

Application of Debating Method in teaching Vietnam's Historical Figures (10th Century – 19th Century) at High School in Order to Develop Students' Critical Thinking

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Abstract Discussion is the method with advantage in promoting the interaction between teachers and pupils, between pupils and pupils and between pupils and contents of knowledge. Organizing discussions for pupils will help them aware more comprehensively and profoundly of a historical character or a historical event. The use of discussion method in teaching about historical characters at schools also contributes to development of critic thought for pupils - an important skill determining whether learners succeed or not. Teachers may organize discussions for pupils about historical characters under 3 forms: group discussion, individual discussion and discussion between teacher and pupils. Each form has its own advantages requiring teachers' thorough grasp of technique to apply efficiently.

Keywords: *discussion method, critic thought, historical character*

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1. Introduction

The current history lesson in high school is no longer as monologue as it used to be but a dialogue. Students are free to argue, reject the opinions of others, defend their opinions, and ask questions. The process of rejecting or defending an opinion requires students to have certain understandings of the issue, ability to think independently; to express their subjective opinions and to be self-confident, self-reliant and dynamic. This is a great way to increase interactions between student-teacher, student-student, student-knowledge, and student-external sources. In addition, the characteristic of history subject is the past, unable to directly interact with historical figures, only to rely on historical sources, so that there will still be different opinions about the same historical figure. With this characteristic, the use of the debating method in teaching historical figures is very necessary and appropriate, and it not only meets the students' needs of cognition and excitement in learning; It is also a way to improve the teaching effectiveness of the subject.

So far, there have been a number of national and international researches that discuss the method of argument to develop critical thinking for high school students.

Among these are "Critical thinking, reading and writing: a brief guide to argument" by Hugo Bedau, Boston Publishers, 2008; "Education, Autonomy and

Critical Thinking" by Christopher Winch, London, New York: Routledge, 2006, or "Critical Issues in Education: Dialogues and dialectics" by Jack L. Nelson, Stuart B. Palonsky, Mary Rose McCarthy, Foreword: Nell Noddings New York McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2010, etc... These works took up much space to analyze what the critical thinking is and how to apply it to life.

Recently, Vietnamese researchers and educators have published journals covering the role of the critical thinking and measures for forming and developing the critical thinking for students in delivering lectures in Vietnamese schools, i.e. "Promoting activities of counter-argument of part-time university students in delivering Vietnamese language syllabus", by Nguyen Van Tu [1]. "Promoting the ability of counter-argument of high school students in delivering literature" by Bui The Hung [2]. "Improving and developing the critical thinking for students during the teaching process" by Nguyen Gia Cau [3], etc.

Journal of Education No. 102, 2004 "Training the self-learning capacity for students in study hours of literature and history using argument" by Pham Thi Xuyen, has very thorough analysis of the effect of the argument in teaching as well as introduces the best way to organize the argument for students during study hours of literature and history, i.e. to create learning situations. The author argued that "Organizing for students to argue and propose questions is a critical way of learning, both to improve the knowledge and to train the ability to think independently and self-study for students, which is the dialectical of learning - asking - understanding" [[4]; 27].

At the CDIO Conference of Ho Chi Minh City National University in 2010, *"Introduction to some innovative teaching methods to help students learn actively and get experience and achieve CDIO output standard"* by Nguyen Thanh Hai, Phung Thuy Phuong, Dong Thi Bich Thuy, introduced the Think-pair-share method in which teachers raise the issue to be argued, determine duration and how to discuss, the students work in pairs, listen and express opinions, defend and counter them. The authors affirmed *"Through collective discussion and argument, individual opinions are revealed, affirmed or rejected; thereby the students lift themselves to a new level"* [[5]; 5].

Besides, there have been many researches focused on the critical thinking as well as the formation and development of the critical thinking in teaching.

2. Content

2.1. Some Relevant Conceptions

The debating method is the teacher's approach to encourage students to think and evaluate a certain subject in different, even contradictory ways. Then, based on their findings, teachers organize the children to discuss that problem. Students will come up with and defend their views while convincing their opponents with arguments and authentic evidence to clarify different aspects of the problem and to enrich their personal knowledge according to the target and the task of teaching.

