

## THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** Critical thinking is a fundamental skill in education, particularly in language learning. In the context of teaching English, critical thinking encourages students to analyze, evaluate, and create, rather than passively receiving information. This article examines the significance of critical thinking in English language teaching (ELT), its impact on learners' language proficiency, and the pedagogical strategies that can be employed to develop critical thinking in the classroom.

**Key words:** critical thinking, higher-order thinking skills, meaningful discussions, innovative and varied ways, debates and discussions, real-world contexts

**Annotatsiya:** Tanqidiy fikrlash – bu ta'limda, ayniqsa, til o'rganishda muhim ko'nikma hisoblanadi. Ingliz tilini o'rgatish jarayonida tanqidiy fikrlash talabalarni ma'lumotni shunchaki qabul qilish o'rniga uni tahlil qilish, baholash va yangi g'oyalar yaratishga undaydi. Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini o'qitishda tanqidiy fikrlashning ahamiyati, uning o'quvchilarning til kompetensiyasiga ta'siri va tanqidiy fikrlashni dars jarayonida rivojlantirishga xizmat qiluvchi pedagogik strategiyalar ko'rib chiqiladi. Yuqori darajadagi fikrlash ko'nikmalarini real hayotiy vaziyatlar bilan bog'liq mazmunli munozaralar va bahslar orqali rivojlantirishga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** tanqidiy fikrlash, yuqori darajadagi fikrlash ko'nikmalari, mazmunli muhokamalar, innovatsion usullar, bahs va munozaralar, real hayotiy kontekstlar

**Аннотация:** Критическое мышление — это ключевой навык в образовании, особенно в изучении языков. В контексте преподавания английского языка критическое мышление побуждает студентов анализировать, оценивать и создавать, а не пассивно воспринимать информацию. В статье рассматривается значение критического мышления в обучении английскому языку (ELT), его влияние на уровень владения языком, а также педагогические стратегии, которые можно использовать для развития критического мышления на занятиях. Особое внимание уделяется интеграции навыков высокого уровня мышления через содержательные обсуждения, дебаты и задания, связанные с реальными жизненными ситуациями.

**Ключевые слова:** критическое мышление, навыки высокого уровня мышления, содержательные обсуждения, инновационные методы, дебаты и дискуссии, реальные жизненные контексты

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of critical thinking into educational practices has gained widespread attention. Critical thinking is defined as the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to believe or what to do (Facione, 2011). In English language teaching (ELT), the cultivation of critical thinking is especially crucial. It empowers students to approach language learning analytically, engage in meaningful discussions, and use language more creatively. Critical thinking helps learners not only understand linguistic structures but also assess the content, context, and implications of what they are reading, writing, or speaking.

Critical thinking, as applied in ELT, involves higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and problem-solving, that support students in becoming active participants in their learning process. This article explores the role of critical thinking in ELT and offers pedagogical recommendations for its integration into teaching practices.

## METHODOLOGY

Critical thinking is essential in English language education for several reasons. First, it encourages deeper engagement with the language, which enhances retention and understanding (Sternberg, 2003). Learners are encouraged not just to memorize vocabulary and grammatical rules but to question the meaning behind language usage in different contexts.

Second, critical thinking fosters creativity. Language learners who are able to think critically are more likely to express themselves in innovative and varied ways, moving beyond basic sentence structures and memorized phrases. This enhances their communicative competence and enables them to participate effectively in conversations (Ennis, 2011).

Furthermore, critical thinking is vital for developing independent learners. In a critical thinking framework, students learn to evaluate sources, make decisions, and justify their opinions based on evidence. These skills are not only useful in language learning but are also essential for academic success and real-world problem-solving (Paul & Elder, 2014).

### *Critical Thinking Strategies for English Language Teaching*

There are several strategies that teachers can implement to foster critical thinking in their classrooms.

#### *Questioning Techniques*

One of the most effective ways to promote critical thinking is through the use of open-ended questions. These questions encourage students to explore different perspectives and justify their responses. For example, asking questions such as, "What do you think is the main theme of this text?" or "Why do you think this character acted in this way?" prompts learners to analyze and reflect on the material (Bloom, 1956).

