

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. *The article examines the role of English language learning in developing students' critical thinking. It discusses key theoretical perspectives and practical teaching strategies, including analytical reading, classroom discussion, problem-solving, and argumentative writing. Examples illustrate how language activities can help learners evaluate evidence, question assumptions, and express reasoned opinions.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, English language learning, EFL, analytical reading, argumentative writing, classroom discussion, language teaching methodology.*

Аннотация. *В статье рассматривается роль изучения английского языка в развитии критического мышления студентов. Анализируются основные теоретические подходы и практические методы обучения, включая аналитическое чтение, дискуссии, решение проблемных задач и аргументированное письмо. На конкретных примерах показано, как языковые задания помогают обучающимся оценивать доказательства, подвергать сомнению предположения и аргументированно выражать собственное мнение.*

Ключевые слова: *критическое мышление, изучение английского языка, английский язык как иностранный, аналитическое чтение, аргументированное письмо, учебная дискуссия, методика преподавания языков.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada ingliz tilini o'rganish jarayonida talabalarning tanqidiy fikrlash qobiliyatini rivojlantirish masalasi yoritiladi. Analitik o'qish, auditoriya muhokamalari, muammoli vaziyatlarni hal qilish va dalillarga*

asoslangan yozish kabi amaliy ta'lim usullari tahlil qilinadi. Misollar orqali til mashg'ulotlarining dalillarni baholash, mavjud qarashlarni tanqidiy tahlil qilish va asoslangan fikr bildirish ko'nikmalarini shakllantirishdagi ahamiyati ochib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: *tanqidiy fikrlash, ingliz tilini o'rganish, ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'qitish, analitik o'qish, argumentativ yozish, auditoriya muhokamasi, til o'qitish metodikasi.*

Introduction. English language education involves more than learning vocabulary, mastering grammatical structures, and developing the ability to communicate. Students also need to understand information, distinguish facts from opinions, evaluate arguments, and express their views with convincing reasons. These abilities are particularly important in an educational environment where learners encounter information from textbooks, online sources, social media, and different cultural perspectives.

Critical thinking has been widely discussed in educational philosophy and cognitive research. J. Dewey connected reflective thought with the careful examination of beliefs and the grounds supporting them. In *How We Think*, he emphasized the importance of questioning, investigating, and considering evidence before reaching a conclusion [1]. His ideas remain relevant to English language teaching because language activities can create opportunities for learners to examine information rather than simply reproduce it. Peter A. Facione's influential report on critical thinking identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as central cognitive skills [2]. These skills can be practised through ordinary English lessons. For example, when students read an article about online education, they can identify its main claim, examine the evidence provided, consider alternative explanations, and decide whether the author's conclusion is justified. However, critical thinking does not necessarily develop simply because students study a foreign language. A learner may understand a text at the level of individual words and sentences without questioning

the reliability of its information. English lessons therefore need activities that deliberately connect language development with reasoning, reflection, and evidence-based communication.

Critical thinking is commonly understood as the ability to examine information carefully, analyse relationships, evaluate arguments, and reach conclusions on reasonable grounds. It involves both cognitive skills and a willingness to reconsider one's own assumptions.

P.Facione [2] distinguishes several interrelated skills. Interpretation enables learners to understand the meaning of information; analysis helps them identify relationships between claims and reasons; evaluation concerns the credibility of sources and the strength of arguments; inference involves drawing conclusions from available evidence. Explanation allows learners to justify their decisions, while self-regulation encourages them to review and correct their own reasoning. These skills can be incorporated into English language learning without turning every lesson into a formal philosophy class. A reading lesson, for instance, can begin with identifying the main idea and progress towards evaluating the author's evidence.

Consider the following statement:

"Students who use smartphones during lessons always achieve lower grades."

A learner concentrating only on vocabulary might translate the sentence and move on. A learner practising critical thinking would ask several additional questions:

- What evidence supports this statement?
- Does *always* make the claim too broad?
- Could other factors influence students' grades?
- Does the statement distinguish between educational and non-educational smartphone use?

The word *always* is particularly important because it presents a generalisation as if it applied to every student. Students may recognise that the statement requires evidence before they accept it. At the same time, they learn how

English adverbs influence the strength and meaning of an argument.