The nature of this method is that the teacher promotes and organizes; learners actively exchange, discuss, debate, flexibly and creatively absorb knowledge in a solid and effective way. The teacher is a motivator to encourage students to freely think, talk and discuss in order to solve problems. The teacher raises requirements; main contents and issues for the learners to self-study self-argue and answer the questions... In the process of discussion, the teacher will raise counter-arguments to the opinions of the learners, argue and together with the learners to discuss the problems. At this stage, the teacher must attach importance to the suggestion of thinking, encouraging learners' independent thinking, creativity, relevance to the practice so that the debate topics are richer and more vital.

The use of debating method in teaching historical figures is to contribute to the development of students' critical thinking. Critical thinking is a dialectical thinking process that involves analyzing, selecting, screening, and evaluating information or issues already present in another view to clarify and reaffirm correctness of the problem. The other view is scientific, based on theoretical and practical basis and logical arguments to ensure feasibility. Critical thinking will help the process of operation and perception avoids the subjectivity, voluntarism, imposition [[6]; 28]. Critical thinking is not merely the passive reception and maintenance of information; it is the process of debating that counteracts the outcome of another thinking process to redefine the accuracy of information.

Based on recent research, educators are encouraging schools to focus more on teaching critical thinking for learners. Critical pedagogy helps learner to be able to consciously criticize, promote the liberation and development of each person's intelligence, empower learner, help student to

help self- liberate from imposition, thereby motivating them to explore, gain knowledge and reach for creativity. That is the ultimate goal of education. Critical thinking is also an important skill that determines whether the learner is successful. It helps learner to think clearly and reasonably.

2.2. The Meaning of the Debating Method for the Development of Critical Thinking for Students

In teaching history, there are many methods available to activate and develop students' critical thinking, such as teaching method of problem-raising, discussion method, group teaching method. However, debating is the dominant method in developing students' critical thinking. At the same time, developing critical thinking is the greatest benefit brought from the debating method. Critical thinking and debating method have a close dialectical relationship: on the one hand, critical thinking creates the premise for effectively implementing the method of argument in teaching; On the other hand, through the teaching activities according to the method above, the critical thinking is increasingly shaped and developed.

Firstly, argument is the best way to form the basic skills of a critical thinker. K. B. Beyer, in his study (1995), outlines the essential characteristics of a critical thinker: 1) No bias; 2) Know the use of standards; 3) Have the ability to argue; 4) Ability to reason; 5) Consider the problem from various perspectives; 6) Apply thinking techniques [[7]; 19]. All of these criteria are formed and practiced in the process of debating.

Secondly, organizing students to argue is a way for the teacher to motivate them to reevaluate their perceptions and knowledge. Self in the thinking of the students will raise the questions for themselves such as: *"Why are they talking about this?"* Or *"Are your views correct?"* ... Thereby, they can self-understand and adjust misunderstandings, respond to creative and progressive insights. This is a form of self-criticism...

Thirdly, by debating and defending one's opinion or rejecting another's opinion, the student goes through a process of thinking, contemplating, considering, evaluating the problem, combining with convincing others by the appropriate theoretical system. This is an important operation, often set for those who have critical thinking to any problem. Through discussion, the student grasps knowledge in a firm, deep and critical way.

Fourthly, critical thinking is the skill of collecting, receiving selectively, considering actively information to solve problems. Thus, through the process of debating, students will acquire a lot of useful new knowledge from teachers and friends. The knowledge gained from the debates is "fine" knowledge, which has been scrutinized; sustainable and rich; It has the effect of enlightening, revealing to them many new and creative things. Through teacher-student dialogue, cooperation with friends under the guidance of teachers, students develop the basic knowledge that they have accumulated to learn how to solve problems, then, they will mature in the learning process.

Along with events and events, characters are an integral part of the historical flow. These are the people who make

history, the outstanding people in many different fields, making a turning point in a certain way that is recognized by the nation or the world. Historical figures are the products of a specific historical situation, governed by the times in which they live and their activities have a definite impact on such historical situation. In "*The Dictionary of terminology of Universal History*," it states: "*A historical figure is a person who has a certain role in a historical event, a period of history*" [[8]; 266].

