know how to put themselves in various positions to see problems from as various perspective as possible. Perspective assessment is necessary for further perfecting judgments that interpret aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry texts.

Teachers should guide students to ask and answer the questions themselves to identify the perspective:

Have I considered the contrarian approach to the aesthetic sign in the Haiku text being judged?

Is the perspective of this aesthetic sign multi-dimensional and complete? Is there another points of view?

3.4.4. Evaluating conclusions

Teachers can guide students to ask and answer the questions themselves to identify the conclusions:

Is the judgment made about the meaning and significance of this aesthetic sign consistent with other symbols in the poem and the main theme of the whole poem?

Is this judgment made clear, coherent, and easy to understand? Is it misleading? Is there another better way to express it?

Have you considered alternative judgments when finding new information?

3.5. Enhancing the skill correcting judgments explaining aesthetic signs in Haiku poetry when they have illogical points, fallacies, and biases in arguments

After guiding students to evaluate the argument to determine the most valid interpretations, and detecting errors in the argument, teachers instruct students to correct the aesthetic sign interpretation judgments which have *illogical points*, fallacies, and biases in arguments.

The main corrective measure is that teacher suggest asks the students not to violate the rules of the argument - reverse the manipulations of that fallacy.

4. Conclusion

Developing critical thinking competence for high school students in teaching Haiku poetry is a scientific and practical significance issue. Students having critical thinking competence can have a multi-dimensional view, discover new, and profound ideas. Thus, students not only develop core competency but also improve their Haiku poetry reading comprehension.

Although developing critical thinking competence for students plays an important role, this task has not been given due attention. The topic has proposed a number of measures to develop critical thinking competence for students in Haiku poetry reading comprehension. However, the proposed measures need to be applied regularly, and flexibly. The activities are suitable with the characteristics of Haiku, students, and the actual conditions of classroom.

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