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The Effectiveness of Critical Thinking on the Iraqi EFL Learner's Performance in Poetry

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Abstract--- *This study aims at finding out the effectiveness of critical thinking (CT) as a technique on the Learners' Performance in Poetry. It is limited to the 4th preparatory students in Iraq during the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019 those who study poetry in their syllabus. To achieve this aim, it is hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the learners' mean scores of the experimental group who would be provided with CT and that of the control group who has not exposed to the mentioned treatment. The researcher has used the experimental design and chosen randomly a sample consisted of (62) students distributed in two groups. A post-test has been constructed to measure students' performance in poetry exposing the items of the test to a jury of experts to ensure its validity. The data has been collected and analyzed by using t-test for two independent samples. The findings have revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, and it was in favour of the experimental one. In the light of the findings, he researcher has drawn a number of conclusions.*

Keywords--- *Critical Thinking, Performance, EFL Learners, Poetry.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The researcher in the current study infers that having an environment full of ideas, interesting authentic materials, and available resources is believed to play an essential role in developing student's ability in understanding. Thus, developing students understanding is believed to be one of the most important skills which FL learners need to develop throughout their schooling. It could contribute to enhancing learning and increasing learner's self- confidence, a fact that might be reflected on the teaching learning process.

It has been obvious that there is a problem in teaching process because most of the teachers use the communicative language teaching approach in teaching which concentrates on the simple level of thinking. In addition to the researcher observation, need analysis strategy has been conducted to the target participants to reveal their needs and what they want to develop. The results of the need analysis revealed that most of them need to improve their understanding. They wants to learn how they read and understand the text. The results of the need analysis have the researcher believes that if the FL teachers keep teaching understanding by the communicative language teaching approach, learners' level will never progress, and they will never be able to express their ideas and organize them well. The researcher believes that understanding is a trade that needs training to develop, thus to reach the ultimate goal of enabling FL learners to express their ideas freely. The current study comes as an attempt to propose CT technique to develop fourth grade preparatory learners' performance in poetry. It seems that cognitive factors have a profound effect on the quality of learning in students and, also they can deepen the process of understanding the concepts and solving the problems.

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The problems coming from the students' were related to the lack of their understanding. Students lack of vocabulary, and they still have difficulties in comprehending the context of the text such as finding the topic of the text, and unstated details. Teaching poetry, in particular, has additional problems resulted from the nature of the skill. In the traditional way for teaching poetry, not all the students of a class participate, relatively few students have the chance and have necessary feedback. Those who participate are often the brightest students who volunteer to respond to teachers questions. Many students attend lessons in a passive way for long time. This weakness among students may be due to several factors including the teaching methods or the strategy which teachers follow in teaching where they focus only on the simple level of thinking. In addition to that, students do not employ their language skills in different life situations, in other words students use English only inside the classroom. To sum up, teaching and learning, the teacher of English should take into consideration follow up the modern teaching methods and strategies which can help him/her to facilitate and increase classroom learning and to achieve the educational objectives.

It is believed that the art of teaching is encouraging the students to challenge the problems and find suitable solution for them. In this regard, cognitive strategies are very compatible with engaging learner's mind in this process. In recent years, numerous studies are carried out on learners' cognitive skills as well as the strategies which are utilized by learners in foreign and second language learning (Brown, 2000). It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions (Halpern, 1998).

Benesch (1999) argues that when we shift to a critical thinker, we enhance awareness that prevents us to utilize fast and fix solution. In other words, critical thinkers would be a better problem solvers and decision makers. An individual thinking critically uses the scientific method to understand the ordinary world. This is true because critical thinking mimics the well-known method of scientific investigation: a question is identified, a hypothesis is formulated, relevant data are gathered, the hypothesis is logically tested and evaluated, and eliciting a reliable conclusion from the result (Stapleton, 2002).

Hay (2007) observes CT as the only eminent reason for teaching literature, because it teaches students to read and think more critically. He believes that although thinking is amazingly hard, it is the most rewarding thing we can devote our time to.

