Exploiting Time Fillers Activities for Enhancing Students Critical Thinking Skills and Vocabulary Learning.
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Abstract:
The current study aims at finding out the impact of exploiting time filler activities which are things that teacher does when he / she has run out of other material on enhancing or developing secondary students critical thinking skills .It also aims at investigating the effect of implementing time filler activities on improving students vocabulary learning . To achieve these aims , the researcher has used an experimental design in which twenty students from Al-Fawz secondary school in Baghdad Governorate are taught the English textbook with a great emphasis on exploiting time fillers by using activities as crossword puzzles and charades . The researcher has adopted a critical thinking checklist and has constructed written vocabulary test along with the daily observation formula for the two independent samples for applying the data analysis techniques as t-test . The results of the study are really promising as they indicate that there is a very positive impact of using time filler activities as crossword puzzles and charades on improving students skills of critical thinking and vocabulary learning .
Key words : Time Filler , Critical Thinking , Vocabulary learning

1-Introduction
The English language is regarded as an important language all over the world as it helps in making people communicate with each other . Due to this importance , many countries put heavy emphasis on teaching the English language to their students . Andrew (2003) , moreover , states that there has been a growing need for using it for knowledge expression within specific professional fields during the last few decades . Therefore , for the purpose of achieving a successful process of learning the English language , the students must acquire its grammar , vocabulary , pronunciation and the four language skills . They also need to be able to integrate certain competencies such as oral presentations skills using critical thinking and teamwork communication .

Throughout the researchers long experiences in teaching , she has observed that most secondary schools has been dominated by rote learning and passive learning strategies which can be considered as the main reason or obstacle that face the students in developing their critical thinking and teamwork communication .Relating to the same point , Ballard (1996) cited in Pally (2000)   assures that most of the students learning strategies focus on imitation and memorization . She adds that most students of Asian learning background depend on rote learning and rely heavily on the authority of the teacher . They also don't encourage the teachers or the texts critical questions . Similarly , Goodwin (2003) indicates that even the instructors at the higher education struggle with the resources and the time needed to design efficient strategies and tools suitable for teaching and facilitating critical thinking .

It has been acknowledged that critical thinking is an essential and vital subject in modern education and many educators and instructors are interested in teaching this concept to their students . The main purpose behind teaching it is enhancing the students thinking skills and preparing them for the world of challenge and change . (Schafersman ,1991).Due to this significant value of critical thinking , most teachers and instructors nowadays are looking for the methods of developing and enhancing it for their students . Time filler activities could be considered as one method for achieving this aim which is developing the students critical thinking skills .

Time fillers activities are activities that keep the students occupied i , e activities that manage or fill time that would otherwise be wasted . Scrivener (2010,p.56) asserts that teachers may use fillers in separate way from the surrounding lessons or they may use them in a way that is connected with the lesson .It should be noted that the researcher has chosen only two types of these activities which are crossword puzzles and charades to be implemented by the students in the classroom .Therfore, this study tries to provide answers to the following questions :

1- What is the impact of using time filler activities (crosswords puzzles and charades) on EFL secondary students critical thinking skills ?
2- What is the effect of using time filler activities (crosswords puzzles and charades) on EFL secondary students vocabulary ?

1- **Aims of the study** .

The current study aims at ;

a- Exploiting part of the classroom time for using time fillers activities .

b- Finding out the effect of implementing time fillers (crossword puzzle and charades)on the EFL secondary students critical thinking .

c- Investigating the impact of using time fillers activities (crossword puzzle and charades) on EFL students vocabulary learning .

In sum , this research has conducted to see the impact of using some of the filler activities namely (crossword and charades) on EFL secondary students critical thinking and vocabulary . It deals with the second class students of the intermediate stage . Both of these activities may play a role in developing or enhancing students critical thinking and vocabulary learning .

1- **Theoretical Background .**

2.1 Time filler activities

Teachers need fillers which are things to do when they have run out of other material .   Scrivener (2010 ,p :356) justifies the main reasons behind the use of fillers by most teachers saying '" fillers are also useful at the start of a lesson as a warmer (particularly when you are waiting for some late comers) or mid –lesson as a way of changing the pace or breaking up similar activities "

He (ibid) highlights the importance of using fillers by indicating that they may be regarded as a chance for recycling lexis from earlier lessons or working on activities that have an aim of group building .They also may keep the students busy and interested at the same time .

Fillers are then not basically games , but they are activities which can be regarded as games by incorporating the element of competition to them (http:/www.wikipedia. org) .

