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CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MASTER STUDENTS

Abstract

The article is devoted to the issues of practical appliance of critical thinking development methods on lessons of English. The author presented a couple of examples of tasks aimed at improvement of speaking skills and critical thinking.

Key words: critical thinking, speaking, writing, argumentation, persuasion, project, interpretation.

Аңдатпа

Берілген мақалада ағылшын тілі сабағындағы сыни түрде ойлануды дамыту әдістерінің тәжірибелік түрде қолдануының мәселелерін қарастыруға арналған. Автор сыни тұрғыдан ойлау мен сөйлеу дағдыларын дамуға бағытталған тапсырмалардың мысалдарды келтірді.

Тірек сөздер: сыни тұрғыдан ойлау, сөйлеу, жазу, аргумент жасау, көндіру, жоба, интерпретация.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена проблемам практического применения методов развития критического мышления на уроках английского языка. Автор представила примерные задания, направленные на развитие навыков речи и критического мышления.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, говорение, письмо, аргументация, убеждение, проект, интерпретация.

Language being a complex and comprehensive means of communication enables a person to shape out his mindset, formulate his thoughts and deliver them in the form of speech, and reversely, be on the receiving end of the communication process and trace down the ideas and views that are expressed by others. The process of communication involves a number of complex analytical and synthetic operations that rely on the general intellectual capacity of a human being. These mental operations are directly connected with such brain activities as memory, imagination, concentration, even emotions. One of the fundamental provisions forwarded by cognitive sciences is the assumption that language paves the way to thinking, to be precise; it is through development of lingual skills that human beings acquire the genuine capacity to think as abstract conceptions are nestled in human mind by the means of words and their meanings [1, p.56]. Psychologists and linguists refer to thinking as "inner speech" thus appealing to the lingual function of conceptualization and concretization.

Thus it can be conceived that the language is the main instrument that turns a human being into a member of the society as it building in him necessary cognitive and communicative mechanisms. Teachers of languages should carry in mind that a language is not only needed for communication but it is the unique medium that bridges reality and human mind.

Many specialists of learning psychology believe that clear mind is normally demonstrated through clear and articulate speech. Thus, language learning is more effective when it is accompanied by activities stimulating complex mind work, in particular, such mental processes as deduction, induction, analysis, comparison, exclusion, inclusion, etc. Most experienced teachers conclude that inducing students into learning vocabulary elements by heart will bring no apparent and quick results. On the contrary, learning by heart in most cases discourages language students as this activity is usually found time- and effort-consuming while effects are minimal. The vocabulary thus acquired falls in the passive memory section and can hardly ever be withdrawn from there in case of need. The best way to teach vocabulary is through contexts when words are presented in a text and both their meanings and syntactic function can be inferred implicitly. As a result a stock of words is completed through analysis which facilitates systematizing and association building. This method requires more concentration, however brings long-term effects.

Lingual skills are ones of the earliest psycho-physiological capacities that are involved into a human being formation and they are constantly developed throughout a person's life. People take their ability to speak and to write for granted without realizing how many mental efforts they make until they face a necessity to learn a foreign language. Eventually they come across many constraints and hardships when they fail to remember words, keep to grammatical norms, form cohesive and coherent sentences and phrases. Many fail to cope with such difficulties and loose further interest in studies. That's why teachers should be appropriately alert for signs of reduced enthusiasm and take relevant measures. Most of innovative techniques and methods aim to facilitate the process of language learning, make it easier and more interesting. One of the main objectives of a teacher is to select those ways that will be most effective and motivating.

Today teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is one of the most methodologically developed teaching fields. Many of TEFL professionals have mastered latest cognitive and IT technologies introduced into the teaching process and apply the newest techniques and methods. In the past several decades English has actually turned into a language of international communication due to some historical factors and due to its structural simplicity.

Teaching of English in Kazakhstan gained the second momentum after our state got independence 20 years ago and since then as educational integration gets more intensive worldwide it has been developing more or less in line with modern international methodological tendencies. Teachers of English in Kazakhstan turn to interactive technologies, such as critical thinking development, model simulation, debates and round tables, projects, presentations, case-studies, etc. Critical thinking development beside lingual capacities improvement targets as well at upgrading a student's analytical and critical abilities. Critical thinking development is commonly entwined into the structure of English classes as one of the methodological steps the whole process of language learning is based on.

