

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Annotation: This article explores the significance of developing critical thinking skills among foreign language learners and how such skills enhance their communicative competence, problem-solving abilities, and overall academic performance. The integration of critical thinking into language learning encourages students to analyze, interpret, and evaluate information rather than simply memorizing it. The technology of critical thinking development is explored as a system of methodical techniques and strategies aimed at enhancing students' educational and cognitive awareness. The paper discusses the relationship between language proficiency and cognitive development, identifies effective classroom strategies, and highlights the teacher's role in fostering critical thinking.

Keywords: critical thinking, foreign language learning, cognitive skills, communication, reflective learning, education

Introduction

In today's globalized and information-driven world, education aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to cultivate analytical and independent thinkers. Critical thinking has become an essential competence in all fields, including foreign language learning. The process of mastering a foreign language involves more than learning grammar and vocabulary; it requires the ability to understand meaning, evaluate perspectives, and express one's thoughts logically and creatively.

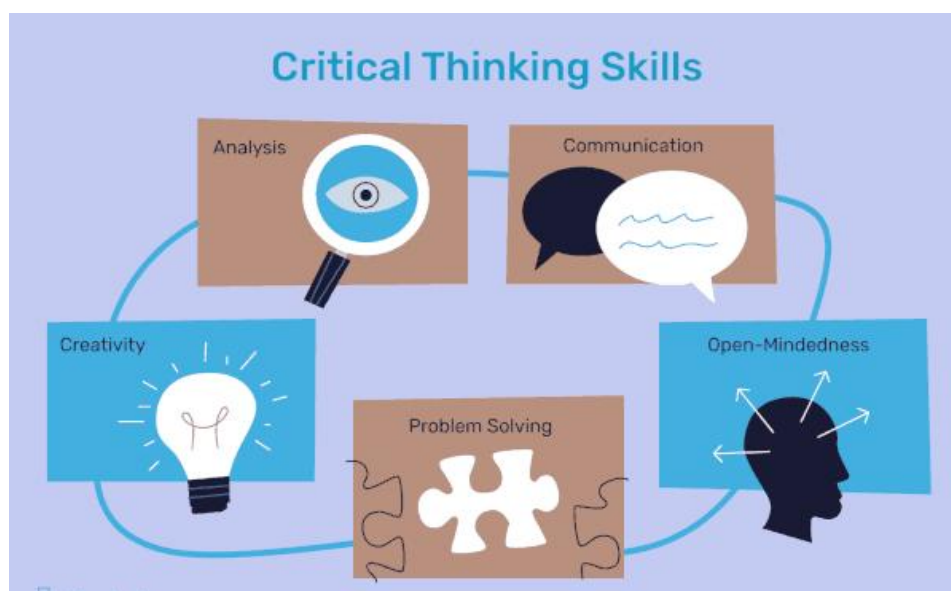
Because it encourages students to interpret cultural quirks, challenge presumptions, and create meaning through communication, teaching foreign languages offers a special chance to foster critical thinking. Enhancing students' educational and cognitive awareness, independence, reflection, cognitive activity, and flexibility of thought is the goal of the latest trends in higher education and educational technologies, such as the critical thinking development technology. These trends help students acquire foreign languages more qualitatively and support ongoing professional and personal development.

Questioning, analysing, interpreting, evaluating, and passing judgement on what you read, hear, say, or write are all components of critical thinking. The Greek word *kritikos*, which means "able to judge or discern," is where the word "critical" originates. The process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information generated by or gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to belief and action is known as critical thinking.

Methods

These days, the phrase "critical thinking" is defined in a number of scientific studies. It is described as logical reflective thinking that is centred on choosing what to believe and what to do by J. A. Braus and D. Wood. In addition to being objective and logical, critics are attempting to comprehend and realise their own "I" and other people's perspectives. According to them, critical thinking is the pursuit of common sense and the capacity to set aside one's own assumptions. The ability of critical thinkers to propose novel concepts and see fresh possibilities is crucial for problem-solving [1].

German scientists are R. Paul and L. Elder define critical thinking as a kind of thinking (this applies to all items of content or problems) in which a person improves the quality of his thinking, making it an integral part of his life. It involves mastering of certain qualities of thinking and leads to the development of creative abilities in communication and solving of problem [2].



Picture 1. Critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking is defined by D. Halpern in his book "Psychology of Critical Thinking" as directed thinking that is balanced, rational, and concentrated. It is also characterised by the application of cognitive abilities and methods that increase the probability of achieving the intended outcome [3].