It should be noted that there are many types of filler activities that the teacher can exploit for reinforcing learning aims and goals , but the researcher has used only two types namely crosswords and charades .

2.2Puzzles

Theoretically , most research studies have established the significance of puzzles in the process of learning a foreign language and their roles and effects on the students achievement .

According to Oxford Wordpower(2002) , puzzle is a game that can test ones knowledge , skill and intelligence .As a general definition , puzzle is something as a toy , game or problem that requires ingenuity ,cleverness and creation and often persistence in assembling or solving . (Farlex , 2009).

Puzzle –like activities could have many benefits as indicated by Harmer (2010 , p. 106) who assures that "we can give our students puzzle – like activities to get them thinking . They can work out 'rules' for themselves " . He also states that many students may remember and learn the new language better if they have to get it themselves for example by looking for it in their activities that require discovery and using their intelligence to understand "with the help of the teacher ".

Puzzles are then very creative types of filler activities because there isn't a requirement or time limit and the student can work at their own pace .Moreover, Scrivener(2011) adds that puzzles especially web puzzles may be considered as one of the suggested methods of improving students reading skills as they consist of series of questions and the students are required to get the answers by reading and searching the internet . Michalewicz and Michalewicz (2008) illustrate the main reasons behind the students enthusiasm for using puzzles in learning the English language by stating that they are educational and they can illustrate powerful rules of problem – solving in a very entertaining way . They are also thought – provoking and engaging .

It is worth mentioning that there are many types of puzzles as word search puzzles , crossword puzzles , web puzzles , number puzzles , logical puzzles …….ect , but this study has tackled only crossword puzzles as they are the most common types of puzzles among secondary stage students . Theoretically , crossword puzzle is defined by Hornby (1963 , p :233) as a problem design for testing a persons knowledge in which the words have to be written horoizontally and vertically in spaces on a sequred . They can be used with thematic units of study and big units of study . Kress (2008) also states that having the students to complete crossword puzzles may benefit in

reviewing the spelling and definition of the new vocabulary words . She (ibid , p.301) comments that " weekly crosswords can be habit forming and a painless – way to continue to review vocabulary and spelling"

2.3 . Charades

As a general definition , charades means as Tate (2004) states , a game of acting out words , feeling or actions in the text . Gloubeman (2003) adds that charades is a game of using the body and the face to communicate . Charades is also regarded by Kaduson and Schaefor (2003) as a game for facilitating the emotional education of the pupils as it requires them to be in the attention center for few minutes . It is also motivating intrinsically . According to Farqi (2014) , charades is a pantomime game where the students should guess words from other friends or parteners who act without sounds ,words and phrases to resemble something . Relating to the significance of charades in learning a foreign language , Kress ((2008 , p . 302) assures that it can be a good team game for reviewing vocabulary by having the members of the students pick the cards with the vocabulary word written on it and pantomime gesture or dramatize the words , then having the other members of the class guess that word .

2. 4. Critical Thinking

Generally , critical thinking is defined by Gardner (1996 ,p. 271) as " looking beneath the surface of words to understand a writers meaning and intention . Critical thinking involves analysis , synthesis and evaluation " . Moon (2008, p . 7) defines critical thinking by clarifying that " critical thinking is a capacity to work with complex ideas whereby a person can make effective provision of evidence to justify a reasonable judgment " . Critical thinking can be defined in relation to logic and this is assured by Patterson (2011) who states that critical thinking is the logical use of information and in a sequential manner .

According to Halpern (1996) , critical thinking is the use of the cognitive strategies or skills for increasing the probability of the desirable outcomes . Paual and Elder (2006) characterize critical thinking as the ability to solve complex problems by asking vital questions , collecting relevant information , specifying findings and communicating in an effective way .

Critical thinking has many significances on the process of learning a foreign language as indicated by Mdzabit etal (2018 , p. 154) who highlight this value of critical thinking saying " it prepares the students with the necessary tools for responding to the changes and new challenges arising . It facilitate the execution of the individual tasks involved in such a process " .

Critical thinking is also regarded as an essential and vital subject in modern education and many educators and instructors are interested in teaching this concept to their students . The main purpose behind teaching it is enhancing the students thinking skills and preparing for the world of challenge and change .In sum , critical thinking is a method of open – ended learning and thinking into the classes . It means accepting more than one correct answer

2.5 .Vocabulary Learning

The acquisition of vocabulary is an essential part of learning a foregin language . Fraga etal (2011) states that the students knowledge of words is critical factor in reading comprehention . He adds that vocabulary plays one if not the most important role in learning a foreign language . The students are required not only to know an extensive number of words , but they must combine this knowledge of how and where to use them as Mostak and Hosseini (2009) mention that these two banks of knowledge are necessary for effective communication in the foreign language.

