

Освіта

Critical thinking in ESL classroom

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The constant scientific progress, the conquest of outer space and the penetration of artificial intelligence into everyday life made educators think about 21st-century skills which can prepare modern students for the real world.

The four 21st-century skills which were chosen are: critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy and global awareness [3, p. 17]. It may be noticed that all these skills are not new and they have been used throughout the human progress. But with the appearance of advance technologies and replacement of human labor by automated machines, these skills is what makes people unique since no machine can replace them.

In the following article we will pay our attention to critical thinking as one of the key elements in learning a foreign language as it is responsible for developing reading, writing and even speaking skills.

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate data, distinguish between facts and opinions, discriminate between reliable and non-reliable sources of information to make a decision or solve a problem [2].

Studying numerous research works we can differentiate five most common critical [1; 2; 3] thinking skills can be divided into analytical, evaluation and communication skills, creativity and open-mindedness.

Critical thinking skills can be easily studied using Bloom’s taxonomy which contains different learning objectives [4, p. 5-7]. Using Bloom’s taxonomy we will give characteristics to the above mentioned components of critical thinking competence.

Analytical skills are responsible for examining information, identifying motives and causes, making inferences, questioning evidence and developing skepticism [2].

Evaluation is another critical-thinking skill that helps to express and defend opinions by evaluating information, validity of ideas or assessing quality of work based on a set of criteria. This skill is developed through observations, objectivity, tolerance and reflection [2].

Communication skills help students to collaborate with their group mates and teachers effectively in order to share ideas or figure out solutions to complex problems. These include interpersonal skills, teamwork, and ability to express your opinion, explain the task, assess and present the obtained results [3, p.18].

Creativity is a top-level skill in Bloom's taxonomy which involves curiosity, imaginative and visionary skills, predicting, conceptualization and cognitive flexibility [4, p. 6]. It is responsible for compiling information in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.

Open-mindedness, in its turn, is responsible for impartial judgments, accepting and appreciating other cultures and traditions, acquiring different information with the ability to differentiate facts and opinions [1].

These skills can be easily developed through a set of exercises while learning English. Among such exercises are:

- reading the text and answering the questioning with paying attention to details;
- circling the "odd word out" trains analytical skills of examining, contrasting and categorizing information;
- asking critical questions, such as "What ...?", "Why ...?", "Who ...?", "How ...?", "When ...?" or "Where ...?";
- expressing opinions followed by a reason;
- a for-and-against essay helps develop not only writing but evaluating skills as well; creating the list of reasons or evidence supporting the argument for or against the statement is a good example of application critical thinking skills.

Thus, critical thinking skills developed at foreign language lessons help to be successful in various spheres of life and everyday situations. They help to teach critical literacy, to distinguish and use authentic meaningful texts, to pass language exams and to implement critical thinking in future occupation.

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