Learning critical skills is essential for all people. So that, they can strengthen their thinking power and establish effective communication with others. Some experts believe that the problem solving is a sub-category of CT, while, others state that these two concepts have over lapped. Problem solving is a behavioral- cognitive and innovative process that provides effective strategies for routine problems. In addition, problem solving is an important strategy that increases the personal capability and decrease stress. Therefore, CT and problem solving are important skills that should be taken into consideration in any instructional system (Azizi et al, 2018).

The following research question was posed to address the purpose of the study:

Does teaching CT skills have any significant effect on the development of Iraqi EFL learners' performance in poetry?

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There were some studies tried to find out the impact of CT in many fields and different levels. So, it is so important to review some of them that are related to foster the present study.

2.1 Fahim and Hashtroodi (2012)

This study tried to find "whether or not teaching techniques of critical thinking through writing to the Iranian English students at university level can lead them develop writing argumentative essays". To achieve this goal, a sample of 63 university students was chosen from Islamic Azad University. The experiment consists of two classes: the first one which represented the experimental group was received a treatment while the other section which represented the control group was taught according to the conventional method. The participants were asked to write two five-paragraph argumentative essays; one at the beginning of the term, and the other one after 6 sessions. Since the second session, for about four sessions and each session 30 minutes. After applying the test, participants' papers were scored based by two teachers. By using T-test, the results showed that techniques of CT could help the students to become critical thinkers because the improvement was positive.

2.2 Haseli and Rezaii (2013)

The study was conducted to search the "the effect of teaching critical thinking on educational achievement and test anxiety among junior high school students in Saveh ". The sample of the study contained the 3rd grade high students in Saveh during the educational year 2012-13, including 40 students were randomly divided into 2 groups of 20 students in control and experimental groups. There were 12 sessions of CT treatment and a post-test. After comparing and analyzing the data by SPSS software, the results appeared that the test anxiety decreased to a great deal in favour of the experimental group after CT treatment sessions. So, it was possible to say that CT training seem to be useful in junior high school level.

2.3 Kanbay and Okanlı (2017)

The study aimed at investigating "the effect of critical thinking education on nursing students' problem-solving skills". The study sample consisted of 93 students divided into two groups: 49 in the control group and 44 in the experimental group. After twelve weeks of CT education, they took the test of California CT Disposition Inventory. The results indicated that the mean scores of experimental group was 268.72 while the control group was 258.18 on the posttest. So, it was concluded that CT education improves problem-solving skills.

2.4 Azizi et al. (2018)

This study was conducted to identify " the effect of critical thinking education on problem solving skills and self-esteem " .The researchers used A quasi-experimental study and randomly selected two high schools for girls distributed into two groups: the experimental and control. The experimental one received eight sessions of CT education. After the intervention, students completed Problem Solving questionnaires and Rosenberg self-esteem scale. Data analysis was performed by the Multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA). The finding showed that there was a significant correlation between problem solving skills and self-esteem.

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III. CRITICAL THINKING

CT belongs to the English word Critical, where we find that it is derived from the Latin origin "Criticus" or Greek "Kritikos", which simply means the ability to distinguish or make judgments. This linguistic significance of the Greek word may explain the old traditional view of thinking established its rules and adopted by the three philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (AbdulAziz, 2009).

CT has roots in philosophy, psychology and education. It is one of the most important concepts involved in education, so that one of the main goals of modern education is to motivate individuals to know what they learn and why they learn. This approach of learning is supported by cognitive and metacognitive theories. From the cognitive perspective, learners are active processors of information on their learning process and they seek information for solving their problems. According to Metacognitive approach, learners should have an active monitoring of their mental processes and set and repair their mental activities (Azizi et al, 2018).

