

The Use of Literary Texts and Questioning to Examine First-Year Central Asian Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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Abstract

This research project reports the results of the study on freshman Central Asian students' critical reasoning skills before learners actually become familiar with the concept of critical thinking through formal instruction. In addition, the researcher explored the effect of the fourth-level foundation English course upon the development of critical thought of students in the fifth-level foundation English course taught at a major Kazakhstani university. Overall, 37 first-year Central Asian students enrolled in the Foundation English 5 course in Fall 2011 participated in the project. Besides, seven Foundation English 5 course faculty members participated in a small survey with four open-ended questions inquiring their beliefs about critical thought and questioning as well as observations of the possession and use of critical thinking skills demonstrated by the foundation English learners. The researcher used three different types of questions – questions of fact, questions of preference and questions of judgment - as the basis for constructing a more inclusive instrument for grouping questions produced by the students after reading literary texts. The results indicate that many learners who have been taught various critical thinking skills in the lower-level foundation English course asked fewer factual questions, more preferential and almost the same number of judgment questions compared with those asked by the newcomers. The research and teaching implications suggest possible ways for educators to help first-year Central Asian students to further develop their critical thinking skills for study and career purposes.

Key Words: critical thinking, questioning, students, texts