

## THE DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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**Abstract.** *Critical thinking refers to the individuals' ability to think and make correct decisions independently. Nowadays enhancing critical thinking in learners is considered one of the foreign language teachers' tasks due to its high position in foreign language classrooms. There are various factors affecting language learners' critical thinking skills. Among these factors is the assessment methods used. Therefore, through managing the ways of assessing language learners' ability, language teachers can help them develop critical thinking skills. In this presentation, some suggestions for language teachers to make sound choice of assessment methods and activities will be presented. Critical thinking has been the focus of many studies considering the educational and social contexts. However, English as a foreign language (EFL) context is the one in which studies about critical thinking and its link to classroom engagement have not been carried out as much as expected. Hence, this study investigated to understand the association between EFL teachers' critical thinking ability and students' classroom engagement to get a broader understanding of the impact critical thinking has on students' success.*

**Key language:** *critical thinking, assessment practice, teaching context, enhanced learning, assessment, assignment, technique, concept.*

**Introduction.** Assessment practices mainly influence learning through affecting the objectives the learners set for themselves in learning the foreign language. In fact, in many cases the way of assessment is determinant of the objectives of the language

learning program. If in a language teaching context, assessment focuses on linguistic competence of the learners, mastery of linguistic competence becomes the learners' objective, while in a context emphasizing communicative competence, learners do their best to become communicatively competent in the foreign language.

In the same way, if the focus of assessment is on integrating language and thinking skills, the learners do their best to achieve this objective. In fact, when the purpose of teaching is understanding the process of assessment, in addition to evaluation, is a substantive contribution to learning. Assessment that fosters understanding needs to inform students and teachers about both what students currently understand and how to proceed with subsequent teaching and learning. Language and critical thinking grow together and nurture each other's development. As children engage in critical thinking, their language skills expand because they're encouraged to develop and use more complex language with words like "because", phrases with "if" and "then" and different verb tenses. Conversely, as children's language development progresses, their ability to think critically grows as well.

Here are presented a number of suggestions for enhancing critical thinking among language learners through assessment practices:

1. Use ongoing assessment rather than one-shot exams at the end of the semester. While one-shot exams require the test taker to have a limited amount of knowledge, mostly linguistic, ongoing assessment carried out during the course gives the teacher the opportunity to test a larger range of knowledge and skills, including critical thinking skills.

2. Use criterion-referenced testing rather than norm-referenced testing. NR testing encourages learners to attempt to be better than others without thinking about what they learn and how they use it. Moreover, CR testing welcomes the differences among learners and consequently, differences among learners lead to learners' learning from each other in a friendly non-competitive atmosphere. While the learners become more cooperatives than competitors, they become more concerned

with understanding than with outcomes. As such the help each other in developing critical thinking skills.

3. Include activities in your assessment which encourage the learner to think about the major objectives of the course, including developing critical thinking skills. The type of activities used in assessing language learners determines the goals of learning. Those activities which can be carried out through simpler processes such as memorizing, substituting, etc. are not appropriate activities for enhancing critical thinking in language learners. Better activities for the purpose of promoting critical thinking skills are those which require the learners to think, cooperate, ask questions from themselves and others, etc. These activities also require the learners to the activities with the purposes of such activities.

4. Provide learners with feedback which gives learners understanding that thinking is an integral part of their learning experience. This integration of performance and feedback is exactly what students need as they work to develop their understanding of a particular topic or concept. Feedback needs to occur frequently, from the beginning of the unit to its conclusion, in conjunction with performances of understanding. Some occasions for feedback may be formal and planned; some may be more informal. Feedback also needs to provide students with information not only about how well they have carried out the activities but also how they might improve them. Furthermore, it needs to inform learners of the teachers' planning of subsequent classes and activities. Another requirement of feedback is that it must come from a variety of perspectives: from students' reflection on their own work, from classmates reflecting on one another's work, and from the teacher. Model for students how to provide feedback that both tells them how well they are doing and gives them information about how they might do better.

5. Co-develop criteria for assessment. Even if you have a sense for what the criteria for a particular performance should be, try inviting learners to develop the criteria themselves by looking at models of similar performances. Help students to

see how the criteria relate to the goals of the activities. The points suggested here are just a few among many points which if taken into account can help language learners think critically. In fact, what is highly important is the teachers' understanding and having in mind that assessment is a key determinant of what is learnt in the language class and how it is learnt. In that case, the teachers can choose the most appropriate ways of language assessment with regard to the specific context of their own classroom.

In order to improve critical thinking, evaluate the questions you're asking: Are your questions crafted to produce detailed, in-depth responses, or do they lead to one-word answers? Do they allow students to draw on their personal experiences or offer their opinions? Do they inspire students to passionately debate, or to engage in an exchange with a peer? Are students answering these questions enthusiastically? Let's look at an example of a flat question versus a dynamic one.

Place culture at the core of your lessons and units: Language teachers are not solely responsible for teaching a language - we should also be exposing our students to the culture(s) associated with the target language.

Incorporate authentic resources: There's no better way to expose students to culture and higher-order thinking than with authentic resources - real-life materials from the target country, including infographics, articles, songs, films, podcasts, commercials, written ads, and so on. Authentic resources need not be reserved for higher-level classes - they can be used at any level. Adapt the task -not the resource - for the appropriate level. Level one students often need an authentic resource to pique their interest in the language and culture. For example, when teaching novice students about foods and eating habits in the target country, incorporate an authentic menu for them to examine and analyze. Using authentic resources can entice students to continue on their language learning journey, igniting their curiosity. Such resources also present an increased level of rigor and challenge. Students are required to evaluate and analyze an authentic cultural product when evaluating these resources.

Give students independence: While it's sometimes tempting to lecture students and control the entirety of the class period, releasing some control can be empowering. Let students think independently and design some of their own tasks. Require them to problem-solve. Give them choices. Let them own their learning and take an active role in it. Giving students time to work independently fosters a rigorous environment in which students are able to think critically without constant assistance.

Rather than providing questions immediately after reading an article with your students, allow them to come up with the questions. Identify key vocabulary by asking students which words they associate with the given topic instead of providing a list. And instead of leading every class discussion, assign student's different jobs in group discussions, or allow them to take turns facilitating a whole-class discussion. When students are given a chance to lead, they generally rise to the occasion, which can lead to deeper learning.

**Conclusion.** Critical thinking needs to be enhanced among language learners due to its significance in developing effective language learning. So promoting critical thinking skills is considered one of the tasks of language teachers. As we have seen, critical, analytical and higher-order work can be incorporated into the language classroom without too much disturbance of your planned work. A few small additions here and there, and some rethinking of tasks and activities, can raise the level of thinking that goes on, and help students to help themselves when they come to perform in English in situations outside the classroom. They can do this task through various ways, including using appropriate ways of assessment as assessment practices usually determine the learning objectives of the language learners. Critical thinking means making reasoned judgments that are logical and well-thought out. It is a way of thinking in which you don't simply accept all arguments and conclusions you are exposed to but rather have an attitude involving questioning such arguments and conclusions. It requires wanting to see what evidence is involved to support a particular argument or conclusion.

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