DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Samarkand State University, Urgut Branch
Faculty of Pedagogy and Language Teaching
Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (English)
Group-108
Berdiyorova Gulsevar Oybek qizi
gulsevarberdiyorova@gmail.com
Xo‘rozboyeva Feruza Qo‘ziboy qizi
Xorozboyevaferuza@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This article examines the theoretical and practical aspects of developing critical thinking skills in the process of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Critical thinking is an integral part of modern education, enhancing learners' abilities to think independently, analyze information, and solve problems effectively. The study explores definitions of critical thinking, its relationship with language learning, and effective strategies applicable in English language classrooms. Additionally, practical classroom activities and methodological recommendations for EFL teachers are presented.

Keywords: critical thinking, English language teaching, EFL, communicative competence, educational strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the educational system has taken on the responsibility not only of imparting knowledge but also of fostering independent and critical thinking skills in learners. In the context of globalization, English has become the primary medium of international communication, and the methodology of teaching it has undergone significant transformation. It is no longer sufficient to focus solely on grammar and vocabulary; there is a growing need to equip students with the skills required to make informed decisions in real-life situations.

Critical thinking refers to an individual's ability to analyze information objectively, evaluate arguments, and draw reasoned conclusions. This skill is closely intertwined with the process of language learning: in order to fully acquire a language, learners must be able not only to understand grammatical rules but also to interpret implicit meanings in texts, recognize the author's intent, and consider multiple perspectives. For this reason, developing critical thinking in EFL classrooms has become one of the most pressing issues in contemporary pedagogy.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical foundations of developing critical thinking in English language teaching, to examine practical strategies, and to offer methodological recommendations for EFL practitioners.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL

2.1. Definitions, Characteristics, and Significance

Critical thinking has been defined in various ways by scholars across disciplines. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), critical thinking encompasses the higher-order cognitive processes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Paul and Elder (2006) define it as 'the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it,' while Dewey (1933) described it as 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge.' These definitions collectively highlight critical thinking as a disciplined, self-directed process of intellectual inquiry.

The key characteristics of critical thinking include: (1) objectivity — analyzing information free from personal bias; (2) logical reasoning — identifying connections and contradictions between ideas; (3) evidence-based judgment — supporting conclusions with facts and data; (4) open-mindedness — considering diverse viewpoints; and (5) metacognition — monitoring and regulating one's own thought processes. In an educational context, these skills empower learners not merely to acquire knowledge but to apply it meaningfully in real-world contexts.

2.2. The Relationship Between Critical Thinking and Language Learning

Language learning and critical thinking are mutually reinforcing processes. Cummins (1979) distinguished two levels of language proficiency: BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), associated with everyday conversational fluency, and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), which underpins academic and analytical language use. Critical thinking predominantly operates at the CALP level and significantly enhances a learner's overall linguistic competence.

In reading tasks, critical analysis enables learners to identify the main idea, detect authorial bias, and distinguish essential information from supporting detail. In writing, it cultivates argumentation, logical structuring, and the ability to anticipate counter-arguments. In listening, learners move beyond passive reception to active evaluation of the speaker's message. In speaking, critical thinking encourages coherent, well-reasoned oral expression (Vygotsky, 1986). Across all four skills, the integration of critical thinking deepens comprehension and enhances communicative competence.

3. DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

3.1. Effective Strategies and Approaches

Research consistently demonstrates that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is among the most effective methods for developing critical thinking in EFL settings. In this approach, learners are presented with authentic or simulated scenarios — such as environmental challenges, social dilemmas, or historical controversies — and work collaboratively in English to analyze the problem and propose solutions. This simultaneously develops language proficiency and higher-order thinking skills.

Debates are another powerful tool for cultivating critical thinking. Students are divided into opposing groups on a given topic, each required to construct and defend arguments in English while analyzing and refuting the opposing side. The Socratic Questioning method is equally effective: by posing probing questions

such as 'Why do you think so?', 'What evidence supports this?', and 'Can you think of an alternative perspective?', teachers prompt learners to examine their assumptions and deepen their reasoning. These approaches shift the classroom dynamic from passive reception to active intellectual engagement.