According to Dewey (1933), CT is seen as "a reflective process that composes questioning and searching to solve thinking difficulties, and to avoid hesitation and bewilderment". While Paul and Elder (2004) define it as "self- directed, self- disciplined, self-monitored and self-corrective thinking"

Siegel (1988) sees CT as "the education cognate of rationality". Thinking critically leads to better understanding of the surrounding world through tracing a scientific method. This method encloses several procedures starting from identifying a question and formulating a hypothesis, passing through gathering relevant data, logically testing and evaluating the hypothesis, and ending in drawing reliable conclusions from the result (Angeli & Valanides, 2009).

3.1 Steps of CT

Abdul-Aziz (2009) states that the steps of CT that the learner must follow in order to achieve the skills of CT as follows:

1. Collecting all that can be collected about the topic.
2. Reviewing the different opinions related to the topic.
3. Discussing different opinions to determine the correct one from the false.
4. Distinguish the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing opinions.
5. Evaluate opinions in an objective manner.
6. Demonstrate the validity of the arguments and evidence.
7. Refer to more information if necessary.
8. Accuracy in observing events as they happen.
9. Objective evaluation of the topics.
10. Avoid personal factors in the evaluation.

3.2 Criteria of CT

Many researchers state that there should be a number of criteria in CT for treating certain situation. These criteria are considered as guides for teacher and learner to ensure the effectiveness of CT. Al-Halaq (2010) mentions them as follows:

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1. Clarity: it is considered one of the most important criteria and it is the main entry point for the rest of the criteria because if the phrase is not clear, we cannot understand it and we cannot know the intentions of the speaker or the text and therefore we will not be able to judge it.
2. Health Accuracy: the statement should be correct and documented and it may be is clear, but it is not correct.
3. Precision: it means the accuracy in thinking, in general, giving the topic all its right of treatment and expressing without increasing or decreasing.
4. Relevance: It means the extent of the relationship between the question, the intervention, the argument, or the phrase and the topic of the discussion or problem intended.
5. Depth: The intellectual treatment of a problem suffer from the required depth appropriate with the complexities of the problem or the topic.
6. Breadth: it is described as an inclusiveness when all aspects of a problem or a topic are taken into consideration.
7. Logic: it means that the ideas are organized, sequential and interconnected in a way that leads to a clear meaning, or a result of reasonable arguments.

3.3 Stages of Teaching CT

Al-Atoum and Al-Jarrah, (2009) state that CT can be developed through various activities and exercises by a number of stages. The success in the first stages helps in achieving success in the subsequent stages. These stages can be summarized as follows:

1. Observation it requires the learner to examine all relevant information and data of the instructional in the learning environment.
2. Facts: it requires the learner to determine the facts and information that are characterized by high degrees of credibility and objectivity.
3. Inference: it requires testing the facts extracted in the previous stage.
4. Assumptions: it requires forming a number of assumptions or postulates about the learning topic.
5. Opinions: And it requires the learner to develop his/her opinions according to the rules of the logic about the learning topic.
6. arguments :it requires identifying arguments, and evidence about the instructional situation
7. Critical Analysis: It requires identifying observations, facts, inferences, assumptions, opinions and previous arguments to be analyzed to enable the learner develop a clear situation with which he/she can confront others.

3.4 The Teacher's Role in Developing CT

Al-Asmar (2016) explains that “in order to develop the process of CT, we must deal with the teacher's role as a model through the roles he/she produces to facilitate this process". These roles are as follows:

1. The teacher is a planner for teaching process: He/she organizes daily lesson plans, performance goals, educational materials and activities that determine the goals of teaching and the means to achieve them.

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2. The teacher is a designer of the classroom climate: The classroom climate based on group dynamics and democratic participation is the climate constitutes a coherent climate in which expression of opinion, cooperation, support, self-confidence and encouragement are valued.
3. Teacher is an initiator: this can be achieved by using a variety of activities and introducing students to situations that focus on real life problems , and asking questions to engage students effectively
4. The teacher keeps communication: The easiest task that the teacher can perform is to arouse learners' interest with real and interesting issues, but the difficulty he/she faces is in attract their attention because this requires from the teacher to use exciting activities and questions to motivate students.
5. The teacher is a source of knowledge: In many cases, the teacher plays the role of a knowledge source when he/she prepares information and provides devices and materials for students to use.
6. The teacher is a facilitator: By asking deep, inspecting questions that require justification or support for their ideas, hypotheses, and conclusions they reached.
7. The teacher is a model: By presenting the behavior that reflects that the teacher is an interested, curious and critical person in his/her thinking and reading who is energetic, creative, sympathetic, willing in his/her thinking seeking for evidence.

