

**TEACHING MIDDLE-SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS ENGLISH IN EFL  
CLASSES VIA IMPLEMENTING CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGIES  
EFFECTIVELY**

**Qurbanova Shahloxon Botir qizi**

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

**Abstract.** The pace of our lives in which we are trying to survive has already prompted us, everybody in the planet to continue contemplating both critically and creatively. The very new aspects of today such as logistics, analytics, the field of nanotechnology, biochemistry, biometry and so on trigger every human being partake in some kind of lifelong processes and find their places in their societies presenting their own masterpieces to the millions of high-profiled employees. In this way, if the most basic fundamental knowledge is still lacking, it is natural for us to step back from our career ladders. Organizing and developing critical thinking skills in early primary school years of the students while teaching English conspires them to come up with new ideas and collaborate with their foreign peers at ease through mastering their language learning aptitudes at the same time. This paper focuses directly on to the importance of critical thinking and IQ of the students by making use of different kinds of brain activities; analyzing famous theorists' researchers in this area; differences between teaching English in Uzbekistan and Finland; and my conclusive results which I have gotten from the English teaching phases at school N04 during my practicum period in Fergana city. I hope it will benefit all the specialists working and carrying their professions on in this field of study.

**Key words:** critical thinking in primary and secondary education, Bloom's taxonomy, communication skills.

**Introduction.** The introduction part of this researched scientific article gives definitions to the word of “Critical thinking” and explains why we need it in the

English language teaching atmosphere. According to Halpern, critical thinking refers to higher levels of thinking that learners need to enable them to think effectively and rationally about what they want to do and what they believe is the best action. Thinking critically is effortful and consists of skills such as identifying links between ideas, analyzing and evaluating arguments and undertaking reasoning, in order to come to appropriate conclusions. Critical thinking is a valued skill: whether you are deciding which courses to take or career to pursue, what toothpaste to use or what stocks to buy, which candidate to vote for or which cause to support, which reports to believe or what claims to reject, critical thinking can be very useful. Why do we need it while teaching students English? As we know very well, English is the universal language and it is not enough for a person to know the outer part of this language like its grammar, sentence structure and lexicology. In order to speak fluently in this language, one has to think like a real Englishman so as to communicate and collaborate with the foreign community both locally and globally. That is why, every foreign language teacher should immerse their students in authentic brain-stormed English context wholeheartedly. The scientists have identified three Core Areas within Critical Thinking: Within these Core Areas they break things down further, defining the Components that make up each core Area:

- Understanding and analyzing thoughts and arguments refers to a learner's ability to identify and analyze information in order to recognize patterns and relationships. This helps students to gain a deeper understanding of ideas and arguments, as well as to interpret and draw inferences about the information they are presented with.
- Evaluating ideas and arguments is related to a learner's ability to judge which opinions or ideas they can rely on and which they should be skeptical about. This contains evaluating evidence presented in an argument, as well as the argument's overall logic. Becoming skilled at this competency helps learners draw appropriate conclusions and construct strong arguments themselves.

- Explaining problems and making decisions involves many skills such as identifying and analyzing problems, gathering appropriate information, evaluating a range of options, making decisions about which possibilities to implement and finally, evaluating those decisions to further refine solutions.

**Literature review.** Shaila and Trudell state that the ability to think critically is especially important for students living in a country with political and socioeconomic problems, for it will help them to look at issues from different viewpoints and become independent thinkers and responsible citizens “While we are teaching English, we teach different kinds of texts such as essays, poems, stories, memoirs, biographies, dramas, novels, etc. In order to teach these discourses, we can very wisely utilize critical thinking strategies, which can help us shift our activities from teacher centered to student centered. These strategies can help us divide texts into various pieces and analyze each piece with some criteria or standards. If we apply ABC framework with suitable strategies, we are sure to ‘improve today and create a better tomorrow’ Chapman (2007). Raymond S. Nickerson (1987) provides us with a whole list of capabilities and attitudes which characterize the individual who thinks critically. This individual is someone who:

- organize thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently;
- suspends judgment in the absence of sufficient evidence to support a decision;
- attempts to anticipate the probable consequences of alternative actions;
- can learn independently and has an abiding interest in doing so;
- applies problem-solving techniques in domains other than those in which learned, to name just a few [3, c.289]. There is an inclination among teachers, students and people in general, to believe that there is only one type of learning, namely, the one which relies on cognitive activity”.

Indeed, reasoning as a mental process is crucial in learning, but this simplistic way of addressing such a complex phenomenon as human learning fails to recognize the role of emotions and attitudes in learning identified and emphasized by Benjamin Bloom in his Taxonomy of educational objectives: the classification of educational goals

published in 1956. The cognitive domain "involves knowledge and the progress of intellectual skills. This includes the recollection or recognition of specific facts, procedural designs, and concepts that serve in the development of intellectual abilities and skills." The affective domain "includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes" [1, c.208] (Bloom).

