論 文

Critical Thinking Instruction: Laying the Groundwork for Success in CLIL Courses

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Abstract

This paper investigates the development of critical thinking skills (CTS) through the discussion of topical social issues in a first-year English as a foreign language (EFL) course conducted online via Zoom. The classroom materials were designed to promote the development of intellectual traits identified by Paul and Elder (2001) as essential components of critical thinking (CT), including intellectual autonomy, intellectual empathy, and fair-mindedness. The classroom activities are in part intended to help first-year students acquire the thinking skills and thinking dispositions needed for subsequent participation in second and third-year Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses, which emphasize CTS and active group discussions. A survey was conducted at the end of the semester to collect student feedback about the classroom activities as well as their views on CT.

Introduction

Universities must prepare students for success in a world that is being rapidly transformed by globalization and technological advancements. The ongoing digital transformation of societies and economies is ushering in a new era in which many of the skills and competencies that will be valued and in-demand from now may differ significantly from the past. In this backdrop of accelerating change, critical thinking (CT) has been identified as an essential 21st century skill (DiCerbo, 2014) that is crucial for success in the global workforce (Liu et al., 2014), and is one of the most sought-after skills by employers (Pearson.com, 2021).

Although there is no consensus definition of CT, Paul and Elder (2006) define it succinctly as "the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it." Prudence Williams (2016) describes the critical thinking process as containing the following elements:

(a) identifying the assumptions that frame our thinking and determine our actions, (b) checking out the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid, (c) looking at our ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives, and (d) on the basis of all of this, taking informed actions.

Critical thinkers are said to be "skeptical, open-minded, value fair-mindedness, respect evidence and reasoning, respect clarity and precision, look at different points of view, and will change positions when reason leads them to do so" (Beyer, 1995).

The Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT, 2018) encourages the development of critical thinking skills (CTS) so that students will be able to think, make judgements and express themselves in complex and unfamiliar situations. Many universities in Japan are increasingly emphasizing CTS in their curriculums. Rikkyo University, for example, aims to help students develop into global leaders who can "think and act independently and live in harmony with the world" (Ikeda, 2020). Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at International Christian University describes CT as the foundation of liberal arts education and adds that the acquisition of CTS does not come easily but requires great

effort and training (Ikoma, 2022). Therefore, an understanding of best practices in CT instruction along with awareness of the specific challenges unique to each learning environment is essential.

In the case of Japan there are elements of culture, as well as pedagogical approaches in schools, that may hinder the development of CTS in Japan (Graham, 2018), such as the desire to maintain group harmony, fear of standing out— or ostracization—from the group, and strict hierarchical relationships. Okada (2017) concludes that many Japanese students may have difficulty in expressing ideas and asking questions in class because these activities clash with values that they have been raised with, and adds that students are often willing to accept what they are told by authority figures, such as teachers, rather than thinking for themselves.

Given that language and culture are inextricably linked, Japanese students may feel freer to ask questions and express opinions in English classes (Okada, 2017). Ichimura (2013) echoes these thoughts, stating, "We urgently need to train students to be globally competent. EFL teachers must take a leading role in teaching students to think independently, to ask questions, and to express themselves by including opportunities for these activities in class." Courses with a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach may be well suited for this purpose.

CLIL and other similar approaches to teaching have gained in popularity as Japanese universities have sought to further internationalize and raise the English skills of students. CLIL courses "are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language" (Marsh, 2002). The term CLIL is sometimes used interchangeably with content-based instruction (CBI) and English as a medium of instruction (EMI). However, CLIL differentiates itself by giving equal weight to language and content, whereas CBI tends to place a larger emphasis on language learning over content and EMI generally does not focus on language. Furthermore, CLIL encourages the use of authentic learning materials, seeks to develop higher-order thinking skills, and promotes intercultural understanding (Coyle et al., 2010). The guiding principles of CLIL are referred to as the '4Cs': content, communication, cognition and culture. Coyle defines *content* as the acquisition of concepts and knowledge; *communication* as language knowledge and skills; *cognition* as the development of "thinking skills which link concept formation, understanding and language"; and *culture* as "exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self" (Coyle, 1999).