3.5 CT as Metacognitive

Flavell (1979) sees CT as a subdivision under a larger umbrella of metacognition when he says “critical appraisal of message source, quality of appeal, and probable consequences need to cope with these inputs sensibly” can result in “wise and thoughtful life decisions”. In nutshell, CT, for him, is a process of “thinking about thinking”.

Metacognitive thinking as stated by Halonen (1995) is the capability to observe the degree of goodness of CT. Whereas, Schraw et al (2006) look at the relationship as combining three aspects, metacognitive, CT, and motivation to form a systematic way of self-learning. The process of directing self-learning as defined by Schraw et al is the “ability to understand and control our learning environments”.

Krathwohl (2002) states that CT is a three-dimension process: the analytic, the evaluative, and the creative. Creative as well as CT are both fall under the widest scope of order thinking which comprises five fields; critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive and creative thinking.

3.6 Barriers to CT

Bassham et al (2011) state that when CT is taken into account, there appears a number of widespread limits or obstacles including irrelevant store of knowledge, unprofessional reading skills, bias, prejudice, narrow-minded thinking, overpowering emotions, self-deception, and fear of change.

There are some other barriers to CT as proposed by Cottrell (2005):

1. Ignorance of the accurate meaning of CT.
2. Lack of methods, strategies, or practice.
3. Affective reasons.
4. Mistaking information for understanding.

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5. Insufficient focus and attention to details.

For Landsman & Gorski (2007), CT is not a rooted capacity. In spite of the fact that some peoples may be very talented, training is still of significance for them to analyze systematically, and open-minded in their acquisition of knowledge. In such case, students will have confidence in themselves in reasoning and able to use their capacity on making critics in new fields or situations (Lundquist, 1999). Four obstacles that stand on the way of the CT integration in the field of education are stated by Snyder and Snyder (2008) . These obstacles are:

Lack of training, lack of information, preconceptions, and time constraints.

IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The researcher has selected the appropriate experimental design that gives valid results about the relationships between both dependent and independent variables. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher uses "the Non Randomized pre- posttest control group design". This design takes the form as shown below in table 1.

Table 1: The Experimental Design

Groups	Pre-test	**Independent Variable**	Post-test
Experimental		CT	
Control		----------	

The control group has been taught by the conventional method, whereas the experimental group has been taught by applying CT technique.

4.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study includes the Iraqi 4th preparatory school students in Faluja city that belongs to the ministry of Education in Iraq. The total number of the 4th preparatory student's population is 1120 students taken from 28 secondary schools. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the researcher has randomly selected Al-Khansaa' secondary school for girls to represent to be the sample of the study. Fourth preparatory students have been distributed into three sections (A, B, C). Section C has randomly been chosen to be the experimental Group, which consists of 34 students. Section B has been also chosen randomly to be the control group, which includes 33 students. Thus the total number of the sample participants is 67 female students. Five repeaters in the previous year have been excluded, so the final number is (62), as shown in table 2.

Table 2: The Sample of Study

School	**Groups**	**Sections**	**Number of Students**	**Number of repeaters**	**Final Number**
AL-Khansaa' secondary schools	Experimental	C	34	2	32
	Control	B	33	3	30
	Total		67	5	62

4.2 The Pre-Post Test

The pretest is used to ensure the equalization between the two groups of study, and the posttest to assess the influence of the experimental procedure. In this study, a performance test has been selected to fulfill the aim of the

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study and to verify its hypothesis. Both groups of students are exposed, to the same pre-posttests.