Richard Paul and Linda Elder [3] also emphasise the importance of examining the elements of reasoning, including purpose, assumptions, evidence, implications, and conclusions. Their framework provides a practical way of organising classroom questions. When learners analyse an argumentative text, they can identify what the writer wants readers to believe, what assumptions support the argument, and whether the evidence is sufficient. Critical thinking is therefore not an additional subject unrelated to language learning. It can be developed through the interpretation and production of meaningful language.

Language provides the means through which learners organise ideas, explain relationships, compare alternatives, and communicate conclusions. When students discuss an issue in English, they must select appropriate vocabulary, structure their arguments, respond to other opinions, and clarify their meaning. These processes can create useful opportunities for reflection.

L.Vygotsky's work on the relationship between thought and language offers an important theoretical perspective [4]. His account of the development of higher mental functions draws attention to the role of language and social interaction in cognitive development. Applied cautiously to language education, this perspective suggests that classroom dialogue can support learners as they formulate and refine ideas.

For example, a teacher may ask students to discuss the following question:

“Should university students be allowed to use artificial intelligence tools when preparing assignments?”

Students might initially respond with simple statements:

- ❖ “Yes, AI is useful.”
- ❖ “No, students may cheat.”

The teacher can encourage more developed reasoning by asking:

- ✓ What makes AI useful in this situation?
- ✓ Under what conditions might its use be acceptable?
- ✓ What problems could arise if students rely on it completely?

✓ How could a university distinguish responsible use from academic misconduct?

Learners may then produce more qualified responses:

“AI tools can help students generate ideas and check their grammar, but students should verify the information and acknowledge their use when required by university rules.”

This answer demonstrates more than grammatical development. It identifies a benefit, recognises a limitation, and proposes a condition for responsible use.

Language proficiency and critical thinking should nevertheless be distinguished. A student may have sound reasoning but lack the English vocabulary needed to express it clearly. Another student may speak fluently while making unsupported claims. Effective teaching should support both dimensions by providing language scaffolding alongside intellectually demanding tasks.

Reading is particularly suitable for critical-thinking development because written texts present claims, descriptions, explanations, and interpretations that can be examined. Conventional reading exercises often focus on locating information, matching headings, or identifying the meanings of unfamiliar words. These activities are useful, but they do not necessarily require learners to evaluate what they read.

C.Wallace [5], in her discussion of critical reading in language education, draws attention to the importance of considering texts in their social and ideological contexts. Readers need to examine not only what a text says but also how meaning is constructed and whose perspective is represented.

Classroom discussion provides learners with opportunities to test their ideas, listen to alternative perspectives, and revise their positions. However, discussion does not automatically lead to critical thinking. If students merely express preferences without explaining them, the activity may develop speaking fluency but offer limited practice in evaluating arguments.

N.Mercer's research on classroom talk highlights the educational value of dialogue in which participants explain their reasoning, respond to others, and work

towards a more considered understanding [6]. In English lessons, teachers can encourage this kind of interaction by establishing clear expectations for discussion.

A useful technique is the claim–reason–evidence–response structure.

Element	Guiding question	Example
Claim	What is your position?	University students should read news in English.
Reason	Why do you hold this view?	It can expose them to different perspectives.
Evidence or example	What supports your reason?	Comparing two reports may reveal differences in emphasis and interpretation.
Response to another view	What might someone disagree with?	Some reports contain difficult language or unreliable information.

The teacher can ask students to discuss the question, “*Should university students be required to read news in English every day?*” One student may support the proposal because it builds vocabulary and awareness of current affairs. Another may argue that a compulsory daily requirement could be unrealistic for students with different proficiency levels or workloads.

The objective is not to make every student agree. It is to help them distinguish a reasoned argument from an unsupported assertion and to respond respectfully to opposing views.

Useful language frames can make this possible even for intermediate learners:

1. “I agree with this point because ...”
2. “The evidence suggests that ...”
3. “One possible limitation is ...”
4. “An alternative explanation might be ...”
5. “I would reconsider my opinion if ...”

These expressions provide linguistic support while making reasoning

visible. They are especially helpful for learners who understand the issue but lack the confidence to express a nuanced opinion in English. Argumentative writing requires students to establish a position, organise supporting reasons, select relevant evidence, and consider alternative views. It is therefore a productive setting for integrating language development with critical thinking.

Conclusion. Developing critical thinking through English language learning requires deliberate attention to the relationship between language, reasoning, and classroom interaction. Analytical reading encourages students to examine claims and evidence; discussion helps them articulate and reconsider their views; argumentative writing requires them to organise reasons and address opposing positions; and problem-solving tasks allow them to apply these skills to realistic situations.

LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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