The learning objectives in a typical EMI course may focus exclusively on content with little or no attention devoted to the development of CTS. However, in the case of CLIL, the 4Cs framework extends the learning outcomes beyond content and language to encompass higher-order thinking skills and intercultural understanding, both of which overlap with CT. Therefore, the CLIL approach seems an ideal fit for university departments such as the Faculty of Intercultural Studies at Yamaguchi Prefectural University, which places great importance on the development of CTS and intercultural competence.

Development of Classroom Materials for Critical Thinking Instruction

At Yamaguchi Prefectural University, there are a number of content courses in the Department of Intercultural Studies that are taught in English. The CLIL and EMI courses offered to students from their second year include: *Japanese Modern Society*, *Japanese Modern Culture*, *Yamaguchi and the World*, *Politics of Japan*, and *Introduction to Buddhism*. The CLIL and EMI courses offered to students from their third year include: *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, *Japanese Economy and Globalization*, *Media and Communication in Japan*, and *Intercultural Studies*.

All first-year students in the Department of Intercultural Studies are required to take the course *Advanced English* in both spring and fall semesters. This course meets two times per week and seeks to develop students' four skills of English (Reading, Writing, Speaking Listening) while focusing on academic English such as vocabulary words from the Academic Word List (AWL) and practical English skills to help students improve their TOEIC scores. Furthermore, the broader curricular objectives of the course include helping students to attain a deeper understanding of

social issues, as well as the ability to think independently and to be able to respond flexibly to meet the demands of our diverse and rapidly-changing world.

There is a significant gap between the English language skills needed for students to succeed in the CLIL and EMI courses compared to the first-year course. Therefore, in order to help prepare students for the academic rigors of the CLIL and EMI courses—which require high-level English skills and vocabulary knowledge, and involve active group discussions and the need for CTS—new activities were introduced into the *Advanced English* course. The new activities aimed to promote CTS while at the same time developing students' English skills and deepening their understanding of topical social issues.

To promote the development of CTS, the classroom materials were designed to target the intellectual traits identified by Paul and Elder (2001), with particular emphasis on intellectual autonomy, intellectual empathy, and fair-mindedness. Paul and Elder (2001) developed a critical thinking framework which includes three components: elements of reasoning, intellectual standards, and intellectual traits. In this CT model, the application of intellectual standards (e.g., accuracy, logical, depth, breath) are applied to elements of reasoning (e.g., inferences, concepts, implications, assumptions) which leads to the development of the following eight intellectual traits that are essential to being a critical thinker: intellectual humility, intellectual courage, intellectual empathy, intellectual autonomy, intellectual integrity, intellectual perseverance, confidence in reason, and fair-mindedness.

In the spring semester of *Advanced English*, three topical social issues were discussed in class: the voting age in Japan, the holding of the Tokyo Olympics during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the participation of transgender athletes in accordance with their gender identity at the Olympic Games. For each of these three topics students were given a claim to consider (e.g., the voting age in Japan should be raised back to 20 years of age). First, students had to brainstorm as many reasons as they could think of in favor of the claim and write down their top three reasons, and then share their ideas with a classmate (appendix 1). Next, students had to brainstorm as many reasons as they could think of against the claim and repeat the same process described above. (It is important to have students brainstorm and come up with their own ideas before sharing with a partner in order to prevent group-think bias). Finally, after having thoroughly considered the pros and cons, students were asked to decide their position for or against the claim and explain their main reason why and share with a classmate. This activity sought to encourage fair-mindedness in students by having them come up with various ideas both in favor and against each claim.

For fall semester, the activity described above was expanded to encompass a wider range of tasks. Similar to spring semester, students were asked to consider claims regarding three topical social issues: school uniforms, English taught in Japanese elementary schools as an official subject, and the 'seishain' (lifetime employment) system of employment in Japan. After the initial tasks of brainstorming pros and cons and writing down their top reasons (appendix 2 and 3), students were asked to identify a weakness in one of their reasons for being in favor of the claim and explain why the reason is weak or not as strong as it may appear (appendix 4). Next, students were asked to do the same thing for one of their reasons for being against the claim. Then, students shared their ideas with a classmate. This activity sought to encourage students to develop the habit of always trying to look for possible weaknesses in reasons and arguments, including their own. Before having students complete this difficult task, the teacher provided students with various examples to help guide them.

