

# Al Ghazali's Dialogue: Language Instructors and Students' Perspective on the Overall Effectiveness of the Subject.

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate a framework that integrates both Case-Based and Critical thinking skills into the teaching of English; mainly targeted at improving one's communicative competence. The subject, known as Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English for Communication encourages deep discussions that require both the application of critical thinking and problem solving skills using case studies. The proposed framework has been presented and recognised for its' successful entrepreneurial opportunities. The findings from this study are an extension to the first phase of this research process, which looked at introducing the subject to other public and private universities and other government and non-governmental bodies seeking language learning enhancement activities. This phase presents findings that were piloted to both students and language instructors from UPNM who have actively been involved in the teaching and learning of this subject. Using a quantitative analysis, the results yielded significant findings indicating positive feedback on the subject in terms of its efficacy. These findings co-relate with the upcoming Phase 3 of the research process, which suggest for this subject to be promoted and further highlighted to other tertiary institutions and organizations.

**Keywords:** *critical thinking skills; case study; communication skills; ESL*

## 1. Introduction

A recent article published by the British Council had indicated that in Malaysia, there is an extensive intervention to promote the use of the English Language at workplace, especially at tertiary institutions [1]. This shift has created the need to re-examine the role of English Language and its' pedagogy especially so that it can cater towards producing undergraduates who not only could meet with the demands of competency in speech, but also to create undergraduates who could use the language effectively and confidently. The report revealed that a majority of the undergraduates had revealed good scores in their language proficiency however they still lacked several skills including effective presentation, communication and problem solving skills as most of these skills require the need to communicate confidently in English.

In another article [2], the five top skills looked for during job interviews were mainly; English language oral and written proficiency, interpersonal skills, flexibility as well as adaptability skills. Most companies indicated that they looked for graduates who were confident in speaking in the English language and were able to solve problems and think critically in any situation that demanded decision making. In relation to these demands, the subject Al-Ghazali's dialogue proposes a framework which incorporates both the concepts of case-based learning and critical thinking skills in order to address issues mainly given to them in the form of case studies. The subject encourages students to work in groups, present their ideas effectively using various analytical tools while also applying effective communication and presentation skills in their speech. The subject is a pioneer in putting forward a

framework that emphasizes on the teaching and learning of English, however it also integrates other skills namely critical thinking and problem solving skills to produce graduates who are communicatively competent and confident.

Within the context of the current research, the subject, Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication, targeted all undergraduates at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) to enhance their communicative abilities whereby they are able to discuss, argue and defend their opinions and ideas based on the selected case studies. Students are highly exposed to Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) in this process. Hence, it allows them to engage actively with one another by incorporating elements of language learning, critical thinking skills and leadership skills.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Critical Thinking Skills and Case-based Learning**

Critical Thinking Skills are among the 21st-century skills. Critical Thinking Skills have developed the idea of engaging the learners in building knowledge by reflecting and thinking deeply [3]. [4] mentioned that Critical Thinking Skills are a reasoned, purposive and introspective approach to problem-solving or any other matters that are related to the unquestionable solution. To encourage Critical Thinking Skills, a student must be able to judge and think carefully, leading to evaluation and finally decide based on the evaluation whether something is acceptable or otherwise [5]. Case-based learning has been in the pedagogy for a long time and has been implemented in many disciplines. Case-based learning has a few steps to be followed when the learners are analysing the authentic case studies. First, they need to identify problems, then compare and evaluate optional solutions and later decide on how to deal with the situations professionally [6]. The benefits of using case studies whilst teaching are students enjoy learning and are able to participate actively, able to share new information, promote critical thinking and improve clinical outcomes [789]. In teaching the students to think critically, the instructors can utilise many tools to assist the teaching and learning process. Among the tools are Bloom's Taxonomy, 6 Thinking Hats and Facione's CT Model. Bloom's Taxonomy was introduced by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 where the educators classified different objectives and skills for their students. The recent terminology has been updated with six levels of learning. The six levels are remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. The 6 Thinking Hats was developed by Edward de Bono in 1986 where colours were used to represent the different styles of thinking, namely white (facts), red (emotion), black (caution), yellow (optimism), green (creativity) and blue (process). The purpose of using 6 thinking hats is to avoid narrow thinking where it could help to develop Critical Thinking Skills. According to [10], applying 6 Thinking Hats in a discussion during the learning session can improve the students' thinking skills and learning outcome. Facione's Critical Thinking Model emphasises analysis, inference, explanation, interpretation self-regulation and evaluation skills.

A study was conducted by [8] on 63 3<sup>rd</sup>-semester biology students at Kingsborough Community College in New York using case studies. The discussion used Bloom's Taxonomy to encourage Critical Thinking Skills. It was found that using case studies are more effective than any other methods where students' performance increased in their examination. At the same time, students managed to improve their oral and written communication skills and relate the case studies with their aspects of life. Another study by [6] to 103 nursing students at MOH Schools of Nursing in the United Arab Emirates. The study used case studies to examine critical thinking abilities among the students. It was found that there were many benefits from using case studies on the students. The students were able to solve complex nursing problems and at the same time, well-structured knowledge was developed.