Despite the wide range of definitions of critical thinking, they all share a common meaning that captures the introspective and evaluative aspects of thought. This is a sort of open-mindedness that rejects orthodoxy and grows by overlaying fresh knowledge on one's own life experiences. It differs from creative thinking in this way. The development of creative and critical thinking is linked and begins with critical thinking.

According to J. Piaget, the ideal circumstances for the formation of critical thinking are established by the time a person is 14–16 years old. This does not imply, however, that each of us develops these abilities to the same degree.

The learner should cultivate some traits, which D. Halpern emphasises [4], in order to apply his critical thinking skills:

- Willingness to plan
- Flexibility
- Perseverance
- Willingness to correct their mistakes
- Awareness
- Search for compromise solutions

The development of critical thinking skills is one of the most intriguing contemporary educational technologies that enables us to cultivate these abilities. Critical thinking, also known as creative thinking, increases the level of individual culture of working with information, helps a person determine his own priorities in both his personal and professional life, assumes the adoption of individual responsibility for the choices made, forms the ability to analyse and draw independent conclusions, predicts the consequences of his decisions and answer for them, and enables you to develop a dialogue culture in joint activities [5]. The applicability of critical thinking development technology is determined by these aspects.

Results and discussion

Critical thinking refers to the ability to analyze information objectively, evaluate arguments, and make reasoned judgments. According to Paul and Elder (2006), it involves disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence. In language learning, critical thinking enables learners to go beyond memorization and engage in meaningful communication that reflects understanding, reflection, and creativity.

The technology of critical thinking presupposes equal partnerships, both in terms of communication, and in terms of constructing knowledge that is born in the learning process. Working in the mode of critical thinking technology, the teacher ceases to be the main source of information, and, using the techniques of technology, turns teaching into a joint and interesting search.

The technology of critical thinking gives the student:

- increasing the efficiency of perception of information;
- increased interest in both the material being studied and the learning process ability to think critically;
- the ability to responsibly treat their own education;
- the ability to work in collaboration with others;
- improving the quality of education of students;
- the desire and ability to become a person who studies throughout life.

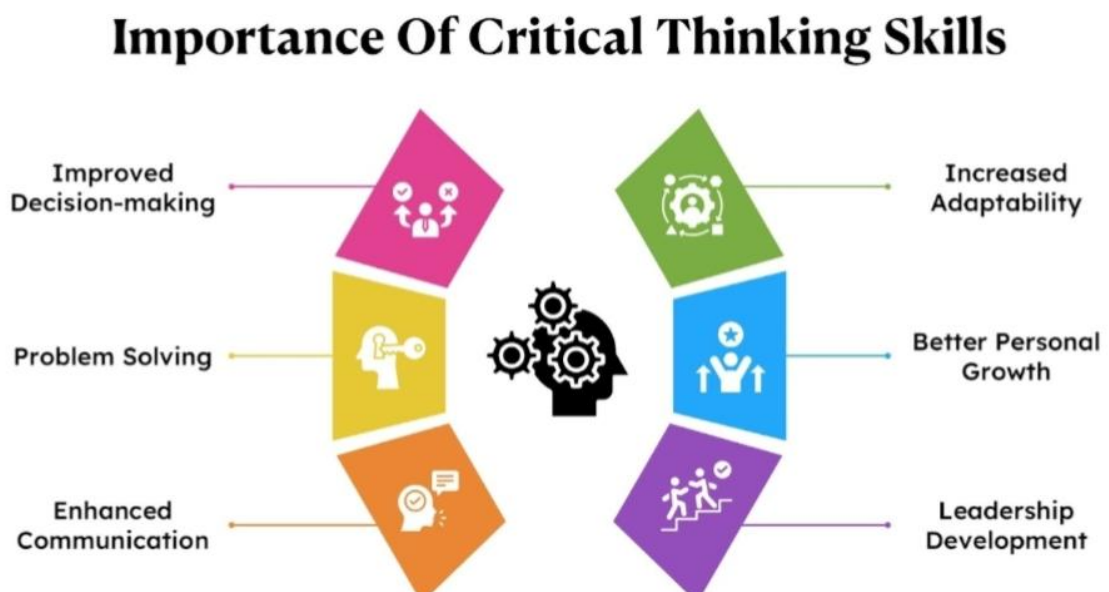
The critical thinking technology gives the teacher:

- the ability to create an atmosphere of openness and responsible cooperation in the classroom;

- the ability to use a learning model and a system of effective techniques that contribute to the development of critical thinking and independence in the learning process;
- become practitioners who are able to competently analyze their activities;
- become a source of valuable professional information for other teachers.