For the next part of the activity (appendix 5) students had to decide their position on the issue and indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with the claim by choosing a number 0-10 (0 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree). By having students not only state their position on the issue but also indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree, it provided students with an additional element to discuss with their classmates so that even if two students happened to take the same position on the issue, their degree of agreement or disagreement may differ.

For the final part of the activity (appendix 6), students were asked to consider the issue from a different perspective. Students were asked to imagine themselves as a person who is different from their real self in an important

way, such as being a different age-group, gender, nationality, or having a different cultural or religious upbringing. Students were asked to consider how this imagined difference may lead them to adopting the opposite position on the issue compared to their true position. This task sought to encourage intellectual empathy so that students could become more accepting of how personal differences or background could lead people to having different opinions about a given social issue. Given the complexity of this task, the teacher provided students with various examples to help guide them. Finally, students were asked to imagine that one year later they decided to change their position on the topic and they had to explain what new circumstance/s caused them to change their mind regarding their position on the topic. For example, perhaps a student experienced something in their personal life that gave them a new perspective on the topic or provided new information to them about the topic, and as a result, it persuaded them to adopt the opposite opinion. Once again, the teacher provided students with various examples to help guide them. This activity sought to encourage flexible thinking in students so that they would develop the habit of keeping an open-mind about the issues and be willing to change their position when new evidence or personal experiences—including recent developments surrounding the issue—compel them to do so.

Research Methods

        At the end of the fall semester, a survey created on Google Forms was administered to students to collect student feedback about the classroom activities and their general views on CTS. 38 students participated in the survey. The survey questions were written in English with a Japanese translation also provided to ensure that students would not misunderstand the meaning of the questions. For many of the survey questions, students were asked to explain the reason for their answer. The results for each survey question along with a number of student comments are compiled below. Students were told that they could write their comments in Japanese or English. In most cases they used Japanese, but a few students answered in English. For the comments in which students answered in Japanese, English paraphrases are provided.
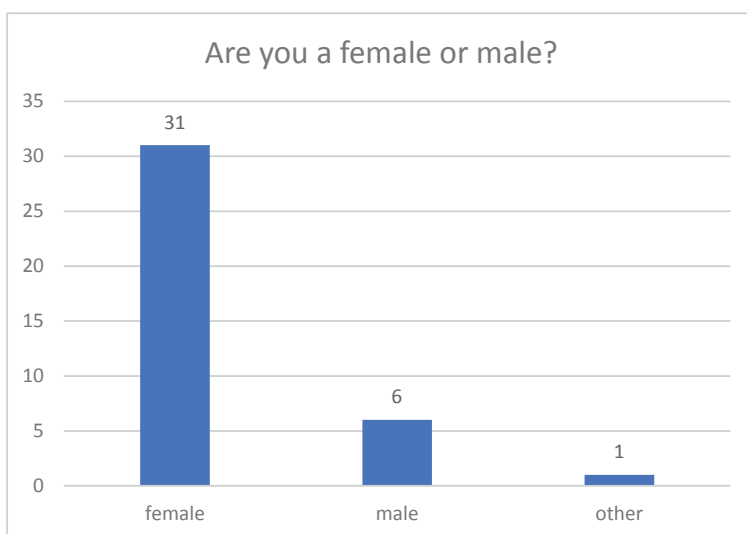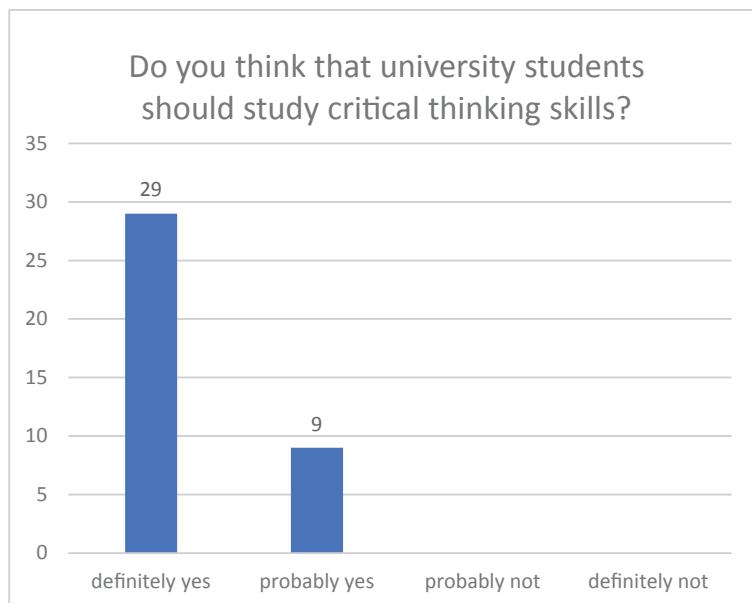
Survey Results