According to the definition given by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul in their statement made at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, Summer 1987, critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action [2, p.3].

Critical thinking is a general mental capacity that is grounded on mind acts as we can see from the definition above. Critical thinking is not universal by its character and quality. Obviously, it is based on scope of background knowledge, type of education, professional area, personal aptitude, inner motivation, even on such seemingly non-relevant matters as cultural values, hobbies, personal preferences, etc. Critical thinking is one of the fundamental abilities that form a set of vital capacities a human being needs in order to adapt to the surrounding environment, to conduct viable activity, to thrive in life. Improving skills of critical thinking is considered one of the most significant academic objectives to be achieved by any successful teacher.

Critical thinking is considered as a complex capacity that reflects a chain of mental processes taking place subsequently in a human mind the purpose of which is to create correspondent mental reaction to the received information. Development of this capacity requires complicated pedagogical approaches. Teacher should build special classroom activities aimed at stimulating students' interest in the subject under consideration and their readiness to study its constituent elements, whole structure and effects. Such activities may include both the simplest ones, such as asking questions, dividing into elements, matching similarities, finding differences, describing, etc., and complex ones which include making forecasts, inferring, explaining reasons, suggesting solutions, preparing judgments, producing estimations, imagining, etc.

One of the hardest aspects in teaching critical thinking is assessing the level of critical thinking a student has achieved. The authors Richard Paul and Gerald M. Nosich offer a set of criteria that can be used for objective and comprehensive evaluation .

Richard Paul and Gerald M. Nosich, in their article "A Model for the National Assessment of Higher Order Thinking" noted that a teacher should concentrate on assessing the fundamental cognitive structures of communication, for example:

- with reading and listening, the ability to
 - create an accurate interpretation,
 - assess the author's or speaker's purpose,
 - accurately identify the question-at-issue or problem being discussed,

- accurately identify basic concepts at the heart of what is said or written,
 - see significant implications of the advocated position,
 - identify, understand, and evaluate the assumptions underlying someone's position,
 - recognize evidence, argument, inference (or their lack) in oral and written presentations,
 - reasonably assess the credibility of an author or speaker,
 - accurately grasp the point of view of the author or speaker,
 - empathetically reason within the point of view of the author or speaker.
- with writing and speaking, the ability to
- identify and explicate one's own point of view and its implications,
 - be clear about and communicate clearly, in either spoken or written form, the problem one is addressing,
 - be clear about what one is assuming, presupposing, or taking for granted,
 - present one's position precisely, accurately, completely, and give relevant, logical, and fair arguments for it,
 - cite relevant evidence and experiences to support one's position,
 - see, formulate, and take account of alternative positions and opposing points of view, recognizing and evaluating evidence and key assumptions on both sides,
 - illustrate one's central concepts with significant examples and show how they apply in real situations,
 - empathetically entertain strong objections from points of view other than one's own [3, p. 2]

The above list outlines the fundamental skills which the ability of critical thinking is constructed of. In order to be able to make an overall assessment a teacher should have a precise and step-by-step vision of what kind of knowledge a student is required to demonstrate. Of course, it is impossible to base the assessment on all the above criteria. Each separate case demands concrete communicative and cognitive skills, the fact which means that students are normally expected to implement limited amount of mental operations. For instance, in the process of critical reading students get introduced with the information in the analyzed text, try to find out the key moments of the information, and should be able to either answer the thought-provoking questions or make such questions themselves. As we see, while assessing such an activity teachers should focus on the ability of reading, accurate interpretation, assess the purpose, perceive basic assumptions, ability to reason one's position, reproduce evidences, communicate clearly. The other criteria enlisted above can be missed as they do not significantly influence the results of assessment.

