# ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

***Rakhimov Mansur Odiljonovich***
*Senior teacher of the Department of Teaching English Methodology No. 3 of the Uzbek State University of World Languages*
*ichbinreich1979@mail.ru*

**ANNOTATSIYA:** Ushbu maqola talabalarda tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda vazifaga asoslangan til o'qitish (TBLT) samaradorligini o'rganadi. Asosiy e'tibor til ko'nikmalarini analitik fikrlash va muammolarni hal qilish qobiliyatlari bilan integratsiyalashga qaratilgan bo'lib, talabalarni haqiqiy kommunikativ vazifalarga jalb qilish orqali amalga oshiriladi. Tadqiqot metodologiyasi sifat va miqdoriy usullarni o'z ichiga oladi.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, vazifaga asoslangan til o'qitish, kognitiv rivojlanish, kommunikativ yondashuv, integratsiv o'qitish.

**АННОТАЦИЯ:** В данной статье исследуется эффективность обучения на основе задач (TBLT) для развития навыков критического мышления у студентов. Основное внимание уделяется интеграции языковых навыков с аналитическим мышлением и способностями решения проблем путем вовлечения студентов в аутентичные коммуникативные задачи. Методология исследования включает качественные и количественные методы.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, обучение на основе задач, когнитивное развитие, коммуникативный подход, интегративное обучение.

**ABSTRACT:** This article investigates the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing critical thinking skills in students. The focus is on integrating language skills with analytical reasoning and problem-solving abilities by engaging students in authentic communicative tasks that require higher-order cognitive processing. The research methodology incorporates qualitative and quantitative methods.

Keywords: critical thinking, task-based language teaching, cognitive development, communicative approach, integrative teaching.

## 1. Introduction

In an era defined by information abundance and rapid technological change, the ability to think critically has become an indispensable skill. For language learners, proficiency in grammar and vocabulary, while foundational, is no longer sufficient. The modern educational landscape demands the cultivation of Critical Thinking (CT)—the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, identify assumptions, and make reasoned judgments [1]. CT encompasses not only logical reasoning but also metacognitive awareness, problem-solving skills, and the disposition to question and reflect.

The primary aim of this article is to analyze and evaluate the pedagogical potential of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a holistic framework for fostering CT in higher education students. The objectives of the research are: firstly, to define the key components of CT within a language teaching context; secondly, to design and implement a TBLT curriculum specifically targeting these components; and thirdly, to assess the impact of this intervention on students' demonstrated and self-reported critical thinking abilities. The central hypothesis posits that TBLT, by creating a need for

authentic problem-solving and collaborative decision-making in context-rich scenarios, provides an ideal environment for the integrated development of linguistic skills and cognitive capabilities.

## 2. Main Body

### 2.1. Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design to capture both the measurable outcomes and the experiential processes of learning. The research was conducted over one academic semester with a cohort of 80 second-year university students majoring in English as a second language. They were divided into an experimental group (EG, n=40$n$=40) and a control group (CG, n=40$n$=40). The CG followed a traditional syllabus with critical thinking taught as a separate, logic-based component (e.g., lessons on syllogisms, fallacies, and argument structure). The EG participated in a structured TBLT curriculum designed to promote CT.

The TBLT curriculum was centered on a series of interconnected tasks culminating in one main project: "Campus Sustainability Initiative." Students in the EG were tasked with identifying a sustainability problem on campus (e.g., waste management, energy consumption, transportation), researching potential solutions, and presenting a proposal to a mock university committee. The project was structured in phases:

1. **Task 1 – Problem Identification:** Students conducted surveys and interviews to gather data on campus sustainability issues. They analyzed the data to identify the most pressing problem and justify their choice through written reports. This phase required evaluating evidence and distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information.

2. **Task 2 – Solution Generation:** Teams researched best practices from other universities and evaluated the feasibility of various solutions. They engaged in structured debates where they had to argue for and against different proposals, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and underlying assumptions. This phase required analyzing multiple perspectives and constructing logical arguments.

3. **Task 3 – Proposal Development:** Teams collaboratively wrote a formal proposal outlining their recommended solution, including an implementation plan and budget. They anticipated counterarguments and addressed them within the proposal. This phase required synthesizing information, making reasoned judgments, and communicating persuasively.

4. **Task 4 – Presentation and Defense:** Teams presented their proposals to a panel (simulated committee) and defended their recommendations during a question-and-answer session. This phase required articulating reasoning under pressure and responding to challenges to their arguments.

Data collection instruments were multifaceted. Quantitative data was gathered using a pre- and post-test adaptation of the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA), which measures dimensions like inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments. Additionally, a pre- and post-project argumentative essay on a campus issue was assessed for logical structure, evidence use, and counterargument integration. Qualitative data was collected from student reflection journals, transcripts of team discussions, and focus group interviews conducted at the project's conclusion.

### 2.2. Results and Discussion

The quantitative analysis revealed significant growth in the EG compared to the CG. While the CG showed modest improvement in formal logic on the WGCTA, the EG demonstrated statistically significant gains in the more dynamic dimensions of inference and evaluation of arguments—the ability to draw logical conclusions from incomplete information and assess the quality of reasoning.