Figure 1: Gender Distribution

Figure 2: Students' views on the importance of studying CTS

Student comments:

・「自分の価値観や偏見に気付ける。多学生の意見を知り、議論できるから。」

・「最近はフェイクニュースがたくさんあるため、情報を批判的に見たり別の視点から情報を見たりする力が必要だから。」

・「複数の視点からものを見ることができるようになったり自分の考えのプロセスを明確にしたりすることで、新しい考えが浮かんだり、より良い考えにつながったりするから。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・We can become aware of our values and biases. And we can exchange ideas and understand what our classmates' think.

・These days there is a lot of fake news, so it necessary to be able to view information critically and from different perspectives.

・Because we can become able to see things from various perspectives and clarify our own thought processes, which leads to new and better ideas.
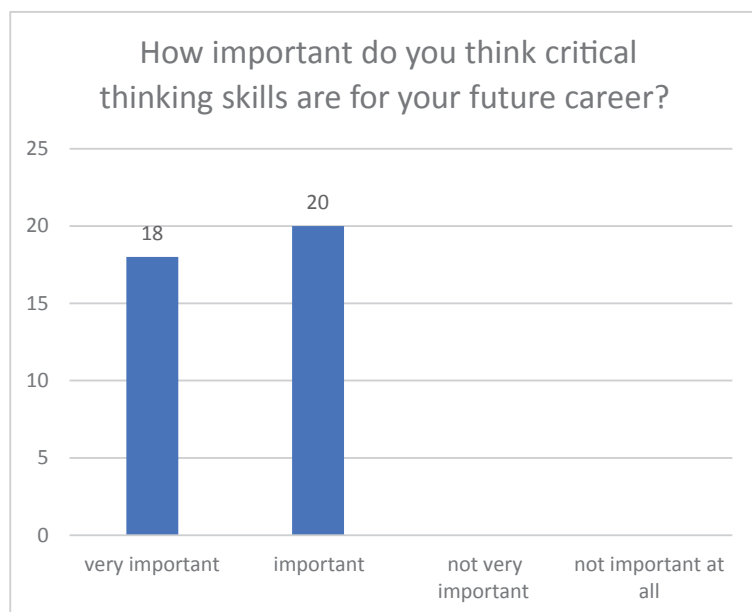
How important do you think critical thinking skills are for your future career?

Figure 3: Students' views on the importance of CTS for future career

Student comments:

・「課題や解決策を考えたり、他の視点からものを考え直すこと、一つの視点にとらわれないことが社会の中で必要だと思うから。」

・「仕事はすべて人間と関わって行うものなので、考え方の違いでトラブルが起こるのを避けるためにも柔軟な考え方を身に着けておくべきだと思うから。」

・「クリエイティブさが重要視される社会の中で、自身の意見をつよく保つため。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・In our society it is necessary to think about problems and consider solutions from different perspectives rather than being limited to one point of view.

・Because all jobs involve interacting with other people, we should learn to think flexibly in order to prevent problems that may arise from different ways of thinking.

