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ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM (ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

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Annotation. *In this article, the author gives a description to “critical thinking” and what prevents students the ability to comprehensively analyze information and make reasonable (ideally objective) conclusions. Moreover, the author talks about the importance of modern textbooks in the development of students and offers his solutions in the development of critical thinking.*

Keywords: *substantiate proposals; monotonous teaching methods; synthesize information; problem-based learning methods; project implementation.*

РАЗВИТИЕ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ И НАВЫКОВ РЕШЕНИЯ ПРОБЛЕМ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КАК ИНОСТРАННОМУ (EFL)

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Аннотация. *В данной статье автор дает характеристику «критического мышления» и того, что мешает учащимся всесторонне анализировать информацию и делать обоснованные (в идеале объективные) выводы. Кроме того, автор говорит о значении современных учебников в развитии учащихся и предлагает свои решения в развитии критического мышления.*

Ключевые слова: *обоснование предложений; однообразные методы обучения; синтез информации; проблемно-ориентированные методы обучения; реализация проекта.*

АНГЛИС ТИЛИН ЧЕТ ТИЛ КАТАРЫ ОКУТУУДА КРИТИКАЛЫК ОЙ ЖУГУРТҮҮНУ ЖАНА КӨЙГӨЙДҮ ЧЕЧҮҮ ИШМЕРДҮҮЛҮГҮН ӨНҮКТҮРҮҮ

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Аннотация. *Бул макалада автор «критикалык ой жүгүртүүнү» мунөздөп, окуучуларга маалыматты ар тараптуу талдап, негизделген (объективдүү, туура) тыянактарды чыгарууга эмне тоскоол болуп жатканын айтат. Мындан тышкary, автор окуучулардын өнүгүүсүндөгү заманбап окуу китептеринин маанисine токтолуп, критикалык ой жүгүртүүсүн өнүктүрүүдө өзүнүн чечимдерин сунуштайт.*

Негизги сөздөр: *сунуштарды негиздөө; монотондуу окутуу ыкмалары; маалыматтын синтези; көйгөйлүү окутуу методдору; долбоорду ишке ашируу.*

In today's educational environment, critical thinking is a key competence necessary for successful knowledge acquisition and effective adaptation in a rapidly changing world. Globalization is taking place in the world, which contributes to the selection of studied disciplines based on competition, which in the future will lead to the choice of educational institutions. Now modern education is aimed at strengthening the individual positions of future professionals in various fields of activity and provides enormous resources for professional and personal improvement, provides places and conditions for the disclosure of their creative abilities. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that all successful specialists of different professions can safely work remotely, moreover, in different countries sitting at home or in the office.

The term "critical thinking" has appeared relatively recently. The theorist John Dewey first used it in 1910 in the field of education in the book "How we think." [1]. I think this term has always been there. Even that person who has never heard of it uses the principles and techniques of critical thinking in one way or another.

Effective university education requires a high degree of intellectual thinking, logic, horizons, and the ability to think critically. Critical thinking - is the process of actively and attentively analyzing information, ideas, events, or situations in order to form informed judgments and make informed decisions. It includes the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, interpret and synthesize information, as well as the ability to formulate logical arguments.

We say that critical thinking involves the ability to consider issues from different points of view, to discover connections and contradictions, as well as the ability to distinguish facts from opinions. This skill contributes to the development of critical awareness, allowing a person to make informed decisions and better understand the complexities of the world around them.

My experience in the field of education is 20 years. I worked at school with pupils for 10 years and with university students for 10 years. I believe that the development of critical thinking begins at school and continues at university. If we teach English at school in the subject of English, we compare simple concepts: determine the topic, goals, emotional coloring, formulate your argument, substantiate your proposals, supporting evidence from the texts you read, etc. The university provides students with more complex and in-depth materials for analysis: projects, essays, scientific research, discussions, seminars, etc. at the university level contribute to the development of analytical thinking. However, many students face challenges in developing this skill, which can hinder their academic progress and professional development. I would like to give some examples on this point from my experience and observation. I remind you that English is a foreign language. Therefore, the top five factors from the words of students that prevent them from thinking critically in English lessons.

1. **Lack of experience** - Some students do not have enough experience in critical thinking. Especially the students who came from the regions. During a conversation with a student, it turns out that the method of teaching at school was teacher-student.

2. **Fear of making mistakes** - Students say they are afraid to make mistakes or give the wrong answer, which can lead to a bad mark by the teacher. Therefore, they limit their answers, refusing to freely express their thoughts and analyze them.

3. **Limited understanding of the language** - a lack of proficiency of English, which is an obstacle to the expression of complex ideas and thoughts. Considering that English as a foreign and popular language, it is necessary to increase the hours on this subject.

4. **Lack of motivation** - If students do not see value in critical thinking, do not feel interest in the subject, the system is focused on getting the "right" answers, focus on memorizing facts, disadvantage of discussions, too strict assessment standards, monotonous teaching methods, etc., this can reduce their motivation.

5. **Insufficient understanding of tasks** - Students may face difficulties in formulating and understanding tasks, rules without analysis requiring critical thinking leads to a decrease in the development of critical thinking.

In fact, critical thinking is one of the important, necessary and relevant skills of the near future. Research conducted by The Boston Consulting Group claims that from 10% to 50% of all currently available professions will lose their usefulness due to digitalization [2]. Some professions in the 21st century do not exist yet, and many of them are transforming. It is just a matter of time. We all understand that without flexibility and criticality, a person will not be able to adapt to the changes taking place.

In 2002, there was established a Partnership in the United States that aims to explore the skills and abilities of the 21st century. It consists of representatives of the U.S. Department of Education, NEA and other government and non-governmental organizations, Microsoft, Apple, Cisco and Dell. This partnership has identified four key skills needed for learning in the first place. They are critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, and collaboration. It is also called "4Cs". These core skills are already being integrated into all educational environments in the United States [3].