**Table 1. Comparative Results of Pre-test and Post-test Scores on Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Mean Values)**

| CT Dimension | Experimental Group (Pre) | Experimental Group (Post) | Control Group (Pre) | Control Group (Post) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inference | 4.1 | 5.9 | 4.2 | 4.8 |
| Recognition of Assumptions | 3.8 | 5.7 | 3.9 | 4.5 |
| Deduction | 4.3 | 5.5 | 4.4 | 4.9 |
| Interpretation | 3.7 | 5.8 | 3.8 | 4.4 |
| Evaluation of Arguments | 3.5 | 6.0 | 3.6 | 4.3 |
| *Composite CT Score* | **3.9** | **5.8** | **4.0** | **4.6** |

*(Note: Scores are on a 7-point Likert scale)*

Furthermore, the analysis of the post-project argumentative essays showed that the EG used significantly more complex and nuanced reasoning when discussing campus issues. Their essays demonstrated a clearer logical structure, more effective use of evidence, and a greater willingness to acknowledge and address counterarguments. Their lexical choices reflected a deeper understanding of argumentation (e.g., using "however," "nevertheless," "on the contrary," "this suggests that") and their syntax showed greater flexibility in expressing conditional and causal relationships, key features of analytical writing.

The qualitative data illuminated the processes behind these quantitative gains. Thematic analysis of journals and focus groups revealed a profound shift in student attitudes. Initially, students expressed anxiety about the open-ended nature of the tasks, citing concerns about ambiguity and the lack of clear "right answers." As one student noted in an early journal entry: *"I am worried I will choose the wrong problem or my solution will not be good enough. I am not used to deciding for myself what is important."*

However, as the project progressed, these anxieties gave way to problem-solving and curiosity. The transcripts of team discussions showed students negotiating meaning, challenging each other's assumptions, and collaboratively constructing arguments. This process of **reasoning through language**—using language to mediate complex cognitive and social activities [2]—was central to their development. The task demands forced them to move beyond textbook language and engage with language as a tool for genuine analytical thinking.

The final reflection journals provided the most compelling evidence of growth. Students moved from simple descriptions of their activities to sophisticated analysis of their own thinking processes. One student's final reflection captured this evolution: *"I learned that critical thinking is not about being negative or finding faults. It's about asking 'why' and 'what if' and being*

*comfortable with not having all the answers immediately. My language had to become more precise to express my thinking clearly."* This demonstrates the development of metacognitive awareness, which Facione identifies as the cornerstone of CT [3].

The TBLT framework was crucial in creating this developmental trajectory. The authentic, complex task of the project provided a purpose for communication that transcended the classroom. The collaborative structure forced students to encounter and navigate cognitive challenges in a supported environment. This aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development [4], where learners achieve higher levels of cognitive functioning through guided interaction with peers and instructors.

**Figure 1. The TBLT Cycle for Fostering Critical Thinking**

A circular diagram with four interconnected stages:

1. **Authentic Task:** (The problem launch - creates need for inquiry and analysis)
2. **Collaborative Investigation:** (Team research and debate - triggers hypothesis testing and argument construction)
3. **Reflective Processing:** (Journals and feedback - facilitates metacognitive analysis of thinking processes)
4. **Consolidated Reasoning:** (Final product and presentation - demonstrates integrated linguistic and cognitive skills)

An arrow cycles back from "Consolidated Reasoning" to "Authentic Task," indicating a spiral of continuous development.

While the results are promising, the study had limitations. The success of the TBLT intervention is heavily dependent on the teacher's ability to design tasks that genuinely require higher-order thinking and to facilitate productive

cognitive conflict. Furthermore, the assessment of critical thinking in a second language presents challenges; students may possess strong reasoning abilities that are not fully expressed due to linguistic constraints. Without skilled facilitation, the tasks risk becoming mere activities rather than cognitive challenges.

### 3. Conclusion and Practical Recommendations

The findings of this study strongly indicate that Task-Based Language Teaching is a highly effective pedagogical framework for promoting the integrated growth of Critical Thinking skills in students. By embedding language use within the context of authentic, collaborative problem-solving, TBLT moves cognitive development from the abstract and theoretical to the experiential and personal. It fosters not only the linguistic skills needed for complex expression but also the analytical disposition, intellectual curiosity, and evidence-based reasoning required for successful critical engagement.

Based on these outcomes, the following practical recommendations are offered to educators and curriculum designers:

1. **Design Tasks with Inherent Cognitive Demand:** Structure tasks so that analysis, evaluation, and synthesis are not optional but necessary for completion. The task should require participants to grapple with complexity and ambiguity.
2. **Scaffold the Thinking Process, Not Just the Language:** Provide structured prompts for reflection throughout the task. Use guided questions for journals (e.g., "What assumptions did you make? How did you test them? What evidence changed your mind?") and facilitate debriefing sessions after key interactions.
3. **Teach Language for Reasoning and Argumentation:** Explicitly teach the language functions crucial for critical thinking: how

to express doubt respectfully, how to request evidence, how to construct a counterargument, how to qualify a claim, and how to synthesize multiple perspectives.

4. **Create a Safe Classroom Culture for Intellectual Risk-Taking:** Emphasize that the goal is not certainty but inquiry. Frame errors in reasoning as valuable learning opportunities. Model curiosity, openness to being wrong, and a non-judgmental attitude towards intellectual struggle.

5. **Leverage Collaborative Structures Purposefully:** Utilize group work not just for efficiency, but for cognitive conflict. Design activities where students must defend their reasoning to peers, negotiate differences in interpretation, and reach consensus through evidence-based discussion. Provide training in constructive disagreement and peer critique.

In conclusion, developing Critical Thinking requires a pedagogical approach that is as dynamic and integrated as the competence itself. By embracing Task-Based Language Teaching, educators can transform the language classroom into a workshop for intellectual development, preparing students not just to use a language, but to use it to analyze complex problems, evaluate competing claims, and make reasoned decisions in a complex and rapidly changing world.

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