4.3 The Choice of the Test topics

The topics of the poetry test have been selected depending on students' interest to ensure that all students are encouraged to undergo the test willingly and that even the students who are weak in this test will have written something. This is achieved by applying an open questionnaire .The students with the researcher have agreed upon 4 topics. The selected four poems have been exposed to the jury members to select the two most suitable topics which are appropriate for the level of the fourth preparatory stage and can support the goal of the study. The jurors agree upon numbers 1 and 3 to be the poems of the pre posttest.

4.4 The Teaching Material

The material that has been taught for the experiment includes two poems. Firstly, "The Lady of Shalott 1832" by Alfred Lord Tennyson that tells the story of a young medieval woman mysteriously imprisoned on an island near Camelot. She must weave a colorful web and only watch the outside world through a mirror. She will be cursed if she looks at Camelot directly. Secondly, "When You Are Old 1892" by W.B. Yeat which concentrates on the love he shared with a woman Maud Gonne who ended up.

4.5 Instruments of the Study

To collect data, the researcher has constructed a written test to achieve the goals and verify the hypothesis of the current study. The test items have been constructed in the light of analyzing the material contents. Two poems have been taken from the text-book prescribed to the 4th students followed by 6 questions to assess the learners' mastery of interpretation with reference to CT. The test has presented to a jury of experts about the suitability of strategy which selected according to the theories and previous studies to be suitable.

4.5 Test Validity and Reliability

To make sure that the test yields face validity, the test and the scoring scheme have been given to a committee of experts in the fields of ELT and literature at different Iraqi universities. The jury members agree on the test and the scoring scheme as being appropriate for assessing the performance of students in poetry. The researcher takes into consideration all experts' opinions and adjustments in order to be in the final form and it has gained 86 agreement of the total jury members.

Two methods have been used for checking the reliability coefficient of the test. Firstly, Alpha Cronbach Formula has been used to gain the internal consistency among the six components of the test. The reliability coefficient is found to be 0.86. Secondly, Inter scorer reliability method has been used in which two scorers practiced have been requested to score the test (by the researcher and another teacher). The result has shown that the correlation coefficient of reliability is 0.89.

4.6 Pilot Administration

The pilot administration of the test has been conducted on Sunday 24th of Feb. 2019, after achieving its face validity. The test has been given to 30 students from Al-Nahda Secondary School for checking its appropriateness and estimating the required time. The results have appeared that the test items are clear to the subjects and the

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needed time to answer is between 30 – 40 minutes. There is no ambiguity found in the items of the instructions of the test.

4.7 Difficulty Level and Discriminatory Power

To find out the difficulty level of each component, the test papers have been divided into two subgroups. A group of some students who have the highest scores that includes 27% of the sample. And the students with the lowest scores who stand for 27% of the sample students. By applying the formula of difficulty level, the test of difficulty level is computed. All the components are found to be of agreeable level of difficulty ranging from 0.20 to 0.80.

The researcher has used the formula of discriminatory to calculate the discrimination power of each component. It has been discovered that the discrimination power of the test elements ranges between 0.37 and 0.54 that is considered as a suitable discrimination level.

4.8 The Experimental Group and the Control Group

The experiment has begun on 3rd of Mar. 2019 after providing all its requirements. In the first stage the researcher has allotted two sequential lectures to clarify some details of CT explaining its meaning, uses, and aims, as well as the method of its practice. In the second stage, the researcher has done the following:

1. Distributing the students into groups each one (5-6) students.
2. Providing them with sheets of paper on which they write their ideas.
3. Explaining many examples of different topics related to CT to enrich the students with enough information about each lesson, with feedback whenever they need.
4. Giving them the poems chosen early from their prescribed text book.
5. Encouraging students to generate new ideas by their writing according to CT tools.
6. Each group has selected a student to offer what they have written.
7. At the end, the researcher encourages them to organize the best sheet, which is richer in its information and ideas, then the researcher provides them with any vocabulary they need as a feedback.

The experiment has lasted for two weeks when the learners have applied the post-test.