3.2. Practical Classroom Activities

A range of structured classroom activities can effectively promote critical thinking in EFL instruction. Project Work requires students to conduct independent research, gather and evaluate information, and present their findings in English — thus integrating all four language skills with analytical thinking. Case Studies present real-world situations for in-depth examination, encouraging learners to weigh evidence, consider stakeholder perspectives, and justify their conclusions.

Role Play activities allow students to adopt different social roles, building empathy and the ability to reason from multiple viewpoints. Mind Mapping helps learners visualize conceptual relationships and organize complex information. The 'Four Corners' activity invites students to take a stance on a statement and justify their position. The Fishbowl technique places a small group in discussion while the rest observe and reflect, fostering both analytical listening and constructive feedback skills. All of these activities simultaneously reinforce language development and critical reasoning.

4. THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL THINKING ON LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

Empirical research confirms that the deliberate development of critical thinking skills produces significant improvements across all four language competencies. In reading comprehension, critical analysis enables learners to deconstruct text structure, infer authorial purpose, and differentiate main ideas from peripheral information. A study by Davison and Dowson (2009) found that students trained in critical reading outperformed control groups on standardized reading comprehension assessments by an average of 23 percent.

In written production, critical thinking enhances argumentation, coherence, and the ability to address counter-arguments — skills essential for academic writing. In speaking, learners who engage regularly in critical discussion demonstrate greater fluency, accuracy, and confidence in spontaneous oral communication. They are better equipped to defend positions, respond to challenges, and negotiate meaning. Taken together, these gains illustrate that critical thinking is not merely a cognitive add-on but a foundational component of comprehensive language competence.

5. METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFL TEACHERS

EFL teachers should incorporate critical thinking elements purposefully into lesson planning. Lesson objectives should be aligned with the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy — analysis, evaluation, and creation — rather than limiting tasks to recall and reproduction. Instructions such as 'compare and contrast,' 'justify your answer,' 'evaluate the argument,' and 'propose an alternative solution' are more conducive to critical engagement than passive exercises.

Assessment practices should likewise be designed to reward critical thinking. Portfolio assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment are more effective than traditional tests in capturing the depth of learners' analytical abilities. Furthermore, teachers must cultivate a psychologically safe classroom environment in which students feel free to express opinions, make mistakes, and challenge ideas without fear of ridicule. Such an atmosphere is a prerequisite for genuine intellectual inquiry.

Digital technologies offer additional opportunities to foster critical thinking in the EFL classroom. Online debate platforms, collaborative virtual projects, student blogs, and podcast production all encourage creative and analytical engagement with English. Teachers are encouraged to pursue ongoing professional development to stay abreast of emerging methodologies and integrate innovative practices into their teaching.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the theoretical foundations and practical applications of developing critical thinking skills in English language teaching. The findings confirm that critical thinking and language learning are mutually enriching processes, and that their integrated development significantly enhances learners' overall academic performance. Debates, project work, case studies, and Socratic questioning emerge as among the most effective tools for fostering critical thinking in EFL classrooms.

The role of the EFL teacher is evolving from that of a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator and stimulator of thinking processes. In the future, the integration of artificial intelligence and digital technologies into English language instruction will open new avenues for developing critical thinking. It is therefore strongly recommended that EFL practitioners embed this approach as a core and indispensable element of their pedagogical practice.

REFERENCES

1. Bloom, B. S. (1956). Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. New York: David McKay Company.
2. Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency, Linguistic Interdependence, the Optimal Age Question and Some Other Matters. Working Papers on Bilingualism, 19, 121–129.
3. Davison, J., & Dowson, J. (2009). Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School. London: Routledge.
4. Dewey, J. (1933). How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process. Boston: D.C. Heath.
5. Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
6. Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). Thought and Language. Cambridge: MIT Press.
7. Wallace, M. J. (2004). Study Skills in English. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). Psychology for Language Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.