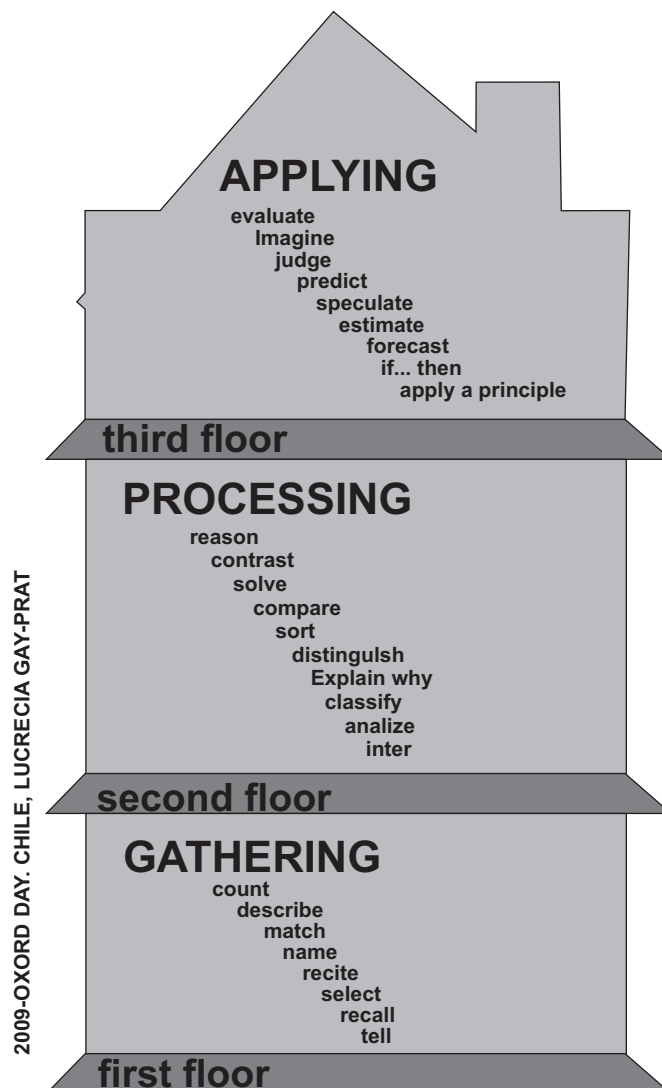
Another factor that shouldn't be left out from the teachers' view is students' awareness of the methods used for assessing their critical thinking ability. It is highly important that learners can have access to the information underlying the principles of their work evaluation. Teachers are responsible for providing clear and perceivable scheme that reflects the basic criteria they rely on while assessing their students. One of the ways is to design a visionary presentation that illustrates those cognitive and communicative skills that are taught in the classroom and form the system of evaluation. When students know what exactly is under the focus of an evaluator then they feel more prepared to give relevant answers.

Dr. Miraglia represents a scheme in the form of a three-storey house that illustrates the levels of mental operations involved in practicing language speaking. He recommends that EFL teachers should post this "house" in the classroom and introduce students with its elements. One of his ideas is that when students know what kind of activities they are doing and what they are doing it for, they can be more effective in their speech and cognitive activities as they recognize their purpose and know what exactly is expected from them [4, p.1].

The scheme above consists of three floors which represent three different levels of cognitive operations. The first floor shows the simple cognitive skills that a student acquires at the earliest stages of his study. This floor is called "Gathering" which encompasses the abilities connected with gathering and plain reproducing of information without involving complex mental operations.

The second floor of the scheme is named "Processing" which implies a more complicated level of cognitive abilities which require not only understanding of the given information but its interpretation and systematization. These skills are based on concrete tangible examples that are processed in order to compare, contrast, reason, explain, etc. At this level of cognitive operations students should be able to demonstrate their readiness to put along different facts and to come to certain conclusions grounded so far on similarity, difference, commonness of the considered objects.

Building Critical Thinking



The third floor of the scheme under consideration represents the cognitive level which the author named as "Applying". This is the highest, therefore the most difficult, level of cognitive abilities, which requires more sophisticated ability of abstract thinking. Having achieved this level, students are able not only to interpret provided facts but also refer to their background knowledge while making predictions of possible evolvement of analyzed events. The skills of imagination, speculation, prediction, evaluation are the more developed in a student the higher volume of experience and knowledge he has acquired previously.

Judging from the above information concerning critical thinking we can confer that advanced abilities of critical thinking may greatly contribute to the process of language learning.

On lessons of modern English critical thinking has turned into an integral element of the teaching process. It is one of the mechanisms used to develop speaking and writing skills. There is a wide range of educating activities and techniques that involve the ability of critical thinking. Teachers may even specifically devise some activities responding to the interests and capabilities of the given group of students.

Language teachers are among practitioners who can greatly influence the type of learning by language learners.

Therefore, one of their responsibilities is to help learners develop critical thinking abilities. Maybe even more than L1 teachers, L2 teachers have reasons to introduce their students to aspects of critical thinking. As we have mentioned above, teachers are responsible for promoting critical thinking in the learners other than helping them to go from one educational level to the next. The responsibility

of foreign language teachers is to help their learners acquire critical thinking skills while learning the language. As many teachers assert there is plenty of room for improvement in incorporating the thinking skills into the curricula.

