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IMPROVING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: Developing critical thinking is an essential objective of contemporary education. It enables students to analyse information, evaluate different perspectives, solve problems and make independent decisions. English language lessons offer opportunities to develop these abilities through interactive and communicative tasks. This article examines the contribution of classroom discussions, debates, problem-based learning, critical reading and project work to students' critical-thinking development. It also outlines practical strategies for integrating these activities into English language teaching. The article argues that purposeful tasks, appropriate teacher guidance and reflection can support both language learning and higher-order thinking.

Keywords: critical thinking, English language teaching, EFL learners, communicative activities, problem-solving, independent learning.

1. Introduction

Modern education should do more than transmit information: it should prepare learners to question, interpret and use knowledge responsibly. Critical thinking is important because it helps students distinguish evidence from opinion, consider alternative explanations and justify decisions. These abilities are valuable in academic study, professional life and everyday communication.

English language classrooms can provide a natural setting for this development. When students discuss authentic issues, interpret texts, solve problems and explain their choices, they practise language while engaging in reasoning. Consequently, lessons should move beyond memorising vocabulary and grammatical rules and include tasks that require learners to think, make choices and support their ideas.

The purpose of this article is to examine how English language activities can contribute to students' critical thinking and to identify classroom strategies that teachers can use in regular lessons.

2. Theoretical Background

Facione (1990) describes critical thinking through skills such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. These skills involve examining information carefully and reaching conclusions supported by reasons. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), in their revision of Bloom's Taxonomy, identify analysing, evaluating and creating as higher-order cognitive processes. These processes can be practised through language tasks that ask students to compare viewpoints, assess arguments and develop original responses.

Research on critical literacy in EFL classrooms also highlights the value of engaging learners with texts and different perspectives (Bobkina&Stefanova, 2016). However, critical thinking should not be expected to emerge automatically from language practice; it needs clear objectives, explicit

guidance and regular opportunities for reflection (El Soufi&See, 2019).

3. English Language Activities for Developing Critical Thinking

A range of interactive activities can help learners use English while practising analysis, evaluation and decision-making. The tasks below can be adapted to students' age, language level and vocational or academic interests.

3.1. Classroom Discussions

Discussions encourage learners to express opinions, listen to others and provide reasons. Teachers can use open-ended questions such as: "Is technology making our lives better?", "Should smartphones be allowed in lessons?" or "Is online learning as effective as face-to-face learning?" Students should be prompted to explain their views with phrases such as "I believe this because…", "One possible disadvantage is…" and "From another perspective…".

3.2. Debate Activities

Debates develop argumentation and the ability to consider opposing positions. For example, students can discuss the statement "Social media does more harm than good". One group supports the statement and another challenges it. Learners prepare reasons and examples, listen to counterarguments and respond respectfully. The teacher can assess the clarity of reasoning and the relevance of evidence, not only grammatical accuracy.

3.3. Problem-Based Learning

In problem-based learning, students receive a realistic situation and work towards a justified solution. For example, a college has resources to fund only one improvement: a computer laboratory, a library or a sports facility. Groups compare the needs, discuss advantages and disadvantages, and recommend one option. They must explain why their choice is more appropriate than the alternatives. This task promotes analysis, collaboration and decision-making.

3.4. Critical Reading

Reading can become a thinking task when students go beyond locating facts. After reading an article, learners can answer questions such as: What is the author's main claim? Which evidence supports it? Is the text presenting facts or opinions? What information may be missing? Do you agree with the conclusion? Such questions help students examine the purpose, reliability and implications of written information.

3.5. Project-Based Learning

Projects require students to investigate a topic, select relevant information, cooperate and present conclusions. Suitable topics include environmental protection, artificial intelligence, healthy lifestyles and future professions. Students should compare information from more than one source, identify relevant evidence and explain their own conclusions rather than simply copying material.

4. Practical Recommendations for Teachers

To make critical-thinking activities effective, teachers should establish a respectful, student-centred environment in which learners feel safe to ask questions and express different opinions. The following practices are recommended:

- Use open-ended questions that allow more than one reasonable answer.
- Organise pair work, group discussions and debates with clear roles and goals.
- Use authentic materials, including short articles, advertisements, videos and workplace situations.

• Ask students to support opinions with examples, evidence or logical explanations.
• Give feedback on reasoning, relevance and clarity as well as language accuracy.
• Adapt task complexity and language support to students' proficiency levels.

Teachers should also distinguish critical-thinking ability from English proficiency. A learner may have a well-reasoned idea but lack the vocabulary to express it fluently. Visual prompts, planning time, key vocabulary and sentence starters can help such students demonstrate their thinking while continuing to develop language skills.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of relevant literature and classroom strategies indicates that interactive English activities can create opportunities to practise analysis, evaluation, problem-solving and communication. Discussions and debates require learners to justify opinions; critical reading encourages them to examine claims and evidence; and problem-based tasks and projects promote collaborative decision-making. These benefits depend on purposeful task design and teacher guidance. An activity is notautomatically a critical-thinking task simply because students work in groups: learners need to compare, question, explain and reflect.

The present article is theoretical and methodological; it does not report original classroom measurements or experimental results. Further empirical research using classroom observation, pre- and post-assessment, and student feedback would help establish which activities are most effective for particular learner groups.

6. Conclusion

Critical thinking should be an integral part of English language teaching. Discussions, debates, problem-based learning, critical reading and project work can help students use English for meaningful purposes while learning to analyse information, evaluate arguments and make independent decisions. Their effectiveness depends on clear learning objectives, appropriate scaffolding and constructive feedback. By integrating these practices into everyday lessons, teachers can support the development of more confident, reflective and independent learners.

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