# IMPROVE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AMONG TEENAGE ENGLISH LEARNERS

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the improvement of critical thinking skills among teenage English language learners and explores effective strategies for integrating critical thinking into English language instruction. Critical thinking is an essential 21st-century skill that enables students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively. However, many teenage English learners struggle to apply critical thinking in a second language due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and insufficient exposure to thought-provoking learning activities.This research examines the challenges faced by teenage learners in developing critical thinking within the English classroom and identifies instructional approaches that can foster higher-order thinking. Data was collected through a student questionnaire focusing on learners' attitudes toward critical thinking, their frequency of applying such skills in class, and the types of activities they find most beneficial. The findings suggest that activities such as discussions and debates, problem-solving tasks, reading and text analysis, and creative projects significantly contribute to the development of critical thinking among teenage English learners.The study concludes that with intentional instructional design and a supportive classroom environment, teachers can successfully nurture critical thinking skills alongside language development. The results of this research provide practical implications for English language teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers seeking to enhance the quality of English language education for teenage learners.

***Keywords:*** *critical thinking, teenage learners, English language learning, instructional strategies, higher-order thinking, language education, problem-solving, open-ended question, debates.*

**Introduction**

In today's world, being able to think critically is just as important as learning a language. Critical thinking means being able to question things, analyze information, and come up with thoughtful solutions to problems. For teenage English learners, developing this skill is especially important because it helps them not only in their English classes but also in their daily lives and future careers.

Teenagers are at a very important stage in their lives. They are beginning to form their own opinions, ask questions, and think more deeply about the world around them. This makes adolescence the perfect time for teachers to help students develop critical thinking skills while also learning English. When students are encouraged to think critically, they become more confident, more independent, and more engaged in their learning.

However, in many English classrooms today, lessons still focus mostly on memorizing grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and preparing for exams. While these things are important, they do not always give students the chance to think deeply or express their own ideas. Because of this, many teenage English learners find it difficult to share their opinions, join in discussions, or analyze what they read in English.

Teenage English learners also face some specific challenges when it comes to critical thinking. For example, limited vocabulary can make it hard for students to explain their thoughts clearly. Feeling shy or lacking confidence in speaking English can stop students from participating in class. Also, if students do not get enough practice with activities like debates, discussions, or problem-solving tasks, they may never fully develop their critical thinking abilities.

Many education experts agree that critical thinking should be part of language learning. For instance, Bloom's Taxonomy — a well-known educational framework

— encourages teachers to design lessons that go beyond simple memorization and push students to analyze, evaluate, and create. This shows that English lessons can be both language-focused and thought-provoking at the same time.

This research was conducted to better understand how teenage English learners feel about critical thinking, what makes it difficult for them, and what kinds of activities help them the most. By looking at these questions, this study hopes to give useful and practical suggestions to English teachers who want to make their classrooms more engaging and meaningful for their students.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will help both teachers and students see critical thinking not as something difficult or scary, but as an exciting part of learning English that prepares teenagers for real life and the future.

**My Teaching Context**

My full name is Olimjonova Dinora, and I am an undergraduate student at Namangan State University. Currently, I am learning how to teach students in public schools. I conducted my research project at School No. 53, focusing on secondary-level learners, particularly 8th-grade students.In this class, students have varying levels of proficiency, and some of them demonstrate limited critical thinking skills. I was responsible for checking homework and supporting the development of their thinking skills during lessons. This experience provided me with an opportunity to actively engage in fostering their critical thinking abilities, while also paying close attention to improving their concentration and classroom participation.

**Literature review**

In the context of this research, the literature highlights several key factors that can influence the development of critical thinking skills among teenage English learners. The ability to think critically is increasingly recognized as an essential skill, as it enables students to analyze information, solve problems, and communicate their ideas effectively ( Facione, 1990). To address the lack of critical thinking

development in English classrooms, several strategies have been identified in the literature.

Student Autonomy, which allows students to take ownership of their thinking and learning, has been shown to increase motivation and deeper engagement with tasks (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In practice, this can be achieved by giving students the freedom to choose discussion topics, form their own opinions, and direct their own inquiry during classroom activities.

*Collaborative Learning and Peer Interaction* can foster a sense of shared responsibility and deeper thinking among students (Vygotsky, 1978). This can be implemented through group discussions, debates, and collaborative problem-solving activities. When teenagers work together and exchange ideas, they are exposed to different viewpoints and are challenged to evaluate and defend their own thinking.