#### *Debates and Discussions*

Organizing debates or group discussions allows students to critically evaluate different viewpoints and construct well-supported arguments. This method

encourages active participation, fosters collaborative learning, and strengthens oral communication skills. Through debates, learners also improve their ability to argue logically and persuasively in English (Pennycook, 2001).

### **Problem-Based Learning (PBL)**

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional method where learning is driven by a complex, real-world problem that students must solve collaboratively. Unlike traditional approaches that focus on rote memorization, PBL requires students to actively engage in research, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. Language skills such as reading for information, synthesizing findings, negotiating ideas, and presenting solutions are all integrated naturally into the process.

According to Barrows (2002), PBL not only helps learners acquire content knowledge but also develops **skills for lifelong learning**, such as critical inquiry and teamwork.

#### **Example Tasks for PBL in English Language Learning:**

##### **Task 1: Design a Tourism Brochure**

Students are given a fictional destination and tasked with creating an engaging tourism brochure. They must consider:

- The target audience (families, young adventurers, retirees, etc.)
- Cultural sensitivity (e.g., avoiding stereotypes)
- Persuasive and descriptive language
- Correct grammar and stylistic choices
- Visual and textual balance (images vs. text)

##### **Task 2: Solve a Hotel Management Crisis**

Scenario: A 5-star hotel is experiencing a decline in customer satisfaction due to service issues. Students act as consultants and must:

- Analyze customer feedback reports
- Research best practices in hotel service
- Draft a formal report with recommendations for improvement
- Role-play a meeting where they present their solutions to "hotel management"

##### **Peer Review**

Peer review is a collaborative learning strategy where students critique and evaluate each other's work. It plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking because students are required to analyze, evaluate, and suggest improvements rather than just passively consume information. Through peer review, students not only recognize common mistakes but also deepen their understanding of writing conventions, coherence, argumentation, and grammar (Boud & Lee, 2005).

##### **Benefits of Peer Review:**

- Enhances students' ability to assess quality
- Fosters self-awareness in writing and communication
- Encourages responsibility and ownership of learning
- Builds communication skills by giving constructive feedback

##### **Example Peer Review Activities:**



### **Activity 1: Writing Feedback Exchange**

After drafting an argumentative essay, students exchange papers and use a guided checklist to evaluate:

- ✓ Thesis clarity
- ✓ Logical flow and coherence
- ✓ Grammar and vocabulary usage
- ✓ Persuasiveness of arguments

### **Activity 2: Oral Presentation Rehearsal**

Before a final presentation, students deliver a practice speech to small groups. Peers provide feedback on:

- ✓ Pronunciation and fluency
- ✓ Organization of ideas
- ✓ Use of supporting details
- ✓ Audience engagement

### **Activity 3: Creative Writing Peer Workshop**

Students write short stories or travel blogs and then workshop them in pairs or groups. Focus areas include:

- ✓ Narrative structure
- ✓ Creativity and originality
- ✓ Language style (formal vs. informal)
- ✓ Correct tense usage

### ***The Impact of Critical Thinking on Language Proficiency***

The integration of critical thinking into language learning significantly improves various aspects of language proficiency. According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), critical thinking helps learners apply language in real-world contexts, enabling them to communicate more effectively and meaningfully. Moreover, critical thinking enhances learners' ability to understand complex texts and engage in deeper conversations, improving their reading comprehension and listening skills.

In writing, critical thinking promotes the development of coherent arguments and well-organized essays. By evaluating different perspectives and supporting claims with evidence, students improve the quality of their written work. In speaking, students who engage in critical thinking are better equipped to express their ideas clearly and persuasively, which is particularly beneficial in academic and professional settings (Pennycook, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Critical thinking plays a vital role in English language teaching by encouraging students to engage actively with the language, think creatively, and develop independence. Teachers can implement various strategies, such as questioning techniques, debates, problem-based learning, and peer review, to foster critical thinking in their classrooms. The integration of critical thinking not only improves students' language proficiency but also prepares them for success in academic, professional, and everyday contexts



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