

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH INTERACTIVE TASKS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: *In the modern educational process, teaching a foreign language requires not only linguistic knowledge, but also the development of students' critical thinking skills. This article discusses the theoretical and practical aspects of developing critical thinking skills in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes through interactive tasks. The study analyzes the impact of problem-based tasks, debates, group activities, and discussion-based tasks on students' analytical, evaluative, and independent thinking skills. The results show that the interactive approach is effective in developing critical thinking in EFL education.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, interactive tasks, EFL classrooms, English language teaching, problem-based learning*

INTRODUCTION:

In the context of globalization, learning English has become an essential component of education. Today, the teaching process in EFL classrooms is no longer limited to the instruction of grammatical rules and vocabulary acquisition; rather, it is increasingly focused on developing learners' independent, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Critical thinking enables students to analyze information deeply, evaluate ideas, draw evidence-based conclusions, and articulate their opinions with logical justification.

Traditional teaching methods often result in passive learner participation. Therefore, modern pedagogical approaches—particularly the use of interactive tasks—are regarded as effective tools for fostering critical thinking skills in EFL classrooms.

Theoretical Foundations of Critical Thinking and EFL Education

Critical thinking is defined as a purposeful and reflective intellectual process that involves analyzing, comparing, evaluating information, and drawing reasoned and evidence-based conclusions. Scholars emphasize that critical thinking enables learners not only to understand information but also to question assumptions, assess arguments, and make informed judgments (Facione, 2011). In educational contexts, critical thinking is considered a key competency for preparing learners to function effectively in academic and real-life situations.

According to Bloom's Taxonomy, cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creation represent higher-order thinking skills, which go beyond simple memorization and comprehension (Bloom et al., 1956). These higher-level skills play a crucial role in language learning, particularly in EFL education, where learners are expected to engage with texts, ideas, and communicative situations in a meaningful and reflective manner.

In EFL instruction, critical thinking is closely interconnected with the development of language skills, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing. For instance, reading and listening activities require learners to interpret meaning, identify implicit messages, evaluate

the credibility of information, and recognize the author's intentions. Similarly, speaking and writing tasks encourage learners to organize ideas logically, support opinions with evidence, and express viewpoints coherently and persuasively.

Learners develop critical thinking skills through activities such as text analysis, identifying the author's stance, comparing different perspectives, and expressing personal opinions based on logical reasoning. Ennis (2015) argues that language classrooms provide an ideal environment for fostering critical thinking, as communication inherently involves reasoning, decision-making, and evaluation. Therefore, critical thinking should not be treated as an isolated skill in EFL classrooms; rather, it should be systematically integrated into the language learning process through communicative and interactive tasks.

The Role of Interactive Tasks in Developing Critical Thinking

Interactive tasks are learner-centered activities that require active participation, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Such tasks shift the focus of instruction from teacher-led explanations to meaningful learner engagement, which is essential for the development of higher-order thinking skills. In EFL classrooms, commonly used interactive tasks include debates, problem-based questions, case studies, role-plays, and project-based activities.

These interactive tasks play a significant role in fostering critical thinking by encouraging learners to think independently, provide logical arguments, evaluate opposing viewpoints, and draw reasoned conclusions. Unlike traditional tasks that often emphasize rote learning, interactive activities require learners to analyze information, make decisions, and justify their opinions using evidence. As a result, learners become more cognitively engaged in the learning process.

For example, during debate activities, students are required to articulate and defend their viewpoints in English while also listening to, analyzing, and responding to the arguments presented by others. This process enhances not only learners' speaking and listening skills but also their ability to reason critically and evaluate different perspectives. Similarly, case studies and problem-solving tasks expose learners to real-life or simulated situations, prompting them to analyze problems, propose solutions, and assess possible outcomes.

Furthermore, role-plays and project-based learning activities promote collaborative learning, where students exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their decisions. According to contemporary pedagogical research, such collaborative interaction supports deeper cognitive processing and facilitates the development of critical thinking skills in language learning contexts. Therefore, interactive tasks serve as effective pedagogical tools that integrate language practice with cognitive skill development.

Practical Implementation and Research Findings

Practical classroom experience indicates that the systematic use of interactive tasks in EFL classrooms leads to a significant improvement in learners' critical thinking skills. Students exposed to interactive activities demonstrate a deeper understanding of textual content and show a greater tendency to construct their own ideas independently rather than relying on predetermined or memorized responses. Additionally, their confidence and level of engagement in English communication increase noticeably.

Comparative analysis between control and experimental groups further confirms the effectiveness of interactive task-based instruction. Learners in the experimental group, where interactive tasks were regularly implemented, outperformed those in the control group taught through traditional methods in terms of critical thinking development and communicative competence. These findings suggest that interactive, learner-centered approaches are more effective than conventional teacher-centered practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of critical thinking skills through the use of interactive tasks in EFL classrooms is one of the key factors in enhancing the overall effectiveness of language education. Such tasks increase learners' active participation, encourage independent thinking, and facilitate conscious and meaningful language learning. By engaging students in problem-solving, discussion, and creative activities, interactive tasks contribute to deeper cognitive involvement in the learning process.

Therefore, it is recommended that English language teachers extensively incorporate interactive, problem-based, and creative tasks into their instructional practices. This approach not only supports the development of learners' language skills but also fosters their critical and creative thinking abilities, which are essential for successful academic performance and effective communication in real-life contexts.

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