**Results and discussions.** While I was doing my practicum in school N04 in Fergana city when it was the month of September, I entered 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> classes mostly. I found out some problems connected with their thinking and speaking abilities in English. Many of them could not express themselves properly in English and found it difficult to apply some kind of answers to the cases handed by the teachers. The problems faced by them were as follows: (1) parents' educational background, (2) respect of elders, (3) fear of children's independency, (4) authoritative learning environment in previous life, (5) weak English language foundations, (6) fear of confrontation, (7) passive learning environment in childhood, (8) lack of critical thinking awareness, (9) lack of valuing critical thinking, (10) lack of understanding of the concept of critical thinking, (11) differences of academic requirements between native and nonnative context, (12) insufficient English language abilities. I also listed factors that affected the promotion of critical thinking and related them to the students' previous learning history. These were: (1) lack of critical thinking encouragement, (2) lack of the modelling of critical thinking, (3) poor methods of teaching writing, (4) unqualified teachers in English as a foreign language, (5) poor English language curriculum, (5) lack of questioning habits, (6) lack of debates and discussions. Thus, how to overcome those barricades in front of the students?

### **Suggestions for classroom practice**

The ideas presented here are intended as a general indication of the types of activity that might develop this competency in the classroom, and are not a definitive list.

### **GENERAL SUGGESTIONS**

Regardless of the age of learners, at the heart of critical thinking is the view of asking questions. Learners should be invigorated to continually question the information they receive and the conclusions they come to. The teacher should push learners to deeper critical thinking by asking them questions, such as:

- Why is that your answer?
- How did you come to that answer?
- Do you think there could be another answer?

Teachers should sincerely listen to learners when taking feedback and respond accordingly, by properly evaluating their ideas and arguments. In so doing, they show their learners that they too are critical thinkers (i.e. act as an effective model). Learners at this age are inspired by topics and activities that are relevant to them or that interest them. It is therefore important to personalize the learning. Teachers should try to link course book materials to learners' actual lives, or to their educational institution. If what they are learning in the classroom really means something to the learners, or if they are more familiar with the subject matter, they are far more likely to be able to understand the concepts and make links between ideas. The following are some classroom activities and strategies that teachers can use to promote the development of critical thinking skills:

**Flipping the learning.** Learners may benefit from flipping the learning. Learners (especially higher-level learners) can be given more responsibility and opportunity to develop the core 'knowledge' outside of classroom time (e.g. for homework). This will help them to synthesize ideas and information. It will also mean that time in the classroom can be maximized for aspects of language acquisition which learners are less able to do by themselves, for example arguing, discussing, comparing, challenging and debating.

**Exploiting productive activities.** Productive activities (i.e. involving speaking and writing) are good opportunities to develop critical thinking. For example, when teaching writing, a teacher could set the same essay question for the whole class, then take the learners through the following steps:

- 1) Student A writes the first paragraph, and then passes it on to Student B.

2) Student B must read this paragraph and continue the writing.

3) After a few minutes, this is passed on to Student C, who continues the process.

At every stage, learners are having to synthesize ideas and information as well as evaluate ideas, arguments and options. This can be a very effective and controlled method for developing writing, particularly for learners who are nervous about the idea of writing a long text by themselves.

### **The snowball technique**

This is an effective way to take feedback from a whole class and get learners listening to each other. This is usually done after an individual task in which learners have come up with their own answers.

Then, after getting into pairs, learners follow these steps:

1. Students A and B compare their answers, and agree on one they are both happy with.
2. Students A and B share their answers with C and D (and vice versa), and repeat step 1.
3. Step 1 repeats with the group size doubling each time, until it gets to the whole class level.

Exercise examples:

PAIR WORK: THINK CRITICALLY . Who do you think made a stronger case, the affirmative side (Kamol)

or the opposition (Laylo)? Why? What was the strongest point in their argument?

D. We liked Laylo’s argument, but her point about service dogs wasn’t relevant. The topic is about pets.

E . Think about your culture and its attitude towards dogs. What is their role in society?

Do you agree with that role? Why or why not? For ideas, watch Aisha’s video.

**Final remarks:** Several proven examples given above are considered the examples that use project-based learning and problem-based learning to promote critical thinking skills. Teachers can use daily situations to promote their students’ critical thinking skills. Preventing from easily give the solutions, and ask the students

to think of the problem, teachers will develop critical thinking skills such as probing and asking students to provide justification during observing, questioning, exploring, and associating activities, enabling students to develop their critical thinking skills. Teachers should utilize any chance to help their students develop critical thinking of their students.

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