Moreover , Fraga etal (2011 , p. 24) highlight the importance of learning vocabulary stating that " insufficient vocabulary hinders the comprehention of academic texts ". This may be justified on the ground that the comprehention of written texts depends largely on the students ability to encounter the meaning of the most essential words and if the students cannot understand the meaning of these words , the comprehention will lag .Awad and Al-Faleet (2005) also assure that vocabulary is the base for all other language skills in that the meaning of a new word is an important skill for strengthening listening comprehention and reading .

Therefore , much emphasis should be placed on teaching and learning vocabulary words as Nunan (2001 , p: 103) indicates that " in recent years , the teaching of vocabulary has assumed its rightful place as a fundemantelly important aspect of language development " . As a result , applying different strategies and methods for improving the teaching of vocabulary for EFL learners has been investigated by many researchers and writers and in different contexts . Al-Darayseh(2014) tries to show the effect of using both implicit and explicit teaching strategies on increasing the vocabulary size of the students and improving their reading skills . Al-Obaydi (2020) reports the use of two strategies or techniques namely input flooding and peripheral learning on the acquisition of vocabulary . She concludes that these two techniques have a significant and positive impact on young learners vocabulary acquisition .Jawad (2020) also assures in her study the positive

impact of applying running dictation technique on promoting EFL primary pupils vocabulary . So , it is hoped that applying these types of filler activities namely crossword puzzles and charades may also help in enhancing students vocabulary .

2.4 . Hypotheses .
a- There is no significance impact of using time filler activities (crossword puzzles and charades) on EFL secondary students critical thinking .
b- There is no significant effect of using time filler activities (crossword puzzle and charade) on EFL secondary students vocabulary .

3. Methodology
3.1 The Experimental Design
  To achieve the aims of the study and to prove the hypotheses , the researcher implemented (the post test only control group design).The following table illustrates the details of this design .

Table (1) The Experimental Design

Group	The Independent Variable	Instruments
The Experimental Group	Using crossword puzzles and charades	Observation Checklist and written vocabulary test .
The Control Group	No additional activities or material .	Observation Checklist and written vocabulary test .

3.2 Participants
  To obtain the objectives of the study , the researcher chose (40) second year intermediate students (20 students for each group) .Baghdad Governorate , Al – Adhamya District , Al Fawz secondary school for girls for the academic year 2018-2019 . The researcher chose two classes from the original four classes in this school . For ensuring better equalization of the two groups , the researcher controlled some of the variables that may affect the results of the experiment as the educational level of the parents and the age of the subjects .

3.3 The experiment

The experiment started on the 7 of October 2018 and lasted for eight weeks to end up on 4 December 2018 . The teacher herself has taught the two groups the same prescribed material of the English language subject . The students of the experimental group have received crossword puzzles and charades as a treatment of a free time filler activities at the beginning of each lesson (five minitues for each activity) . In applying these activities , the researcher followed the following procedures ;

1-   The researcher divided the students into five groups and gave the same crossword puzzles for each group . These groups have received one crossword puzzles for each lesson . For the sake of achieving motivation among the students of each group to solve the given puzzles , the teacher gave a point and a prize for the group who finished first and their answers are true .

It should be noted that most of the crossword puzzles that have been given to the students of the experimental group have elicited from the website (htt:\\iteslj . org / cw) as they suit their level too much .

2-Concerning applying charades to the experimental group , the researcher chose the new vocabulary elicited from the chapters being taught from the prescribed textbook throughout the experiment . She divided the students into groups and ask each group to pick up cards within these new vocabulary written on them and pantomime or dramatize the words , then having the other members of the group guess these words .

The teacher has taught the control group the same material and units used with the experimental group but using the regular methods of teaching without using time filler activities (crossword puzzles and charades).

The researcher compares the aspects of critical thinking and vocabulary of the two groups along within the experiment and according to what is assured by Nunan and Baily (2009 ,p.259) , the researcher can manually collect data by observation schedule as they (ibid)assert that observation is " a codified system of observation category " . The final results have been measured by applying the adapted critical thinking observation checklist and a written test of vocabulary .

3. 4 . Instruments

To provide answers to the questions of this study , an   observation checklist of critical thinking which is developed by Fraker (1995) has been

adopted by the researcher . This observation checklist scale contains ten items , each one of it measures an aspect of critical thinking skills . Therefore , measuring the students critical thinking skills has been achieved by listing specific skills which are being registered and sought on particular assignments given to the students , then the teacher herself observe if the students has mastered them or not .