For a variety of reasons, such as the addition of new research, the difference in research stance or the change in times, it has created a multidimensional view of a historical figure. This often happens with those whose actions are controversial in researching, both positively and restrictively under different aspects. There are those who were condemned by feudal historians, but with the latest studies, there has been a more positive and open-minded change in evaluation. In the history of Vietnam from the 10th century to the first half of the nineteenth century, there are many figures that teachers can organize for students to debate (Table 1).

2.3. Some Forms of Use of Debating Method in Teaching History in High School

Before organizing a debate, the teacher must select the figure and the relevant issues to suit the student's level and experience and specific circumstances. Topics must be attractive and relevant to the learners. The preparation of the argument must be conducted seriously and not

deliberately; should not proceed randomly, arbitrarily; It is possible for students to prepare in advance at home (the teacher raises questions, orients to explore the figure, and encourages students to give their points of view after reading the materials; the teacher should consult the reference materials and prepare the questions before participating in the discussion). If any problem is raised in the classroom, the teacher must spend reasonable time for the students to prepare. Good preparation will be the premise for a successful debate.

The teacher can organize students to argue about a historical character in three forms: group discussion, individual debate, and student-student debate. Each form has its own advantages and specific techniques to be used flexibly.

- **Group Discussion:** This is considered to be the most commonly used form of argument in teaching. Teachers combine skillfully and simultaneously these two methods, creating "dual" effects when applied group teaching in the discussion. With group discussion, the students work together, interact and collaborate with each other in finding materials, giving and unifying views, discussing in groups to make arguments in order to demonstrate the views of their team and support each other in a timely manner. Thereby, they find the values of justice based on equality and solidarity. In addition, the team work of members also influences the development of critical thinking, objectivity, and logical thinking. Group discussion also created a real atmosphere for the class as all members must work to find a way to protect their team's view.

Table 1. Vietnamese historical figures (X century-XIX century) for debating

Name of historical figures	Lesson, Item for debating	Opposite opinions about figures
1. Empress dowager Duong Van Nga	Section I.1, Unit 19- Class 10, High School: Resistance wars against foreign invasion in the 10th - 15th centuries.	When Song Dynasty invaded our country, Empress dowager Duong Van Nga handed over the regency to Commander-in-chief Le Doan (Le Dai Hanh), then became King Le Dai Hanh's wife 1) Many historians disagree with this action of both Le Hoan and Duong Van Nga, suggesting that she had colluded with Le Hoan to seize the throne. 2) Many other researchers have shown their sympathy for the act of giving up the throne to Le Hoan as well as the two becoming husband and wife, claiming that she sacrificed the interests of the family to protect the interests of the nation.
2. Hồ Quý Ly	Section II, Unit 17, Class 10-High School: The formation and development of the feudal state (from the 10th to the 15th century).	-It is an indispensable rule of history that the Ho Dynasty replaced the Tran Dynasty. Ho Quy Ly is a great, bold and drastic reformist. - Ho Quy Ly founded the Ho dynasty instead of the Tran dynasty as a rebellious act of throne robbery deserved to be condemned by the history. Ho Quy Ly's reforms did not make any significant contribution
3. Mạc Đăng Dung	Section 1, Unit 21- Class 10 High School: The Transformations of the Feudal State in the 16th - 18th Centuries	- Mac Dang Dung is a rebellious subject, robbing the Le's throne, deserved to be condemned. - The appearance of Mac Dang Dung on the political scene is inevitable, meeting the requirements and demands of the society at that time. He is a celebrity who made great contributions to the history of the nation
4. Nguyễn Huệ (King Quang Trung)	Section III, Unit 23 - Class 10 High school: Tay Son movement and the unification and defense of the country at the end of the eighth century	- Nguyen Hue is a national hero who made many glorious victories and contributed to the reunification of the country. - Nguyen Hue dispelled the power of foreign aggression, maintained independence; But only destroyed and eradicated the division into feudal realms and decentralization, not the reunification of the country.
5. Nguyễn Ánh (King Gia Long)	Section 1, Unit 25- Class 10 High School: Political, economic and cultural situation under the Nguyen Dynasty (first half of 19th century)	- Nguyen Anh " <i>set a fox to keep the geese</i> ", robbing the outcome of the Tay Son Dynasty and took brutal actions. - Nguyen Anh contributed to the reunification of the country. He is a talented king and a great man of history

To organize a group discussion, the teacher must prepare a very specific plan. From the previous lesson, the teacher must address the problem to be organized the argument (i.e., the figure for the argument), then divide the group and ask the students to investigate the problem at home along with evidence to prove that point by the teacher's orientation. The orientation given by the teacher to each group must be specific, clear, and differentiated on the same historical figure.

