



THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

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Abstract. *In contemporary education, the goal of teaching English as a foreign language goes far beyond the acquisition of linguistic competence. Modern educational paradigms emphasize the importance of fostering higher-order thinking skills, particularly critical thinking, alongside language proficiency. This article examines the role of English language teaching in the development of learners' critical thinking skills. Drawing on cognitive and educational theories, the paper discusses the concept of critical thinking, its theoretical foundations, and its relevance to language learning. Furthermore, it explores pedagogical approaches and classroom strategies that integrate critical thinking into English language instruction. The analysis demonstrates that English language teaching, when grounded in communicative and learner-centered methodologies, significantly contributes to the enhancement of students' analytical, evaluative, and reflective thinking abilities.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, English language teaching, higher-order thinking skills, communicative approach, cognitive development.*

Annotatsiya. *Zamonaviy ta'lim tizimida ingliz tilini o'qitish faqatgina til kompetensiyasini shakllantirish bilan cheklanmay, balki talabalarning tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishga ham xizmat qilishi zarur. Ushbu maqolada ingliz tili o'qitish jarayonining o'quvchilarda tanqidiy fikrlashni shakllantirishdagi o'rni va ahamiyati yoritiladi. Tanqidiy fikrlash tushunchasining nazariy asoslari hamda uning ingliz tili ta'limi bilan uzviy bog'liqligi ilmiy manbalar asosida tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, ingliz tili darslarida tanqidiy fikrlashni rivojlantirishga qaratilgan metod va strategiyalar, jumladan muammoli savollar, bahs-munozaralar, tahliliy o'qish va yozma topshiriqlarning samaradorligi ko'rsatib beriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, tanqidiy fikrlashga yo'naltirilgan ingliz tili ta'limi o'quvchilarning mustaqil fikrlash, tahlil qilish va asosli xulosa chiqarish qobiliyatlarini sezilarli darajada oshiradi.*

Kalit soʻzlar. *tanqidiy fikrlash, ingliz tili oʻqitish, kognitiv rivojlanish, kommunikativ yondashuv, yuqori darajadagi fikrlash koʻnikmalari, taʼlim metodlari.*

Introduction

In the context of globalization, English has become a dominant medium of international communication, academic exchange, and professional interaction. As a result, English language education occupies a central position in modern educational systems worldwide. However, contemporary approaches to education increasingly recognize that the purpose of teaching English should not be limited to grammar mastery or vocabulary acquisition. Instead, language instruction should also aim to cultivate learners' intellectual abilities, including their capacity for critical thinking. Critical thinking is widely regarded as a fundamental skill for academic success and lifelong learning. According to John Dewey, thinking is not merely a passive process but an active, reflective inquiry that involves questioning assumptions and evaluating evidence. In this regard, English language classrooms provide a fertile environment for the development of critical thinking skills, as they naturally involve interpretation, meaning-making, discussion, and evaluation of ideas. The integration of critical thinking into English language teaching (ELT) has gained increasing attention in recent decades. Researchers argue that language learning becomes more meaningful and effective when learners are encouraged to analyze texts, express opinions, and engage in problem-solving activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This article aims to explore how English language teaching can contribute to the development of critical thinking skills and to identify pedagogical practices that support this process.

Theoretical Foundations of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a multifaceted concept that has been defined differently across disciplines. In general terms, it refers to the ability to think clearly, rationally, and independently while analyzing and evaluating information. Ennis (1985) defines critical thinking as "reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do." This definition highlights the role of reflection and judgment in the thinking process. One of the most influential frameworks related to critical thinking in education is Bloom's taxonomy. Benjamin Bloom (1956) classified cognitive processes into hierarchical levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The upper levels of this taxonomy—analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—are closely associated with critical thinking. These levels require learners to go beyond memorization and engage in deeper cognitive processing. From a constructivist perspective, learning is viewed as an active process in which learners construct knowledge through interaction and reflection. This view supports the integration of critical thinking into language education, as learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning, question ideas, and develop their own interpretations. Consequently, English language teaching that incorporates critical thinking aligns well with contemporary educational theories emphasizing learner autonomy and cognitive engagement.



The Role of English Language Teaching in Developing Critical Thinking

English language teaching plays a significant role in developing critical thinking skills due to the nature of language itself. Language learning involves interpreting meanings, understanding context, and making judgments about appropriate language use. These processes inherently require cognitive engagement and analytical thinking. One of the key advantages of ELT is its communicative orientation. Communicative language teaching encourages learners to use language as a tool for expressing ideas, solving problems, and interacting with others. Through activities such as discussions, role-plays, and collaborative tasks, learners are exposed to diverse perspectives and are required to evaluate and respond to different viewpoints. This interaction fosters critical thinking by promoting reasoning and reflection. Moreover, the use of authentic materials—such as newspaper articles, academic texts, and multimedia resources—enhances critical engagement. When learners analyze real-world texts, they are challenged to identify main ideas, detect bias, and assess the credibility of sources. Such activities help learners develop critical literacy skills, which are essential in today's information-rich society.

Teaching Strategies for Integrating Critical Thinking in ELT

Several pedagogical strategies can be effectively employed to integrate critical thinking into English language teaching.

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning encourages students to solve real-life problems through inquiry and discussion. In the context of ELT, learners may be presented with social, cultural, or ethical issues and asked to discuss possible solutions in English. This approach not only enhances language use but also strengthens analytical and evaluative thinking.

Debates and Discussions


Debates are particularly effective in developing critical thinking skills. By defending a position or responding to opposing arguments, learners practice reasoning, evidence-based argumentation, and logical thinking. These activities also improve speaking skills and confidence in language use.

Critical Reading and Writing

Critical reading tasks require learners to analyze texts rather than simply understand them. Learners may be asked to identify the author's purpose, evaluate arguments, or compare different viewpoints. Similarly, critical writing tasks, such as argumentative essays and reflective journals, encourage learners to organize their thoughts logically and express reasoned opinions.

The Impact of Critical Thinking-Oriented ELT on Learners

Research indicates that integrating critical thinking into English language teaching has a positive impact on learners' academic performance and cognitive development. Facione (2011) argues that learners who develop critical thinking skills are better equipped to make informed decisions and adapt to complex situations.



In ELT contexts, students exposed to critical thinking activities demonstrate improved comprehension, greater engagement, and enhanced problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, these learners tend to become more autonomous and confident in their learning process. As they learn to question information and articulate their own ideas, they develop skills that extend beyond the language classroom and contribute to their overall intellectual growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, English language teaching has a significant potential to foster critical thinking skills when it is guided by communicative, learner-centered, and cognitively demanding approaches. The integration of critical thinking into ELT not only enhances language proficiency but also prepares learners for academic and professional challenges in a rapidly changing world. By incorporating problem-solving activities, debates, and critical reading and writing tasks, English language teachers can create a learning environment that promotes analytical, reflective, and independent thinking. Therefore, the development of critical thinking should be regarded as an essential objective of modern English language education.

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