This observation checklist uses (1) check for sometimes , + plus for frequently and (0) a zero for not yet .(Burk , 1993) . It should be noted that not each student need to be observed on one assignment , but four or five students are focused on one assignment and the other four or five students in the next and this may continue so that the teacher can get sufficient insight for each students thinking skills and know which skills need more emphasis and improvement and integrated them into the coming lesson.

This observation checklist has many benefits as it can help the teacher to know at an earlier stage who needs assistance the most before a test or a quiz and allows the time for both the teacher and the students to encounter the problematic spots for achieving better results of the test .

The researcher has also used another technique of assessment which is the interview or the conference for detecting the mastery of the students certain skills of critical thinking which are difficult to be checked by observation as recognizing bias , keeping an open mind and making connection

For the purpose of finding out the effect of using time filler activites (crossword puzzles and charades) on improving students vocabulary , the teacher has constructed an achievement vocabulary test which contains four questions : multiple – choice completion , matching synonyms , matching antonyms and grid technique .

3-5 Validity and reliability

The two types of validity that are used in this study are content validity and face validity . The first one is checked and evaluated before the second one . Brown (2001,p.388) states that content validity occurs if the test or the instrument samples the subject matter on which the conclusions are to be derived . In the current study , the observation checklist used is based exactly on Fraker (1995) checklist which contains the ten aspects of critical thinking skills .So , the observation checklist of this study represents the exact aspects of this field . Concerning the written vocabulary test , the content validity is ensured as all the items of the test are based on the material of the students textbook .The second type of validity is estimated by exposing the

observation checklist and the vocabulary test items to a group of specialists in the fields of language teaching and education .All of the members agree on the suitability of both instruments to be used in this study .Reliability of the observation checklist is evaluated by using inter-rater method by applying Pearson correlation coefficient and the result is 0.82 which is considered acceptable reliability . Reliability of the vocabulary test is confirmed by using test –retest method and the result is 0.81 which is also regarded as acceptable reliability.

4- Results and Discussion

To achieve the aims of the study , two hypotheses have been put forward as follows :

1- There is no significant impact of applying time filler activities (crossword puzzles and charades) on EFL secondary students critical thinking skills ,

2- There is no significant effect of using time fillers activities on EFL secondary students vocabulary learning.

4-1 Results related to the first hypothesis :

T- test for two independent samples is used at level of 0.05 and 38 degree of freedom to obtain the results of the first hypothesis . The results reveal that there are differences of statistical significance between the experimental group and the control group at the following critical thinking skills ; (makes connections , draws inferences , classifies and categorizes , sequences , analyze for cause and effect , analyzes for bias , constructs support for position or decision , avoids premature judgment , applies knowledge to new situations and weights consequences) and in favor of the experimental group . See Table 2 .

Table -2- The Statistical Analysis of the two groups on the Skills of the Critical Thinking .

Variable	Group No	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	Computed t -value
Make connections	Ex=20 Co=20	9.450 8.550	1.27 1.50	38	2.04
Draws inferences	Ex=20 Co=20	9.600 8.700	1.09 1.59	38	2.08
Classifies and categorizes	=	9.250 7.950	0.87 0.85	=	3.29
sequences	=	8.750 7.900	0.63 1.57	=	2.10
Analyze for cause and effect	=	8.22 7.100	1.10 2.04	=	2.11
Analyze for bias	=	9.65 7.954	0.86 0.83	=	3.28
Construct support for position	=	9.449 8.549	1.26 1.49	=	2.3
Avoids premature judgment	=	8.22 7.100	1.10 2.04	=	2.11
Applies knowledge to new situations	=	9.600 8.700	1.09 1.59	=	2.08
Weights consequences	=	9.250 7.950	0.87 0.85	=	3.29

This result shows that the application of time filler activities has significant and positive effects on the students critical thinking .Therefore , the first null hypothesis has been rejected . This result proves that teaching or using crossword puzzles and charades play a significant role on enhancing students critical thinking skills . It helps in creating an interactive classroom

or atmosphere   which in turn helps in making students think critically and depending on their intelligence to understand the new language and vocabulary . It also proves that implementing or exploiting time fillers activities can develop students enthusiasm and autonomy by depending on themselves as groups on solving the crosswords puzzles , problems   and charades   presented to them . They are also thought provoking , educational and engaging means in the process of learning English language .   This result is also confirmed by   Widyasari (2010) who assures in his study that crossword puzzles play a role in training the students brain for thinking critically .Merrick (2010) also reports that synthesizing the concepts of puzzle – based learning within the existing content of the course enhances the students learning experiences by maximizing their interest and participation in the course and developing their skills of critical thinking .