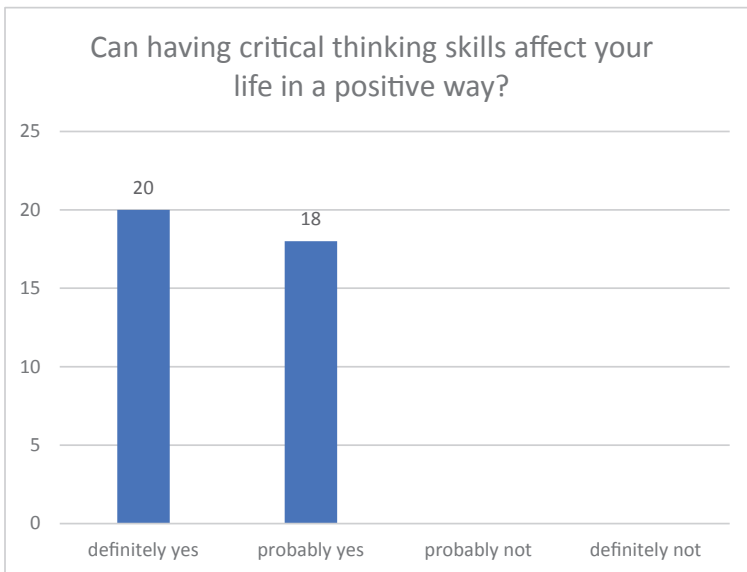・In our society that values creativity, critical thinking skills help us to form our own opinions.

Figure 4: Students' views on CTS affecting their lives in a positive way

Student comments:

・「働く時だけでなく、色々な判断をする際に必要なスキルだから。」

・「世の中にはたくさんの情報があふれているから。」

・「自分の考えがすべてではないということを念頭に置いて生活できると違う考え方を持つ人に会ってもネガティブな感情になりにくくなって、より快適に暮らしていけると思うから。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・It is a skill that is necessary not only for work but also when having to make various decisions in life.

・Because we are inundated by information in this world.

・By keeping in mind that our own ideas are not the be-all and end-all, when we encounter someone who has different thinking from us, we can respond more comfortably without developing negative feelings.
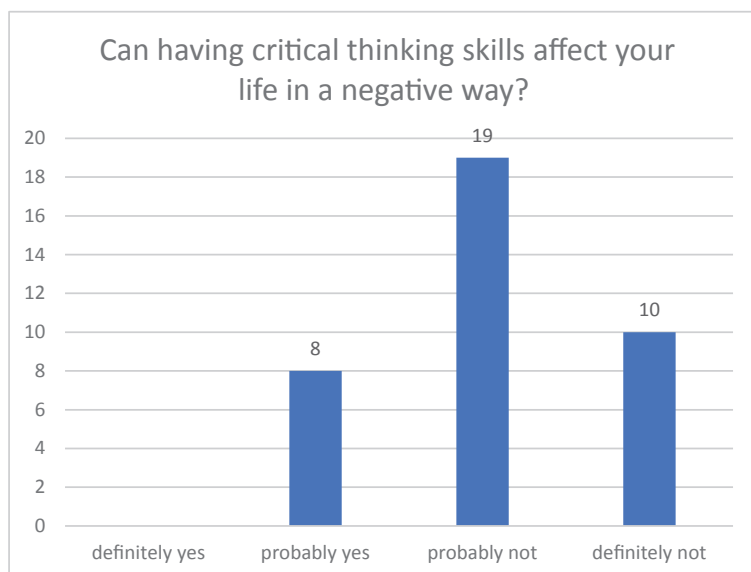
Figure 5: Students' views on CTS affecting their lives in a negative way

Student comments:

・「毎回批判的に深く考えてしまうと、生活しづらくなる。」

・「クリティカルシンキングをするということは、相手の意見を否定してしまうことにもなるから。」

・「基本的には良いことだとは思うけれど、相手の考え方を自分の想像だけで決めつけてしまう場合がある と思うから。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・If you think about everything critically, it makes life unpleasant.

・Critical thinking can lead to sometimes denying the opinions or ideas of others.