A Supportive *Classroom Environment* creates a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and taking intellectual risks (Brookfield, 2012). Teachers can achieve this by promoting a respectful classroom culture, encouraging students to ask questions freely, and providing constructive feedback.

*Using Model Texts and Examples* can help students understand how critical thinking is applied in real contexts. By exposing students to well-structured arguments and thought-provoking reading materials, teachers can demonstrate what critical thinking looks like in practice (Wallace, 2003).

Providing *Explicit Instruction* on critical thinking strategies such as analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, and forming logical conclusions can help students develop the necessary skills and confidence (Paul and Elder, 2006). Teachers can incorporate this into their lessons by modeling the thinking process step by step and offering regular feedback on students' responses.

While these strategies have been shown to be effective, it is essential to consider the unique needs of teenage English learners in this particular context. By thoughtfully applying these strategies in the classroom, students will be provided with the support and guidance they need to gradually develop their critical thinking skills alongside their English language abilities.

**Research Questions**

This study aims to improve student critical thinking during lessons. To improve student critical thing, I seek three key questions:

1. What strategies can be used to improve critical thinking skills among teenage English language learners?
2. 2. Why is the development of critical thinking skills important for teenage students learning English?
3. 3. What difficulties do teenage English learners encounter when developing critical thinking skills?

To gather insights into the challenges of developing critical thinking skills among teenage English learners, I employed a variety of data collection tools.

**Exploratory Phase**

The exploratory phases of research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of improving critical thinking and identify potentially strategies to enhance their engagement. This exploratory phase took a place over a period of one month.

**1.Methods of Data Collection**

To improve learners critical thinking, both observations and discussions were designed to collect information about their interests. Teacher reflective notes out of

teaching period were also used to respond to strategies that could be enhanced students CT.

**a. Teacher Reflective Notes:**

I maintained a reflective journal throughout my research process, where I recorded and wrote down my observations on students' responses to critical thinking tasks. These helped me evaluate which teaching strategies were effective in promoting analysis, reasoning, and independent thinking.

**b. Classroom Observation:**

I carefully observed students' participation during activities that required problem-solving, discussion, and interpretation. This allowed me to identify how actively students engaged in critical thinking and which tasks encouraged deeper understanding.

- Out of 16 learners, about 3 attempted to giving analytical answers.
- A good number were not able to give analytical answers.
- There was a little interaction between the students and the same few students participated in classroom discussions.

**c. Discussion with Colleagues:**

I held informal discussions with teachers to exchange ideas about developing students' critical thinking skills. These conversations provided useful insights into different teaching techniques and helped me improve my instructional approach.