Example: When teaching Unit 17, Class 10-high school: *The formation and development of the feudal state (from the 10th to the 15th century)*, the teacher can organize a debate for students about a figure which has a great influence on the history of the nation, but is hardly mentioned in upper secondary school textbooks, and there is much controversy over this figure, especially with regard to his establishment of the Ho Dynasty instead of Tran Dynasty (1400), it is the figure Ho Quy Ly.

After teaching Unit 16, the teacher will hand over homework by raising the issue of debate, divide into groups and assign groups to conduct research oriented by the teacher.

"For next unit, we will argue about a historical figure - the character Ho Quy Ly. The appearance of Ho Quy Ly and the Ho Dynasty in the late fourteenth century and early fourteenth century is a particular historical phenomenon. Ho Quy Ly's time of power and the reign of the Ho Dynasty were short-lived, but with his reforms, he was highly regarded by many scholars as a great innovator with his comprehensive, bold and radical undertakings. However, there are many negative reviews about Ho Quy Ly and his reforms. So far, there are still a lot of perspectives in assessing this issue, so it is important for us to have a holistic view, set in the context of specific history to make the most thorough and correct comments.

The class is divided into two groups:

+ **Group 1:** The Ho's replacement of the Tran Dynasty is an indispensable rule of history. Ho Quy Ly is a great, bold and drastic reformist.

+ **Group 2:** Ho Quy Ly founded the Ho dynasty instead of the Tran dynasty as a rebellious act of throne robbery deserved to be condemned by the history. Ho Quy Ly's reforms did not make any significant contribution"

- **Individual debate:** This form can promote the positiveness and activeness of each student in learning, which meets the requirements and teaching tasks currently. For group discussion, there are some students who do not work while for individual debate, all students must work seriously because the result of their research will be reflected in the process of debate. Individual arguments can help students discover their hidden values, such as the ability to eloquence in front of the crowd, the ability to think logically or the ability of self-control. They will have to do everything themselves from finding relevant information, evaluating information to making statements. They will be more mature, more assertive and brave when they have to defend their views in front of teachers and friends.

With this form, teacher can organize arguments in two ways: 1) holding debates with students' preparation at home, similar to the group discussion, but when assigning tasks, the teacher do not divide the group but let the students work independently. 2) Teachers raise the issue

for debate right at the class, and offer and give students different information, different assessments of that historical figure, combining with elicit questions that cause contradiction in their thoughts and stimulate critical thinking in each student. It helps to motivate students to come up with and defend their own ideas.

Example: When teaching Section 1, Unit 21 - Class 10 High School: *Transformations of the feudal state in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries*, teachers could organize a debate on the character of Mac Dang Dung by raising the problem right at the class with different sources of opinions for students to think and argue.

"In 1527, Mac Dang Dung requested King Le to cede the throne and established a new dynasty - the Mac. There are many different opinions around this event and the character of Mac Dang Dung. Specifically, there are two tendencies: defending and condemning Mac Dang Dung. 1) **The trend of condemning the Mac and defaming Mac Dang Dung.** In many historical texts of our country during feudal period as "Complete Annals of Dai Viet" (*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*), "The Imperially Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Viet" (*Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*) or "Abridged Chronicles of Viet Nam" (*Việt Nam sử lược*), historians have made strict assessment for Mac Dung Dung and the Mac dynasty. The Mac Dynasty is considered as "dynasty of usurpers" so the Mac Dynasty is put in the sub-chapter and Mac Dang Dung are considered as "rebellious subject" or "usurpers". 2) **The trend of defaming and excultating for the Mac and Mac Dang Dung.** Recently, scientists have had more open and objective views when considering the issue of Mac Dang Dung. The appearance of Mac Dang Dung on the political scene is inevitable, meeting the requirements and requirements of society at that time. In addition, during the ruling of Mac Dang Dung, he also carried out many advances and made significant contributions to the country in terms of economy, culture, education and ideology. He is a celebrity who has made great contributions to the history of the nation.