・Overall, critical thinking is a good thing, but there are times when critical thinking may lead one to wrongly assume the other person's thinking.
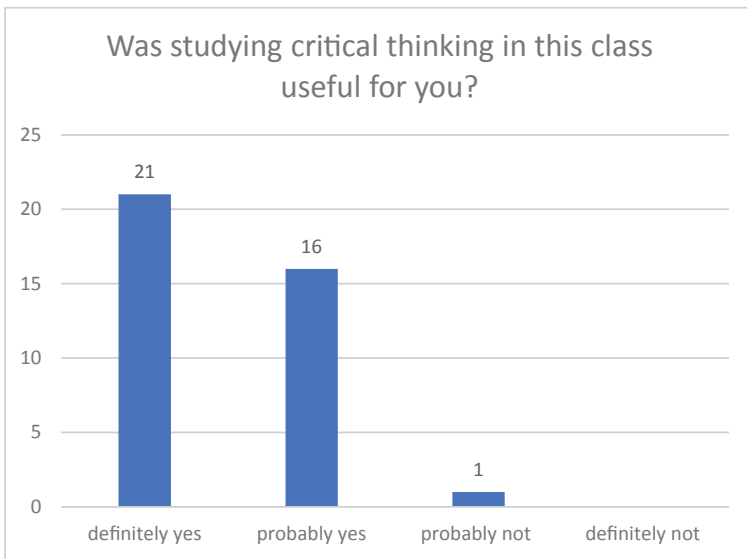
Was studying critical thinking in this class useful for you?

	definitely yes	probably yes	probably not	definitely not
	21	16	1	

Figure 6: Students' views on the usefulness of the CT class activities

Student comments:

・「高校まででは経験することのないものだから。」

・「考えるときに英語のスキルも上達させることができると同時にほかの人と実際に意見を共有できることでまた新たな視点を得ることができるから。」

・「自分の考えていなかったトピックへの他人の意見が参考になって自分の中の視野が広げられたから。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・Because it is not something that I experienced studying in junior high and high school.

・While improving my English skills I can exchange opinions with others and learn new points of view.

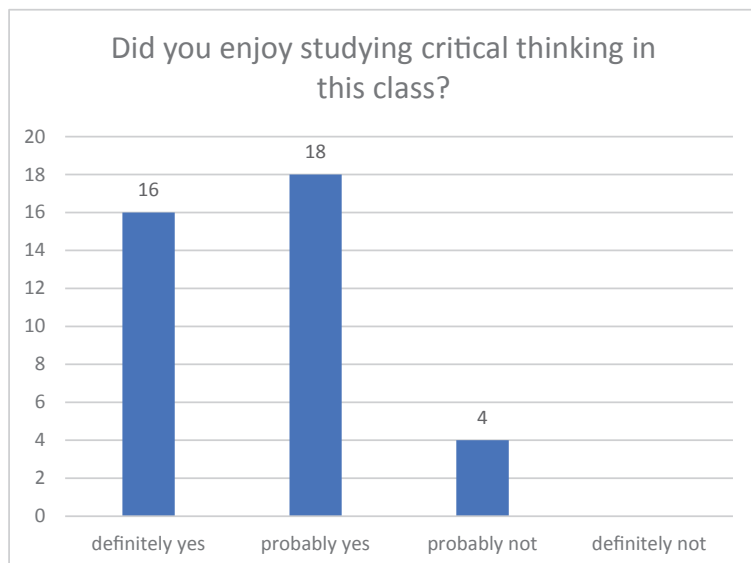・Hearing my classmate's opinions about topics I had never considered about before helped me to broaden my perspective.

Figure 7: Students' level of enjoyment with the CT class activities

Student comments:

・「反対意見、賛成意見の交換をすることで話が盛り上がるだけでなく、とても勉強になった。」

・「自分では全く思いつかない意見があったり、英語で表現することの楽しさがあったりしたから。」

・「以外に考えるのも楽しい。」

English paraphrase of student comments:

・Exchanging opinions both for and against was not only stimulating but also informative.