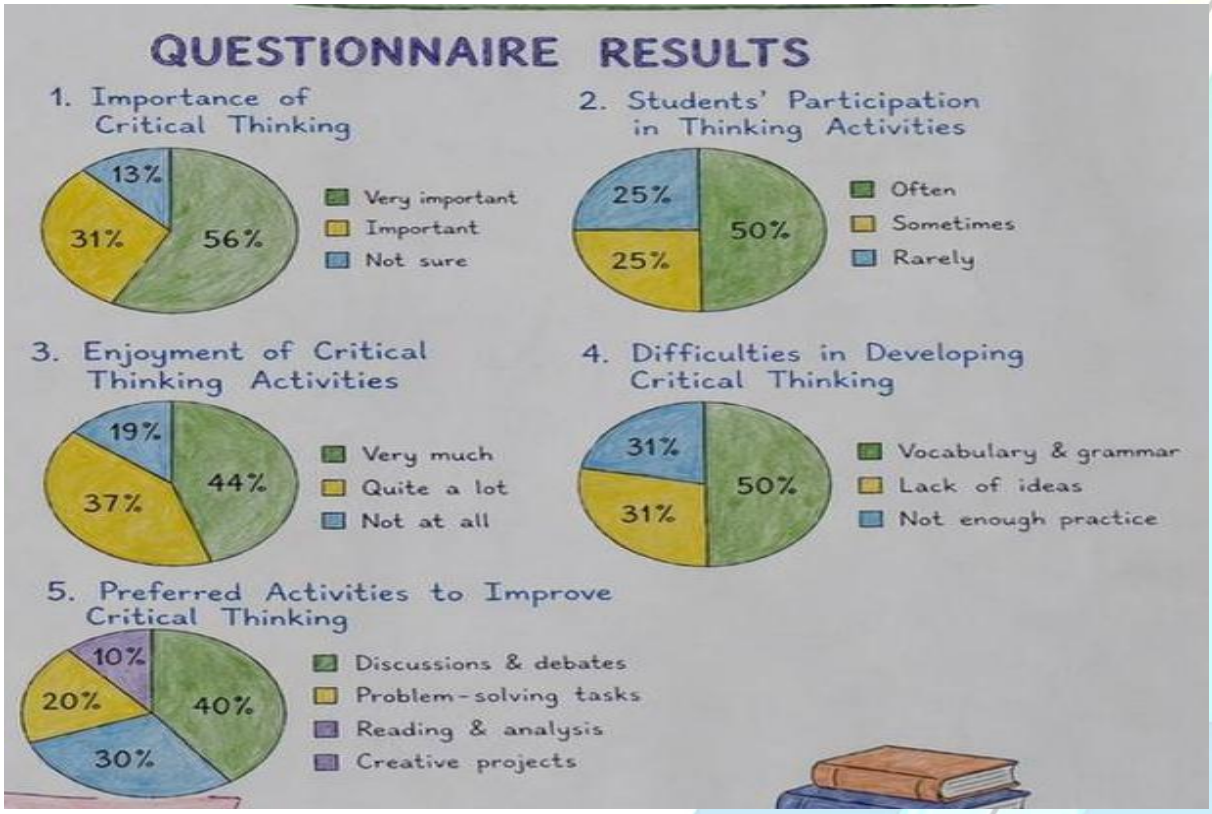
**Exploratory findings**

Through self-reflection, classroom observations, and discussions with colleagues, I identified several factors influencing the development of critical thinking skills in my classroom. 13 out of 16 respondents gave the reasons as to why

they are reluctant in taking part in classroom discussions. These findings are summarized in my questionnaire results Picture 1 ( below ).

Discussions with colleagues revealed that these challenges were common across different classrooms. Many teachers observed that students showed better critical thinking when they were encouraged to work collaboratively, share opinions, and solve real-life problems. Group discussions and peer interaction were particularly effective in helping students think more deeply.Teachers who incorporated activities such as debates, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks reported noticeable improvement in students' analytical skills and engagement.

**Survey results**




*Picture 1. Survey results from my poster presentations.*

According to the questionnaire results, most students recognize the importance of critical thinking, with many considering it very important. In terms of participation, some students actively take part in activities, while others are less

engaged. Most students enjoy critical thinking tasks and show a generally positive attitude. However, they face challenges such as difficulties with vocabulary and grammar, a lack of ideas, and limited practice. Students prefer interactive methods to improve their skills, especially discussions and debates, followed by reading and analysis, problem-solving tasks, and creative projects. Overall, students value critical thinking, but more interactive activities and language support are needed to improve their skills and motivation.

## Action Research 1. Action Plan

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, reflective notes, and student interviews, I created an action plan to address the issues identified. The action plan included strategies that supported learners to develop their critical thinking skills in English, and this was carried out over a period of eight weeks during the second trimester of the academic year. This gave a total of ten lessons of one hour duration each.

The following activities were suggested based on both the learners' preferences and the goals of the English curriculum. Groups were formed based on students' interests and comfort levels, which allowed them to feel more confident participating. The topics and tasks used in the lessons included discussions on everyday issues, debates on relatable topics, analytical reading tasks, and creative projects. Students brainstormed ideas together in their groups before engaging in the main critical thinking activities.

### a. Pre-Thinking Activities and Guided Discussion

To help students develop their critical thinking, I engaged them in pre-thinking activities at the beginning of each lesson. These activities were designed to activate students' prior knowledge and prepare them for deeper thinking tasks. I facilitated this process by:

1. Providing relevant learning resources and language support by explaining key vocabulary and writing important words and phrases on the board to help students express their ideas more clearly in English.

2. Offering discussion prompts to stimulate group conversations and encourage students to share their opinions, agree or disagree with others, and justify their thinking.

3. Allowing groups to share their ideas with the class and receive constructive feedback from both their peers and the teacher.

4. Using visual aids such as pictures, charts, and real-life scenarios to spark curiosity and generate ideas before the main activity began.