## **3. Methodology**

This quantitative study involves 18 students who took Al-Ghazali's Dialogue: English Communication (LLE 3032) and 12 lecturers who taught the course at the Language Centre, Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia. Two different sets of questionnaires were given to the students and lecturers at the end of the semester. The questionnaires were regarding the students' and lecturers'

feedback on the benefit of using case studies in the teaching and learning process. After completing the questionnaires, the data were analysed using SPSS.

#### 4. Results & Discussion

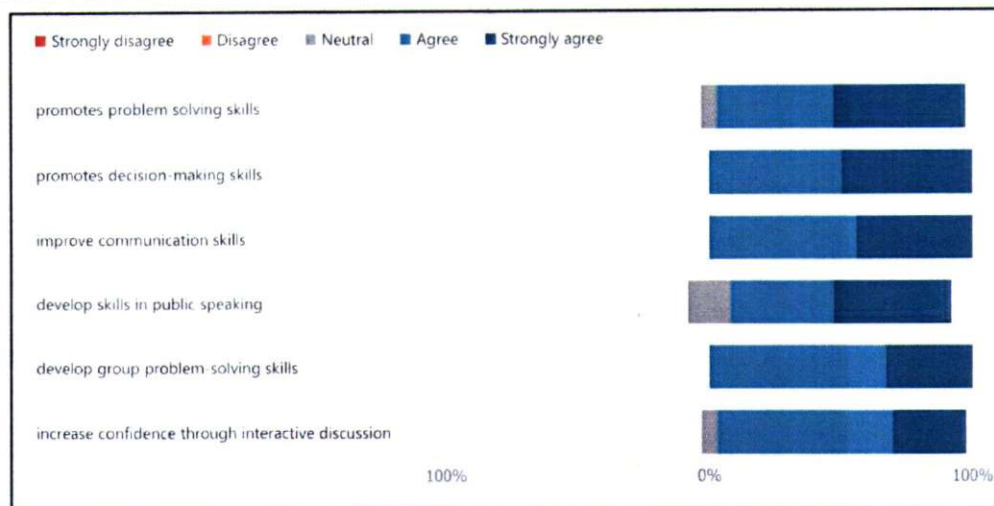


Fig. 1: Benefits of a Case Study – Students' Feedback

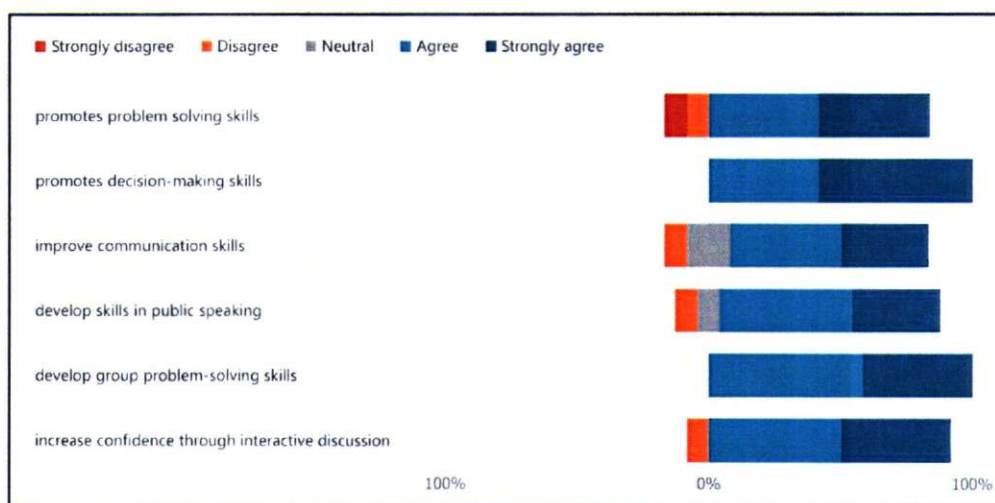


Fig. 2: Benefits of a Case Study – Instructors' Feedback

Based on Figure 1 above, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that case study promotes problem-solving skills and decision-making skills. 44.4% strongly agreed that by using a case study, students can improve communication skills and develop public speaking skills. Apart from that, 33.3% strongly agreed that a case study can help to develop group problem-solving skills, 27.8% strongly agreed that they can increase their confidence through interactive discussion.

From Figure 2, 58.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that a case study can promote decision-making skills, 41.7% strongly agreed that a case study promotes problem-solving skills, develops group problem-solving skills, and increases students' confidence through interactive discussion. Finally, 33.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that students are able to improve communication skills and develop skills in public speaking.

Overall, more than 90% of the students gave positive feedback on the benefits of a case study, and more than 83% of the instructors agreed that case study benefited students in terms of thinking skills and communication skills. These showed the advantages of case study are improving student's communication skills [6] and promoting critical thinking skills [789].

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on finding out the effects of case-based learning in language courses on students' critical thinking skills and communication skills. From the findings, it can be concluded that by using case study, students are able to enhance their critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, communication skills as well as improve their confidence.

Nevertheless, the result of the study is limited to a small group of respondents among students. Further investigations are needed in order to get feedback from a bigger group of respondents. For future plans, the researchers are planning to expand this study and continue with Phase 3 of the research, which highlights on promoting the subject to other bodies and institutions.

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