

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Annotation

This thesis examines the major challenges faced in teaching critical thinking in English language classrooms. The study focuses on difficulties related to traditional teaching methods, limited language proficiency, lack of teacher preparation, classroom management, and students' low confidence in expressing opinions. It also explores how these challenges affect learners' participation, communication, and independent thinking abilities. The findings suggest that despite various obstacles, the effective integration of learner-centered and interactive teaching strategies can significantly improve the development of critical thinking skills in English education.

Keywords

Critical thinking, English language teaching, classroom challenges, learner-centered education, communication skills, teacher preparation, classroom interaction, language barriers, student motivation, independent learning.

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ НА УРОКАХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются основные трудности преподавания критического мышления на уроках английского языка. Исследование посвящено проблемам, связанным с традиционными методами обучения, недостаточным уровнем владения языком, нехваткой подготовки

учителей, управлением классом и низкой уверенностью учащихся при выражении собственного мнения. Также анализируется влияние этих трудностей на участие учащихся в учебном процессе, развитие коммуникативных навыков и самостоятельного мышления. Результаты исследования показывают, что, несмотря на существующие препятствия, эффективное использование интерактивных и личностно-ориентированных методов обучения способствует успешному развитию критического мышления в обучении английскому языку.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, преподавание английского языка, трудности в классе, личностно-ориентированное обучение, коммуникативные навыки, подготовка учителей, взаимодействие в классе, языковые барьеры, мотивация учащихся, самостоятельное обучение.

INTRODUCTION

In modern education, critical thinking is considered one of the most important skills necessary for academic achievement, independent learning, and effective communication. In English language education, critical thinking helps learners analyze information, express ideas logically, solve problems, and participate actively in classroom interaction. As educational systems continue to shift toward learner-centered and communicative approaches, teachers are increasingly encouraged to integrate critical thinking activities into English lessons. However, despite its recognized importance, teaching critical thinking in English classes remains a complex and challenging process for many educators and learners.

One of the main reasons for these difficulties is that critical thinking requires students not only to understand language but also to use it actively for reasoning, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation. For many learners, especially those with limited language proficiency, expressing opinions and analyzing ideas in English can be stressful and challenging. In addition, traditional teaching systems in many educational

institutions still emphasize memorization, grammar exercises, and teacher-centered instruction rather than discussion, analysis, and creativity¹. As a result, students often become passive learners who hesitate to question ideas or participate actively in communicative tasks.

Another important challenge is related to the role of teachers in promoting critical thinking. Many educators may understand the theoretical importance of critical thinking but experience difficulties implementing it effectively in real classroom settings. Large class sizes, limited lesson time, insufficient teaching materials, and lack of professional training can reduce opportunities for interactive learning and meaningful classroom discussion².

Moreover, some teachers may feel uncertain about how to evaluate critical thinking skills or how to encourage students to express independent opinions while maintaining classroom discipline.

Furthermore, cultural and educational traditions may also influence the development of critical thinking in English classes. In some learning environments, students are accustomed to listening to teachers passively rather than participating in open discussion or questioning information. This can make it difficult for learners to adapt to activities such as debates, problem-solving tasks, and analytical discussions³. Consequently, both teachers and students may experience challenges when attempting to create a more communicative and critical learning environment.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the major challenges involved in teaching critical thinking in English language classrooms and to analyze how these difficulties

¹ Dewey, J. *How We Think*. – Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1933.

² Bloom, B. S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. – New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956.

³ Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

affect learners' language development, classroom participation, and independent thinking abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Many educational researchers emphasize that critical thinking is an essential component of effective English language learning. Traditional teaching methods mainly focused on memorization and grammar exercises, while modern approaches encourage analysis, discussion, and independent thinking. According to Dewey, education should develop reflective thinking and problem-solving abilities⁴. Similarly, Bloom's Taxonomy highlights higher-order cognitive skills such as analyzing and evaluating, which are closely connected to critical thinking⁵. Researchers also argue that communicative and learner-centered teaching approaches help students improve both language proficiency and analytical abilities. However, studies show that challenges such as limited language proficiency, lack of confidence, and traditional classroom practices often make the implementation of critical thinking difficult in English classes⁶.

METHODOLOGY

This This study employed a qualitative and descriptive research design to investigate the challenges of teaching critical thinking in English language classrooms. The research involved English language learners and teachers from different classroom settings where critical thinking activities such as discussions, debates, analytical reading tasks, and problem-solving exercises were integrated into lessons. Data were collected through classroom observation, teacher feedback, students' participation analysis, and evaluation of speaking and writing activities.

⁴ Dewey, J. *How We Think*. – Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1933.

⁵ Bloom, B. S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. – New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956.