**b. Model Texts and Analytical Reading**

Model texts including articles, opinion pieces, and short stories were used to demonstrate how critical thinking is expressed through language (Wallace, 2003). These texts were taken from a variety of sources including internet articles, newspaper cuttings, and reading materials relevant to students' lives. This enabled students to:

1. Familiarize themselves with different types of texts and how arguments are structured

2. Analyze and evaluate the ideas and opinions presented by the author

3. Examine how evidence is used to support a point of view

4. Discuss and respond to texts together before working on their own individual responses

By combining reading with critical analysis, students gradually developed both their language skills and their ability to think more deeply about the texts they encountered.

**c. Classroom Discussions and Debate Activities**

To give students authentic and meaningful opportunities to practice critical thinking, I organized structured classroom discussions and simple debate activities. Students were paired or grouped and given relatable topics to discuss and debate. This initiative created excitement and engagement in the classroom as students felt their opinions were genuinely valued and heard. Upon gaining confidence through group work, students became more willing to share their ideas individually in front of the whole class.

The discussions and debates gave students a real purpose for thinking critically, as they needed to form clear opinions, listen carefully to others, and respond thoughtfully to different points of view.

**d. Assessing Students' Participation in Critical Thinking Activities**

Based on my findings from analyzing the data, I designed an evaluation checklist that would respond to the different challenges that learners faced. This checklist assessed five key aspects:

1. Engagement and Participation: Students' involvement in both individual and group critical thinking tasks

2. Preparedness: Students' readiness to engage with thinking tasks and their completion of any preparation activities before class

3. Collaboration and Feedback: Peer-to-peer constructive feedback, active listening, and teamwork during group activities

This checklist provided a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness of the strategies employed to enhance students' critical thinking skills and overall engagement in English lessons.

**Results**

After implementing the action plan aimed at improving critical thinking skills among teenage English language learners, I observed varying levels of progress:

**Table 3: Impact of implemented Strategies**

Topic: Improving Critical Thinking Skills Among Teenage English Learners

| Number of students enrolled | Number of students who attempted critical thinking tasks before research | Range of Scores /20 | Number of students who showed progress after implementation of findings | Range of Scores /20 | Number of students with slight progress |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | 3 | 3 - 10 | 13 | 12 - 16 | 3 |

Outcomes included:

- More students engaged and participated in writing activities.
- Students worked effectively in groups, took notes, asked questions and completed assignments, demonstrating commitment to learning.
- 13 out of 16 students showed improved engagement and grades, with scores ranging from 12–16 out of a total of 20.
- 3 students demonstrated little improvement, highlighting areas for further support, such as constructing basic English sentences and appropriate tense usage.

Group work and collaborative feedback enabled students to:

- Plan, draft, revise and edit compositions together (Graham & Perin, 2007).
- Share knowledge and generate ideas for writing.
- Correct each other's work and provide feedback.

The letter exchange activity motivated students to write without fear of poor grades. Allowing students to write drafts and receive feedback, and to rewrite, boosted their confidence in writing.The new strategies not only improved the grades but also increased students' motivation. One student exclaimed, "I can't believe I have a pass grade in writing! This is the first time this is happening." This anecdotal evidence underscores that the strategies used were effective and actually helped to enhance students' writing skills.

## Conclusion

This study examined the impact of innovative teaching strategies on students' writing skills, with a focus on engagement, collaboration, and motivation. The findings demonstrate that the implementation of these strategies yielded significant improvements in both the academic performance and the overall attitude of students toward writing.The results revealed that 13 out of 16 students showed measurable progress, with scores ranging from 12 to 16 out of 20, following the introduction of group work, collaborative feedback, and letter exchange activities. These strategies created a supportive and interactive learning environment that encouraged students to take ownership of their writing process. By planning, drafting, revising, and editing compositions together, students developed not only their writing competencies but also their critical thinking and communication skills.While 3 students demonstrated only slight improvement, this highlights the importance of continued and differentiated support for learners who face challenges with foundational English skills, such as sentence construction and appropriate tense usage. These students serve as a reminder that no single strategy fits all learners, and that ongoing assessment and tailored intervention remain essential components of effective teaching.

To conclude, the study confirms that when students are provided with meaningful, low-pressure writing opportunities and constructive peer feedback, their

confidence and motivation increase significantly. The anecdotal evidence gathered throughout the research further supports this conclusion, as students expressed genuine surprise and pride in their own academic progress.In light of these findings, it is recommended that educators continue to incorporate collaborative and process-oriented writing strategies into their teaching practice. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these approaches on students' writing development, as well as their effectiveness across different educational contexts and language backgrounds.

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