A critical-thinking student can interpret and evaluate information in a variety of ways, identify contradictions and different types of structures in the text, and use both logic—which is already significant—and the ideas of the other person to support his position. Such a learner can use a wide range of materials effectively and feels comfortable working with different kinds of knowledge. The development of a fundamental mindset towards oneself and the world, which implies a diverse, autonomous, and significant stance, is a prerequisite for the development of critical thinking. Because it makes people more thoughtful and conscious and enhances their ability to communicate, this viewpoint greatly improves the dependability of education.

Critical thinking is an essential ability that enables people to solve issues efficiently, make well-informed judgements, and handle challenging circumstances. Its significance is shown in a number of crucial areas:



Picture 2. Importance of Critical Thinking

Thought and language are intimately related. Cognitive development is facilitated by the development of verbal proficiency, and vice versa. Learners acquire both linguistic and intellectual abilities at the same time when they evaluate texts, deduce meanings, or voice opinions in a foreign language.

Integrating critical thinking into foreign language instruction requires deliberate teaching methods. Some effective strategies include:

1. Discussion and debate. Encouraging students to express and defend their viewpoints helps them develop reasoning and argumentative skills.
2. Problem-based learning. Presenting real-life situations where students must find solutions promotes analysis and decision-making.
3. Project work: Research-based projects require planning, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
4. Critical reading and writing tasks: Analyzing texts for bias, tone, and underlying assumptions strengthens evaluative thinking.
5. Reflective activities: Asking students to reflect on their learning experiences fosters metacognition and self-assessment.
6. Teachers should design tasks that require students to question, compare, and evaluate information rather than simply reproduce it.

In order to foster critical thinking, teachers are essential. They ought to establish an open classroom atmosphere that promotes discussion and inquiry. Teachers serve as facilitators, assisting students in finding the answers on their own rather than serving as the exclusive source of knowledge.

Furthermore, rather than concentrating only on accuracy, feedback should also highlight pupils' thought processes. Teachers can foster an intellectually engaging environment that supports critical growth by modelling analytical thinking, asking challenging questions, and promoting teamwork.

Students that possess critical thinking skills are able to evaluate many viewpoints, approach problems logically, and come to well-informed conclusions. The development of critical thinking through ELT becomes even more pertinent in non-philological faculties like engineering, medicine, commerce, and technology, where professionals must solve problems and make decisions. English is more than just a subject; it's a way to communicate internationally, access knowledge from around the world, and take part in discussions in the workplace and in academia. Therefore, teachers in these universities should prioritise incorporating critical thinking into ELT.

Inquiry-based learning, which motivates students to pose queries, carry out research, and actively interact with the material, is a successful strategy for promoting critical thinking in English language training. Students are required to investigate real-world problems, evaluate information, and communicate their conclusions in English rather than merely learning vocabulary and grammar rules. In addition to increasing language skills, this method teaches pupils how to evaluate information critically, take into account other points of view, and create arguments that are well-supported. For instance, medical faculty students may be assigned English-language case studies in which they must evaluate symptoms, talk about possible diagnoses, and defend their treatment decisions. Similar to this, engineering students can analyse the advantages and disadvantages of various technical solutions while participating in English-language conversations about sustainable development.

Another effective method for incorporating critical thinking into ELT is through debates and contentious conversations. Students gain the ability to create arguments, support their positions with facts, and evaluate opposing views critically by participating in organised debates. This approach not only improves their ability to communicate in English but also strengthens their capacity for logical argument construction, inconsistency detection, and quick thinking. Teachers can create discussion subjects that are pertinent to their students' fields of study, such as global economic policies for business students or ethical concerns in artificial intelligence for IT students. Through these conversations, students build their analytical and evaluative skills while also gaining confidence in their ability to express themselves in English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of critical thinking skills is vital for foreign language learners in the 21st century. It empowers them to communicate effectively, interpret cultural meanings, and approach problems with analytical reasoning. Language education that integrates critical thinking not only improves linguistic competence but also prepares students to become independent thinkers and active participants in global communication. Therefore, fostering critical thinking should be a central goal of modern language teaching practices.

Critical thinking offers equal interaction between subjects of learning, dialogical speech, the ability to express one's thoughts and be heard, the development of the ability to listen, understand and perceive a different point of view, build a system of affirmations in defense of one's own, as well as the ability to compare and compare different opinions and attitude to a particular situation, event, etc. The use of critical thinking technology in English language classes makes it possible to create favorable conditions for activating and developing students' thinking.

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