・It was fun to express myself in English and also hear opinions and viewpoints that had never even occurred to me before.
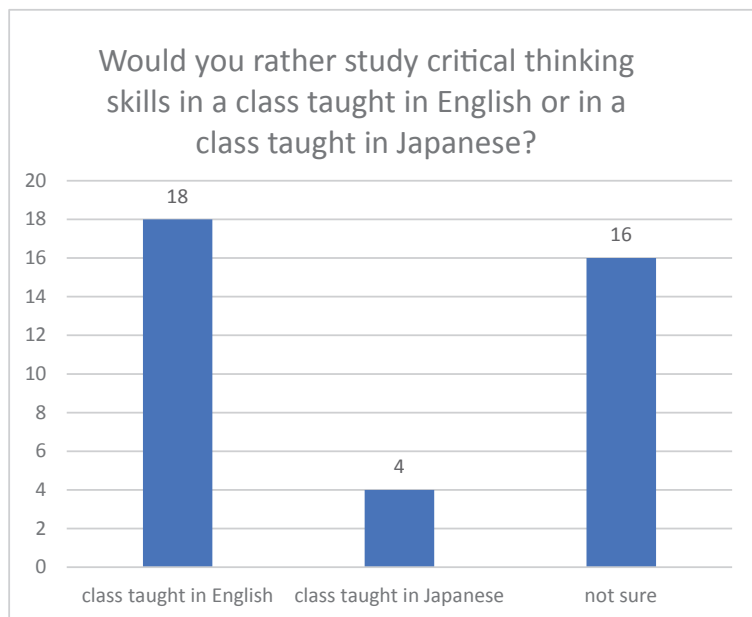
・I unexpectedly enjoyed thinking about things.

Figure 7: Students' preference for studying CT in English or Japanese

Student comments:

・「英語のスキルも同時にあげることができる。日本語よりフランクな雰囲気で話をすることができる。」

・「いくら良い意見をもっていても、それを英語で表現するのに苦労することも多かったから。」

・"We can improve two abilities in the same time. English and critical thinking."

English paraphrase of student comments:

・I can improve my English at the same time and also I can be more open and frank with my opinions in English rather than in Japanese.

・No matter how good my ideas were, I often had trouble expressing them in English.

Survey Question 9: *What could your teacher Swanson do differently to make critical thinking activities more useful or enjoyable for you?*

Student comments:

・「今のままでも十分楽しいが、より身近なトピックにするともっと楽しくなると思う。」

・「有名なクリティカルシンキングの例を見てみたいと感じた。英語、日本語どちらのものでも。」

・ "Some of the topic was a little bit difficult for me, so I thought if there was some easy question, it will be better."

English paraphrase of student comments:

・ It was fun enough as it is now, but it would be even more fun with more accessible topics that I can relate to in my life.

・ I would have liked to see a well-known example of critical thinking, either in English or in Japanese.

Survey Question 10: *Is there anything you would like to tell Swanson about the topic of critical thinking?*

Student comments:

・ 「難しいけど、近年の問題が多く役に立ちました。」

・ 「多角的なものの見方、自分とは違う意見を知ることはこれから柔軟に物事を考えるうえで重要であると思うのでこの授業は私にとって有意義なものでした。」

・ "we need a little more time to think.... it was a little bit short….:)"

English paraphrase of student comments:

・ It was difficult but it was useful to study about topical issues.

・ This class was beneficial because through hearing diverse and multi-faceted views and hearing opinions that are different from mine, I could realize the importance of thinking about things more flexibly from now on.

Analysis and Conclusion

　　The survey results suggest that Japanese university students generally believe that critical thinking skills are important and useful to them. However, this survey has several limitations that must be acknowledged. One limitation is that the survey was only conducted at the end of the fall semester rather than at multiple intervals at the beginning and end of each semester. As a result, it is unclear whether or not the students' generally positive views regarding critical thinking were influenced by the class activities outlined in this paper—or possibly influenced by teacher comments about the importance of critical thinking during class—or if students already held those views from before. Had the survey been conducted at the beginning and end of each semester, it would have been possible to analyze changes to the students' views on critical thinking. Moreover, there was no control group, which makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions regarding any connections between the class activities and students' views on critical thinking.

　　Overall, the results of the survey were somewhat of a pleasant surprise given the high level cognitive and language demands placed on students to complete the various tasks, combined with students' lack of background knowledge and familiarity with some of the topics (e.g., the 'seishain' employment system). In spite of these challenges, the vast

majority of students perceived the class activities to be both enjoyable and useful. These results may suggest that EFL educators can feel emboldened to challenge their students with tasks that are cognitively demanding. All of the students surveyed believed that CTS can affect their life in a positive way and are important for their future career. Finally, although many students were unsure whether or not they preferred to study CTS in an English class or Japanese class, there was an overall preference for the former, which may corroborate the idea that the EFL classroom, including CLIL courses, may be suitable—if not ideal—for CT instruction. As attested to by one of the student comments, the English-language classroom may have a comparatively open and frank atmosphere of communication in which some students may feel freer and more comfortable to share and debate ideas compared to a Japanese-language classroom setting.

