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CRITICAL THINKING ON LESSONS OF ENGLISH

Аннотация

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

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

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, көңдіру, жоба, интерпретация.

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.

Language being a complex and comprehensive means of communication enables a person to understand other people, express his ideas and opinion, all this can be formulated in terms of linguistics as participation in the discourse. Language is the main instrument that turns a human being into a member of the society. However teachers of languages should remember that a language is not only an instrument of communication but it is as well the main means of cognition. Some scientists even referred to thinking as "inner speech".

Many specialists of learning psychology believe that clear mind is normally demonstrated through clear and understandable verbal speech. Thus, language learning is more effective when it is accompanied by activities stimulating mind work, in particular, such mental processes as deduction, induction, analysis, synthesis. Most experienced teachers conclude that making students learn vocabulary elements by heart bring no apparent results. On the contrary, learning by heart in most cases discourages students of languages as this activity is usually found time- and effort-consuming while effects are minimal. The best way to teach vocabulary is through context when words are presented in a text and both their meanings and syntactic function can be inferred easily. As a result a stock of words is completed through analysis which facilitates systematizing and association building. Critical thinking development is commonly entwined into the structure of English classes as the process of language learning is based on it.

Language skills are ones of the earliest to be acquired by a child and are developed constantly throughout a child's life. People take their ability to speak and to write for granted without realizing how many mental efforts they make in order to speak, to write, until they face a necessity to learn one more foreign language. Then they come across many technical difficulties connected with remembering words, keeping to grammatical standards, forming 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.

Today teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is one of the most methodologically developed teaching fields. Most of TEFL professionals have mastered latest IT technologies introduced into the teaching process and skillfully 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 a

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 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 is the one that beside lingual capacities improvement targets as well at upgrading a student's analytical and critical abilities.

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.

Critical thinking is a general mental capacity that involves a number of 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.

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.

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. The named activities enable to learn how to correctly and coherently express one's opinion. In this case language is an instrument that organizes students' 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 convenient as they are targeted at several skills simultaneously.

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.

I would like to present some of critical thinking activities that I have found to be most effective on my lessons of English. Generally, I have noticed that students are genuinely interested in those tasks that provoke their thoughts and analytical abilities. 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.

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 as well 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.

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. Their creativity was limited only by their imagination. After they had finished their pictures they were asked 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. I was really lucky to have such a group.

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.

Concluding, I would like to note that language skills cannot be developed to the highest levels without simultaneous development of critical thinking, moreover critical thinking is the only way to make students proficient in a language.

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