THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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***Abstract**: this paper analyzes the role of critical thinking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. In contemporary education, language learning is no longer limited to grammar and vocabulary learning only but also it comprises the enhancement of higher-order thinking skills. Critical thinking helps learners to analyze, assess, and produce language in a more effective way [2]. This study discusses the significance of integrating critical thinking into EFL teaching, explores practical classroom strategies, and identifies common challenges faced by teachers. The thesis argues that fostering critical thinking not only advances language proficiency but also prepares students for real-life communication and problem-solving.*

***Keywords**: EFL, critical thinking, language learning, communication, pedagogy, learner autonomy.*

***Аннотация:** В данной статье анализируется роль критического мышления в классах английского языка как иностранного (EFL). В современном образовании изучение языка уже не ограничивается только освоением грамматики и словарного запаса, но также включает развитие навыков мышления высокого уровня. Критическое мышление помогает учащимся более эффективно анализировать, оценивать и использовать язык [2]. В исследовании рассматривается значение интеграции критического мышления в преподавание EFL, предлагаются практические стратегии для работы в классе, а также выявляются основные трудности, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели. В работе утверждается, что развитие критического мышления не только*

повышает уровень владения языком, но и готовит студентов к реальному общению и решению жизненных задач.

Ключевые слова: *EFL, критическое мышление, изучение языка, коммуникация, педагогика, автономия обучающихся.*

In recent years, education systems around the world have highlighted the significance of developing critical thinking skills beside subject knowledge. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this change has led to new teaching approaches that go beyond traditional memorization and repetition [3]. Critical thinking means the ability to analyze information, assess arguments, and make reasoned decisions [5]. These skills are vital not only for academic success but also for effective communication in real-life situations.

In many EFL classrooms, however, teaching still involves grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and controlled exercises [7]. While these elements are important, they do not fully prepare students to use English in meaningful and authentic contexts. That's why, integrating critical thinking into language teaching has become a key goal for teachers.

Critical thinking plays an important role in language learning. First of all, it assists students to become active learners rather than passive recipients of information. Instead of just memorizing words and structures, students work with content, ask questions, and form their own opinions. This leads to deeper understanding and better comprehension of language [6].

Secondly, critical thinking improves communication skills. When students analyze texts, participate in discussions, or solve problems, they are asked to use language in a purposeful way. They learn how to express ideas clearly, support arguments with evidence, and reply to others effectively [4]. These skills are essential for real-world communication as well.

Furthermore, critical thinking motivates learner autonomy. Students who think critically are more independent and confident in their learning. They can

evaluate their own progress, identify weaknesses, and find strategies to improve [8]. This is especially important in EFL contexts, where exposure to the language outside the classroom may be limited.

There exist several practical strategies that teachers can use to integrate critical thinking into EFL classrooms. One effective method is the usage of open-ended questions. Instead of asking simple questions with one correct answer, teachers can encourage students to explain their reasoning, compare ideas, and justify their opinions [3].

Another strategy is the use of problem-solving activities. For instance, students can work in groups to discuss real-life situations, such as planning a trip, solving a social issue, or making a decision. These tasks require students to think critically while using English as a tool for communication [9].

Debates are also a powerful way to develop critical thinking. In a debate, students must analyze a topic, form arguments, and respond to opposing views. This not only enhances their speaking skills but also teaches them how to evaluate different perspectives [2].

Additionally, teachers can use authentic materials including articles, videos, and case studies. These materials expose students to real-world language and encourage them to interpret, analyze, and discuss information [4].

In spite of its benefits, integrating critical thinking into EFL classrooms is not without challenges. One common issue is the lack of teacher training. Many teachers are familiar with traditional methods but may not have experience in teaching critical thinking skills [7]. As a result, they may feel uncertain about how to design appropriate activities. Another problem is the students' language proficiency level. Beginners may face hurdles to express complex ideas in English, which can limit their ability to engage in critical thinking tasks. Teachers need to carefully adapt activities to match students' language abilities.

Time constraints also play a role. In many educational systems, teachers must follow a strict curriculum and prepare students for exams. This can make it difficult to include activities that require deeper thinking and discussion [9].

Finally, cultural factors may affect classroom interaction. According to Lev Vygotsky, learning is shaped by social and cultural context, which can affect how students participate in critical thinking activities [10].

In conclusion, critical thinking is an essential component of effective EFL teaching. It helps students develop not only their language skills but also their ability to think independently and communicate effectively. By using strategies including open-ended questions, problem-solving tasks, debates, and authentic materials, teachers can create a more engaging and meaningful learning environment.

In spite of the fact that there are challenges in implementing critical thinking, these can be addressed through teacher training, careful lesson planning, and gradual introduction of activities. Gradulally, integrating critical thinking into EFL classrooms prepares students for both academic success and real-life communication, making it a valuable goal in modern language education.

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