In conclusion, the primary aim of this study was to implement classroom activities that would encourage the development of students' CTS as a goal in and of itself. As a secondary aim, it sought to help prepare students for the high-level language, cognitive, and academic demands of the second and third-year CLIL and EMI courses that many students will take in subsequent years at Yamaguchi Prefectural University. Despite the limitations and shortcomings of this study, the results paint an encouraging picture about students' views on the importance of thinking critically and their willingness to share their ideas and opinions about various social issues with their classmates.

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Appendix 1

<u>Forming an Opinion</u>

Claim:

Write 3 Reasons for agreeing with the claim:

1)

2)

3)

Write 3 Reasons for disagreeing with the claim:

1)

2)

3)

After carefully considering the reasons for both sides, my conclusion is that:

Critical Thinking About Social Issues

Today's claim for us to consider:

Part 1: Reasons in favor of the claim（主張に賛成する理由）

Step 1: Brainstorm

Write down at least four reasons why people should <u>agree</u> with the claim:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Step 2: Let's share our reasons with our partner and see what they think!

Appendix 3

Part 2: Reasons against the claim（主張に反対する理由）

Step 1: Brainstorm

Write down at least four reasons why people should <u>disagree</u> with the claim:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Step 2: Let's share our reasons with our partner and see what they think!

Appendix 4

Part 3: Finding weaknesses in your reasons（理由の弱点を見つけよう）

Step 1: Go back to part 1 (Reasons in favor of the claim) and look at the reasons you wrote about why people should <u>agree</u> with the claim. Try to think about any weaknesses in your reasons. Choose the one that you think has the biggest weakness and explain what the weakness is:

_____

_____

Step 2: Let's share the weakness you wrote about above with your partner and see if they agree with you.

Step 3: Go back to part 2 (Reasons against the claim) and look at the reasons you wrote about why people should <u>disagree</u> with the claim. Try to think about any weaknesses in your reasons. Choose the one that you think has the biggest weakness and explain what the weakness is:

_____

_____

Step 4: Let's share the weakness you wrote about above with your partner and see if they agree with you.

Appendix 5

Part 4: Forming your opinion（見解を立てる）

Step 1: After carefully considering all of your reasons both for and against the claim, including the weaknesses that you discussed, decide whether or not you agree or disagree with the claim.

Circle your position and explain your main reason why: Agree   Disagree

The main reason I _____ with the claim is because _____

_____

_____

Step 2: Decide the intensity of your position

Circle a number below to express the degree to which you agree or disagree with the claim:

Strongly Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Strongly agree

 0   1   2   3   4   6   7   8   9   10

Step 3: Let's share our opinion with our partner about whether we agree or disagree with the claim and our main reason/s why. And then share your intensity rating with your partner and explain why you chose that number instead of a lower number or higher number.

Part 5: Revisiting the topic（見解を見つめ直す）

Step 1: Viewing the issue from a different perspective（別の視点から考える）

Put yourself in somebody else's shoes and try considering how somebody who has different values or life experience from you may think differently about this issue. Characteristics about a person such as their age, gender, nationality, culture, and religion could affect a person's values and life experience, which could lead them to form an opinion about this issue that is different from your opinion. Explain how it might be possible that somebody who is different from you might have an opinion that is different from your opinion.

It is possible that a person who is _____ might have

a different position from me on this issue because_____

_____

_____

Step 2: Changing your position one year later　（１年後に見解を変えることにした）

Let's imagine that it is one year later and that you decided to change your position. First, think about what would be the most likely reasons that could cause you to change your position. Then, explain the reason or reasons why you decided to change your position. (For example, explain how something you experienced in your life gave you a new perspective which caused you to change your position, or some circumstances surrounding this issue have changed in a way that caused you to change your position regarding this issue.)

The reason I changed my position from (agree/disagree) to (agree/disagree) is because_____

_____

_____