So what are your opinions in the assessment of the character of Mac Dang Dung?

- **Teacher-Student Debate:** With modern education, this is a way for teachers to understand students and to maximize their educational democracy, "the education that attaches importance to democracy is a progressive education" [9]. With the timely stimulation of the teacher, students can boldly express their opinions and questions, including the point of view contrary to the teacher's opinion. When teaching a historical figure, the teacher should adopt this form, which will create an atmosphere of openness and comfort in the classroom. There, students can argue with the teacher to protect their opinions with rigorous reasoning and persuasive evidence. This form will break the strict and backward concept of "the teacher says - students listen" and the teacher is always right.

When teaching a historical figure, in case of issues to debate, the teacher will raise different opinions and provide materials and resources for the student to gain certain knowledge about that character. After that, the teacher will stimulate the students' critical thinking by giving her (his) opinion straight away. The teacher must make the students feel the irrationality and mismatch

between the given materials given and the opinions of the teacher. Since then, they can boldly give their different opinions from the teacher's perspective and debate with the teacher.

For example: When teaching Section I.1, Unit 19- Class 10 high school: *Resistance wars against foreign aggression in the 10th to 15th centuries*, teachers can organize students to debate the character of Duong Van Nga .

“Queen Duong Van Nga was the daughter of a subordinate of the Jieudushi Duong Dinh Nghe and came from the Ai province (now Thanh Hoa). She was the wife of King Dinh Tien Hoang. After King Dinh and his eldest son, Dinh Lien, were assassinated, she handed over regency to Commander-in-chief Le Doan (Le Dai Hanh), then became King Le Dai Hanh's wife, which led to her many scandals and stigma of society at the time. When Song troops pulled to the border of our country, in such urgent situation, *“Empress Dowager saw the people voluntarily submit, then ordered to take imperial robe and put on Le Hoan, to be the Emperor”* [10]. In 980 Le Hoan ascended the throne, proclaimed Le Dai Hanh. In 982, King Le Dai Hanh entitled the former empress dowager Duong Van Nga as the new empress of the Early Le Dynasty with the name Empress Dai Thang Minh. Therefore, there are two opposing views on her. 1) Many historians disagree with this action of both Le Hoan and Duong Van Nga, suggesting that she had colluded with Le Hoan to seize the throne. 2) Many other researchers have shown their sympathy for the act of giving up the throne to Le Hoan as well as the two becoming husband and wife, claiming that she sacrificed the interests of the family to protect the interests of the nation. However, I myself still can not agree with this action of Duong Van Nga”. The teacher will then provide evidence that is to evaluate the opinions of historians such as Ngo Thi Si and Ngo Si Lien, and stimulate the students to make a counter-point to the teacher's point of view.

In the process of discussion, the teacher must encourage students to express their opinions and arguments to defend their views and reject the remaining ideas. Teachers also need to ask questions, stimulate the problem, drive the debate on their own accord, and make timely adjustments to prevent students from falling into a small matter for too long or turning debate into quarrel. The teacher must also be fair to evaluate, not to force or coerce students into any ideas, encourage them to follow the view that they have sufficient reason and evidence to prove. Debating is a way to give children a thorough insight into any problem in

their lives and to train their judgment skills rather than to determine win-lose.

3. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can fully affirm: Using the method of argument in teaching a historical figure is the quickest and most effective way to develop critical thinking for students. Helping students argue and propose questions in the study of history is a form of learning that combines internal and external forces. External force is the teacher's leading expressed through questions, learning situations, solutions when needed and opinions of friends. Internal force is the ability of critical thinking, using knowledge to confirm their problems. The issues discussed by the teacher will stimulate students to use critical thinking and on the contrary, the use of critical thinking helps to solve problems faster and more effectively.

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