⁶ Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Particular attention was given to difficulties related to language barriers, classroom interaction, learner confidence, teaching methods, and classroom management. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively in order to identify the major challenges affecting the implementation of critical thinking in English classes and their impact on students' learning outcomes.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that teaching critical thinking in English language classrooms is both valuable and challenging. Although critical thinking activities significantly improve learners' communication skills, analytical abilities, and classroom participation, many obstacles limit their effective implementation in practice. One of the most common challenges observed during the study was students' limited language proficiency. Many learners struggled to express complex opinions, justify arguments, or participate actively in discussions because they lacked sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. As a result, some students remained silent during interactive tasks, not because they lacked ideas, but because they were afraid of making mistakes while speaking English.

Another major challenge identified in the study was the influence of traditional teaching methods. In many classrooms, students are accustomed to teacher-centered instruction, where the teacher explains information and learners are expected to memorize rules and provide correct answers. Because of this educational background, students often hesitate to ask questions, challenge opinions, or think independently during lessons. Classroom observations showed that some learners initially found it difficult to participate in open discussions or problem-solving tasks because they were unfamiliar with such activities. This demonstrates that developing critical thinking requires not only methodological changes but also a gradual transformation of classroom culture and learning habits.

The research also highlighted difficulties faced by teachers when implementing critical thinking activities. Many teachers experienced problems managing classroom discussions, encouraging equal participation, and maintaining lesson timing during interactive tasks. Some educators lacked sufficient training in designing activities that effectively combine language learning with critical thinking development. In addition, large class sizes and limited classroom resources reduced opportunities for personalized feedback and meaningful interaction. Teachers often found it challenging to balance language accuracy with open-ended communication, especially when students produced grammatically incorrect but intellectually meaningful responses.

Another important issue observed during the study was students' fear of criticism and low self-confidence. Many learners avoided expressing personal opinions because they worried about giving incorrect answers or being judged by classmates. This fear was particularly noticeable among weaker students, who preferred passive participation rather than active discussion. However, classroom observations also showed that supportive and collaborative learning environments gradually helped reduce this anxiety. Group work and peer interaction encouraged students to participate more comfortably and increased their willingness to share ideas.

Furthermore, assessment was identified as another challenge in teaching critical thinking. Traditional testing systems often focus on memorization and grammatical accuracy rather than analytical thinking or creativity. Consequently, teachers may feel pressure to prioritize exam preparation instead of interactive and discussion-based activities. This creates a conflict between educational goals and classroom realities, making it difficult to fully integrate critical thinking into English lessons.

Overall, the discussion of findings confirms that although teaching critical thinking in English language classrooms involves numerous difficulties, these challenges are not impossible to overcome. With appropriate teaching strategies, supportive classroom

environments, professional teacher training, and learner-centered approaches, critical thinking can gradually become an effective and natural component of English language education.

As for the results of the study, they revealed several important challenges affecting the implementation of critical thinking in English language classrooms. One of the most significant findings was that many students experienced difficulties expressing analytical and independent ideas in English due to limited vocabulary knowledge and insufficient language proficiency. Learners often understood discussion topics conceptually but struggled to communicate opinions clearly and confidently in the target language. This limitation reduced active participation during debates, discussions, and problem-solving activities, especially among weaker students.

Another major result was the strong influence of traditional teaching practices on classroom interaction. Students who were accustomed to memorization-based instruction initially showed hesitation when asked to analyze information, evaluate arguments, or express personal viewpoints. Many learners expected direct answers from teachers instead of engaging in independent thinking and collaborative discussion. As a result, participation levels during critical thinking tasks were uneven, with more confident students contributing actively while quieter learners remained passive observers.

The study also identified several teacher-related challenges. Classroom observations and teacher feedback showed that many educators found it difficult to manage interactive activities effectively in large classes. Limited lesson time, lack of instructional resources, and insufficient professional training reduced opportunities to implement learner-centered teaching approaches consistently. In addition, teachers experienced difficulties assessing students' critical thinking abilities because traditional

evaluation systems mainly focused on grammar accuracy and memorized knowledge rather than analytical reasoning or creativity.

Furthermore, the results demonstrated that emotional factors played an important role in students' participation. Fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and anxiety about peer judgment prevented many learners from expressing ideas openly during classroom discussions. However, collaborative activities such as group work and peer interaction gradually helped students feel more comfortable and motivated. Overall, despite the identified challenges, the findings suggest that supportive classroom environments and communicative teaching strategies can positively contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in English language education.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the relationship between critical thinking skills and English language learning, with particular attention to how the integration of critical thinking activities influences learners' language development, classroom engagement, and overall academic performance. Based on the analysis of theoretical perspectives and classroom-based observations, it can be concluded that critical thinking plays a fundamental role in enhancing the effectiveness of English language education. The findings consistently show that students who were exposed to critical thinking-based instruction outperformed those who experienced traditional, teacher-centered teaching methods across all major language skills.

Overall, it can be concluded that critical thinking is not an optional addition but a necessary component of modern English language education. Its integration into classroom practice leads to more effective, meaningful, and student-centered learning. Therefore, English language teachers and curriculum developers are strongly encouraged to incorporate critical thinking strategies into their teaching approaches in order to improve learners' language proficiency and foster their intellectual growth.

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