The role of the teacher in the development of critical thinking is enormous. The teacher creates a stimulating environment, a friendly atmosphere, and encourages students to explore and learn independently.

We can say that a student is considered to think critically if he can:

- find primary sources;
- analyze the facts;
- build causal relationships;
- consider several points of view on the problem;
- to put forward and test hypotheses;
- formulate logical conclusions;
- participate in the discussion and argue your opinion;

Such methods are implemented according to the principle of TDCT - **technology for the development of critical thinking** - and assume the presence of three mandatory phases: challenge, comprehension, reflection. Skills are of course important aspects, but I would note important points on the part of the teacher to create conditions for development [4].

1. **Create a learning environment** - The teacher can create a friendly atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and discussing them.

2. Feedback - Such comments on completed tasks help to understand errors and improve critical thinking skills.

3. Support and Motivation - Teachers can stimulate students' interest in the subject and show the practical value of critical thinking for their future careers.

As a teacher with more than 15 years of teaching experience, I want to say that choosing a textbook is also one of the most important aspects. I am a vivid indicator of that generation of the 90s when there were no English language manuals at all. When I started my career as a teacher, I taught for several years according to the textbooks of the author A.P. Starkov. In these textbooks, there were almost no tasks, exercises for the development of critical thinking among students. The teachers had to prepare carefully in order to somehow diversify, give a bright color to the lessons. Now there are many modern publishing houses offering various kinds of manuals together with the use of modern technologies and techniques that allow you to achieve high-quality results without additional spending of valuable resources such as time and money. The authors of the course have done everything to make the English language understandable, and the tasks are designed in such a soft, intelligent way that the student learns to think critically, discuss, argue and simultaneously learn to bring knowledge to perfection. The manuals are accompanied with vivid pictures, videos, puzzles, questionnaires, everything for the development of the student's thinking. Moreover, a set of textbooks consist of teacher's book, which tells how to make the lesson profitable and interactive for students. This is a huge help for teachers. There are workshops with answers to train the grammar of the language. Therefore, I can say with confidence that the textbook undoubtedly affects the development of logical, analytical thinking, in the ability to do a deep analysis of etc. Since I am a senior lecturer at the Kyrgyz-German Institute of Applied Informatics, I want to give a little information about how things are going in the English language subject. At our institute, English is taught to 1st year students. The amount of five credits. Our teachers work on books published by Oxford, The English File 4th Edition series [5]. Content: Practical English with grammatical and lexical materials, audio fragments integrated in each file. An online workshop with educational tasks and interactive educational videos. The purpose of the discipline: mastering the necessary skills of professional communication in a foreign language based on the formation of students' systemic and deep theoretical knowledge, skills and practical skills based on key types of speech activity. Levels: Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Upper- Intermediate. Based on all the above factors and reflections, my pedagogical experience, I propose the top four solutions for the development of critical thinking among students. I will give examples of how I do or apply them during the lesson based on experience and modern textbooks.

Stimulating discussions: Organizing discussions and debates in the classroom activates students.

- I give students a topic to discuss and ask them to make a list of keywords and phrases related to this topic.

- I practice with them in expressing opinion, using phrases like "I believe that ..." or "In my opinion ...".

- I teach them to develop arguments in support of their point of view.

- I also teach them the following expressions to express disagreement, for example, "I understand your point of view, but I believe that...".

- I make sure that students take part in debates or group discussions to practice the language.

- I ask students to listen and analyze the points of view of other people by participating in dialogues, as well as ask open-ended questions to stimulate discussion and develop communication skills.

Application of problem-based learning methods: To apply the methods of problem-based learning to students, offer tasks that require analysis, critical thinking and finding solutions. For example [6]:

- I give students the choice and research of a real problem in their area of interest.

- I will advise them to develop an action plan to solve the chosen problem.

- I teach to conduct independent research using various sources of information.

- I practice with students making presentations of results and discussing possible solutions in classes, seminars, etc.

- I organize a collective discussion of the problem with other students to share ideas and experiences.

Project formation: develop the ability to think independently and argue their decisions.

During the formation of projects, offer students the following tasks:

- I ask students to conduct an in-depth analysis of the chosen problem, identifying the main aspects, factors and relationships.

- I give a task to assess the quality and reliability of the information they use to support their project.

- I urge students to identify possible risks and obstacles in the process of project implementation and propose strategies for their management.

- I propose the task to compare different solutions to the problem, justify the choice of the optimal one and consider possible alternatives.

- I insist on being self-critical and justify my decisions, as well as suggestions for possible improvements.

- I organize debates or group discussions so that students can present their ideas, listen to the opinions of others and defend their points of view in a reasoned manner.

Using technology: The integration of modern technologies and resources allows students to access a variety of materials that stimulate critical thinking. As our students are future IT specialists so they became to be a competent in modern technologies and platforms, and I am happy to use this in my lessons. Now there are various educational platforms like Moodle, Zoom, Canvas, etc., online forums and blogs, virtual laboratories, online group projects, multimedia resources, interactive cases like Case Net or Harvard Business Publishing, etc.[7] All these technologies are aimed at exchanging ideas and opinions online where they can express their points of view and respond to the opinions of others in a reasoned manner, develop critical, analytical thinking when solving real business problems.

Students are our future, the hope of our society. They are the ones who will shape our world of tomorrow, make important decisions, introduce innovations and solve global problems. Therefore, it is very important to teach them not only critical thinking but also to support them in their studies, develop creativity and social skills. The better-prepared students are today; the brighter the future will be tomorrow.

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