Brent A. Jones distinguishes the following basic concepts connected with critical thinking: critical reading and thinking, dialogical reasoning, argument & persuasion, inquiry and integration. Mr. Jones offers several video-excerpt based tasks for students that stimulate both language learning and critical thinking [5, p.12]. The named activities enable to learn how to correctly and accurately express one's opinion. In this case, the language is an instrument that organizes students' mind and communication.

Critical thinking activities in TEFL methodology are distinguished according to the skills they are used to develop: oral speech, writing, reading and listening. Most activities are more expedient as they are targeted at several skills simultaneously.

According to the opinion of Faina A. Turouskaya and Iryna S. Turouskaya, "Teaching for thinking, actively promoting all students to think about the subject matter, falls into two major subdivisions. First, the teacher takes time and care to create the conditions that encourage all students to think in the classroom. Secondly, the teacher uses a variety of strategies and methods to develop students' attitudes about themselves as problem solvers and thus to encourage them in their studying activities" [6, p. 150]. They believe that setting certain rules that regulate students' behavior in the classroom may help to build an appropriate atmosphere for free discussion and opinion exchange. The rules are given below:

- "Accept other's ideas (avoid criticism and put-downs);
- Originality is OK (we need to examine lots of ideas; the way each student looks at things varies, therefore it is important to share your view);
- Variety and vastness of ideas is a start (after we explore many ideas we can become critical thinkers in search of the best ideas);
- Energy and enthusiasm are signs of intelligent and skillful thinkers (put your brain to work)" [6, p.150].

The authors recommend to introduce students with these rules in the beginning of the academic year and to incorporate the atmosphere of mutual support and encouragement among students. Along with the rules above students should as well be taught to improve a number of their lingual skills indispensable for the activities on critical thinking development. Such skills include monological speaking, ability to listen and to understand, ability to learn new words, debating.

Mrs. Faina A. Turouskaya offer a specific type of an activity aimed at enhancing the listening skill which is called "Analyzing the Weather Forecast".

Topic: "Weather" (11th Grade)

Text: The Weather Forecast (Tapescript, see Appendix)

- Revising the vocabulary on the topic. Anticipating the subject of the story;
- Choosing what words will be suitable for a story about the weather forecast;
- Listening to the story for the first time;
- Question: "What will the weather be like during the next 2 or 3 days in Great Britain?"
- Give the characteristics of the weather in different parts of the country in turns.
- The parts (South West, South East, Midlands, East Anglia, Scotland, Northern Ireland, North Scotland ...) are distributed between the students by the teacher;
- Listening to the story for the second time and comparing with what has been said by the students;
- Developing ideas based on the text; give a more detailed forecast, use active vocabulary;
- Listening to the story for the third time;
- Telling the whole story [6, p.154].

Among most popular critical thinking activities that are used on the lessons in order to develop speaking we can name such as general *discussion*, *debates*, *round tables*, *brainstorming*, *case-study*, *picture or photo narration or description*, *story-making*, *puzzles*, *word guessing*, *quizzes*, *competitions*, etc.

A number of activities are purposefully employed for improving students' writing skills. We can relate to them such activities as *questionnaire filling*, *notes writing*, *online chatting*, *completing a story*, *giving an alternative ending to a story*, *writing an autobiography*, *predicting the future*, *writing an essay*, *writing an article*, *writing a review*, etc.

Master students of International Relations are distinguished by wider outlook, awareness of political, economic, social and cultural peculiarities of life in other countries. They have inquisitive mind and far-fetching intellectual ambitions. On lessons of English they demonstrate profound understanding of human behavior motifs, are ready to make estimations of socio-political situation around the world and to share their views in well-organized and weighed logics. While elaborating lesson plans for International relation students teachers are recommended to assign the tasks that stimulate student's mind, enhance their problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Typical assignments should include such stages as discussion or brain-storming, interpretation, finding of solution, presentation of results. In order to help International Relations students to gain good command of English teachers should encourage students to involve activities stimulating critical thinking. This is one of most effective ways to enable students freely manipulate elements of a foreign language the way they manipulate their native language.

Because of its global status, English language learners have to be able to function as socially responsible global citizens as well as local ones. To do so, they need to be equipped with critical thinking skills and critical thinking dispositions.