This result proves that crossword puzzles and charades also encourage students logical thinking , can correct their spelling and motivate them to know the factual information .They use critical thinking because they systematically narrow the range of the possible answers and contemplate the clues . They are also helpful in distinguishing the areas of understanding as well as the weakness areas . Therfore , the students confidence may be increased when they identify the answers in the correct way . In this respect , this study come in accordance with Mshayisas study (2020) which indicates the same result.

4-2 Results related to the second hypothesis

To obtain the result of the second hypothesis , t- test for two independent samples at a level of 0.05 and 38 degree of freedom has been used . The result indicates that there are differences of statistical significance between the experimental group and the control group in the scores of the vocabulary test and in the sake of the experimental group . see table – 3

Table -3- The Statistical Analysis of the two groups on Vocabulary Test

Group	S.D	Mean	T-Value		Level of significance
Experimental	3.03	22.6	calculated 6.27	Tabulated 2	significance
Control	3.26	16.7			

This result proves that implementing charades game and crosswords puzzles helps the students in showing their imagination and creativity of how to act out words . It also helps them in defining the concept and adjust the actions with the spoken word . So , this result comes in line with Sari and Chairani s study   (2017) and Rahmah and Astutiks study (2020) in assuring   that applying charades has a significant and positive effect on learning and teaching English vocabulary at the elementary and intermediate stages .

3- Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the results of this study , it can be concluded that integrating time fillers activities as crosswords puzzles and charades game at the beginning or the end of each lesson or session is an effective and worthwhile activity for the English classroom . Furthermore , crosswords puzzles and charades as teaching tools encourage students critical thinking skills by making them think deeply to solve the problems presented on each crosswords puzzles and charades game and by activating their ability of gathering information depending on their background knowledge of the English language . They also help in developing the students vocabulary and communication skills through working in groups and adding flavor and enjoyment to vocabulary learning and teaching .

Time fillers activities are also considered as an interesting and efficient supplement to the traditional sessions as they engage the students in the material and allow for creating an environment which helps the students to participate actively in the lesson . In addition , they can relieve the tedium of the English lesson and the classical methods by providing a more relaxed and friendly classroom atmosphere .

It has also been concluded that time fillers activities assist in increasing the students participations and attention and improve their learning experiences as they are provoking and challenging .

The teachers of the English language should then encourage the students at the secondary stage to use skills of critical thinking by exposing them to such activities of time fillers as crosswords puzzles and charades because these skills are intrinsic element in the students learning process whether in reading or writing . The students should also realize that the sooner they start developing the skills of critical thinking , the greater the value they will get for the improvement of their learning performance .

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Appendicies
Appendix – A
Critical Thinking Teacher Checklist
1- Make Connection
2- Draw Inferences
3- Classifies/Categorizes
4- Sequences

5- Analyzes for cause and effect

6- Analyzes for bias

7- Construct support for position or decision

8- Avoids premature judgment

9- Applies knowledge to new situation

10- Weight consequences

استثمار أنشطة الوقت الزائد (الفلر)في تعزيز مهارات التفكير الناقد وتعلم المفردات للطلبة

المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى إيجاد تاثير استثمار انشطة الوقت الزائد (الحشو) والتي هي عبارة عن الأشياء او الأنشطة التي يقوم بها المدرس(ة) عندما ينفذ مادة أخرى في تعزيز مهارات التفكير الناقد للطلبة وتعلم المفردات .ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف استخدمت الباحثة المنهج التجريبي حيث قامت بتدريس مادة اللغة الإنكليزية لعشرين طالبة من ثانوية الفوز للبنات في محافظة بغداد مع التركيز الشديد على استثمار الوقت الزائد في القيام ببعض الأنشطة والفعاليات مثل الغاز الكلمات المتقاطعة والحزورات .لقد تبنت الباحثة مقياس لملاحظة مهارات التفكير الناقد للطلبة وقامت ببناء اختبارا تحريريا لقياس تعلم الطلبة للمفردات واستخدمت الباحثة بعض الوسائل الإحصائية لتحليل النتائج .ان نتائج هذه الدراسة هي حقيقة مذهلة حيث تشير الى وجود تاثير إيجابي كبير جدا لاستخدام أنشطة الوقت الحشو(الزائد)في تحسين مهارات التفكير الناقد للطلبة وتعلم المفردات .