The researcher has taught the control group by using the same procedures and instructions mentioned in the teachers' book. A daily lesson plans were prepared by the researcher and approved by the jury members to be implemented.

4.9 Final Administration of Instruments and Scoring Scheme

After ensuring the validity and reliability of the post- achievement test, the students of both groups have been post-tested on the 17th of Mar. 2019 at the end of the experiment. The same testing procedures have been used in conducting the test to avoid any extraneous variables may affect on change the results. The whole tests have been conducted by the researcher with the help of teachers of English language in Al-Khansaa' preparatory school in a comfortable environment. After answering the questions the researchers collected the test sheets and scored them in order to know students' performance after applying the experiment.

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The researcher has adopted by O'Malley and Piere's (1996) analytical scoring scheme for scoring the test. It has six major questions depend on thinking to be answered. Each question has a series of ratings that have numerical values. Four marks have been given for each question. So the highest score the students could get is 30 Marks, whereas the lowest score is 5.

4.10 The Results

To fulfill the aim of the study, verify its hypothesis, and compare the experimental and control group performance in poetry, t- test for two independent samples, the mean and standard deviation have been used. The results have been illustrated in table 3.

Table 3: The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Overall Performance in Post Test

Group	**No.**	**M**	**SD**	**Computed *t*- Value**	**Critical *t*- Value**
Experimental	32	27.24	6.25	4.299	2.000
Control	30	20.89	6.089		

It is apparent from the Table above, that the mean score of the experimental group is 27.24 and that of the control group is 20.89.The computed t value 4.299 is higher than the critical t- value 2.000. It indicates that the experimental group is better than the control group; so there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in performance of the post test. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that "there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental group performance and that of the control group the posttest has been refuted.

4.11 Discussion of the Results

The result of this study elaborates the positive effect of CT on the performance of students in poetry. This embodies the good use of its lessons which enlarge learners' abilities to think effectively in order to generate positive and useful ideas. A successful depot ensures sharing others' viewpoints to argue their thoughts (Other people views), allowing them to activate or ignore the weak ideas in order to achieve better performance especially in poetry.

CT sharpen learners' abilities to think critically by analyzing their concepts to choose the best alternatives or solutions used to face any problem which may arise (alternatives and possibilities). As well as there will be priorities according to the situation to select the most appropriate one (First important priorities). Learners should practise many examples and face different situations in environment of interaction which help to improve their levels, promote students' knowledge and abilities to find good ideas or active thoughts depending on unique information and facts. The findings indicate that CT thinking lessons reinforce learners' abilities to promote their self-confidence and depend on their autonomy when they express their emotions, opinions and concepts in poetry. Teachers provide students with new strategies, programmes and techniques to renew their ideas and their attitudes which encompass their spirit. Those elements will direct the learners to the straight direction in order to undertake any consequence that may appear (Consequences & Sequels) without hesitation while they record their inner concepts to overcome all sequels.

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CT encourages learners to think widely and develop their metacognitive abilities to create other conversation ways and facilitate their using which is derived from their benefit. These factors help to follow modern tactics, strategies and different satisfied styles to find the best solution. The findings of this study are in agreement Fahim and Hashtroodi's (2012), Haseli and Rezaii's (2013), Kanbay and Okanl's (2017), and Azizi et al's (2018), since all the studies assert the importance of CT procedures in developing and improving learner's performance.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Depending on the outcomes of the current study, the following conclusions have drawn:

1. They have revealed that the level of students in the experimental group who have been taught according to CT better than of the control group who were taught by the ordinary method.
2. The implementation of CT tends to be more fun for students than the ordinary method in which the teacher is more dominant.
3. CT makes the learners the center of the educational process, through giving a good role in (organizing, searching, generating, summarize), which helps them understand the information meaningfully.
4. Using CT could facilitate learners to enrich vocabulary. They generate as many ideas as possible related to the topic.
5. CT encourages learners express their opinions and ideas successfully and freely depending on their imagination.
6. CT represents an actual solution for the current education situations because it saves the effort and time of both teacher and learners.

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