Let present some of critical thinking activities that have been found to be most effective and attractive on lessons of English. Generally, it have been noticed that students are genuinely interested in those tasks that provoke their thoughts and analysis. They tend to be more active and enthusiastic in cases when they face challenges hard enough to make them get concentrated and at the same time simple enough to be settled within reasonable amount of time and efforts.

Therefore, in classroom practice teachers make an effort to enable their students to perform meaningful communicative acts; for example, they frequently have students perform tasks that involve both productive and receptive skills in an appropriate context.

They need:

- Activities that involve real communication for language learning;
- Activities that use language to carrying out meaningful tasks and so promote learning;
- Language that is meaningful in order to the learner to support the learning process. [7, p. 223]

One of the most effective critical thinking activities that brings largest methodological fruits are project making, drawing or graph analysis, case study, reality simulation, role-playing, i.e. those activities that not only require analysis but some level of creativity. Let me describe a couple of classroom activities that raised the highest enthusiasm in my International Relations students thus inspiring them for free unprepared speech.

The first activity I called as **Project "Effects of Economic Crisis on Kazakhstan citizens"**.

The aim of this task was to develop students' speaking skills, especially spontaneous speaking in public and academic writing.

The main objective of this task was to acquire statistic data about how the latest financial crises had impacted Kazakhstan citizens. Students were expected to work out special questionnaires and conduct a poll among specific social groups. The questionnaires contained questions concerning respondents' social status, stability of their income, changes in life style, opinions, etc. In this part of the activity students demonstrated their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. They practiced using sociological and economical terminology, applying stylistic and grammar rules.

The students were divided into several teams. Each team was given a separate target group they were supposed to work with. For example, one team got a group of socially vulnerable people, e.g. pensioners and students, another group took the group of people employed in public organizations.

On the lesson the students presented the results of their survey in the form of tables, graphs, diagrams. At this stage the main focus lay on their speaking abilities. The students practiced delivering information orally. They were required to speak coherently, accurately and grammatically correctly.

Additionally, the students were asked to hand a written account on what they had done within the project.

Students had around three weeks to conduct the poll and to prepare their presentations. Unexpected learning benefits included necessity to refer to some authoritative sources such as economist authors in order to support their conclusions, which meant the students had to read some more material than required. Students meticulously worked on their ability to structure information, to generalize facts and to draw conclusions.

Another activity I would like to present as an example is **"Drawing Your Inner Self"**. We took this activity when discussing the Arts. In the framework of this activity students demonstrated those

aspects of their personality which had not been disclosed before. This activity did not only stimulated students to speak actively but helped them to become closed to each other.

The aim of this activity was to improve students' critical thinking, unprepared speaking and opinion exchanging.

The task was to draw the image of a student's inner self as she/he saw it. Students were given coloured pencils, paints and paper. They were asked to produce a graphic vision of their personality, to try to represent peculiarities of their character, temper, mind, mentality. After they finish their pictures they were to exchange them with their partner. In their turn, the partners were to describe what they saw in the pictures and to give their interpretations and explanations of what was in the pictures. They tried to connect images and colours with the author's personality.

This activity being overly personal can be taken only with those groups of students that keep friendly and open relations.

As a result of this activity students practice special terminology used in the spheres of art and psychology. They as well improve their skills of description and interpretation. They learn to organize their own argumentation and reasoning.

One more activity, which I would like to describe is a simulation of a press-conference. It is called **"Press-Conference on the Issue of the Oil Spill in the Mexican Gulf"**. Within this activity students were divided into the group of journalists and representatives of different official agencies and non-governmental organizations. During the press-conference students who played the role of journalist were asked to prepare and to put questions to the officials and representatives, meanwhile the respondents were to answer the given questions straight away without preparation. The aim of this activity was to develop students' unprepared speech, teach them etiquette of journalism and to incorporate in them inquisitive mind.

Concluding, we would like to note that language skills cannot be developed to the highest levels without simultaneous development of critical thinking, moreover critical thinking is one of the most effective means to help students to get proficient in a language. Language as a skill is indispensable from human mind work and it cannot be improved without participation of the latter. However the major issue of involving critical thinking activities in the lessons of EFL is a teacher's ability to select an appropriate level of activity. The chosen activity should not only stimulate students' speech but as well it should raise their interest and enthusiasm which will make language learning more entertaining and involving.

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