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## **CRITICAL THINKING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING STUDENTS**

**Key words:** critical thinking, encouragement, students, activities, challenges

Critical thinking- is the ability to effectively evaluate information and form judgements. It means that in traditional classroom students answer questions that are either right or wrong, but in a critical thinking classroom, instead teachers encourage students to evaluate information and express their thoughts, using evidence to support their thinking. This makes learning meaningful to them. It is one of the most important skills the teachers can teach their students. Empower means that teachers can help them to be stronger and more confident in their own lives.

If students are strong critical thinkers, they demonstrate these eight pillars of critical thinking:

1. Communicate ideas clearly
2. Reflect on their own actions and learning
3. Consider different perspectives
4. Demonstrate creativity
5. Apply knowledge to new situations
6. Solve problems
7. Evaluate information
8. Inquire and ask meaningful questions

Students who can do these eight things have the ability to reach their potential. They are not just memorizing facts in the classroom; they are learning how to think, which, in my opinion, is the purpose of education. There are some benefits of critical thinking:

1. Thinking independently;
2. Making informed decisions;
3. Evaluating information;
4. Considering differing viewpoints;
5. Fostering self-reflection;
6. Positive impact on students' motivation and language acquisition

However, many teachers are hesitant to try to do too much critical thinking in their classes, because there are also many challenges. Let's mention some challenges the teachers face:

1. **Not enough time.** One of the big challenges is that doing critical thinking takes time. It doesn't take much time to answer "yes" or "no," but if a teacher

wants students to elaborate on their answers to address a controversial topic or consider different sides of an argument, they need time to process.

2. **It feels like it takes away from the curriculum.** Teachers feel like it takes away from the curriculum. Teachers face a lot of pressure because their school is giving them a curriculum to follow. So, critical thinking feels like it is taking time away from the curriculum. I would argue, however, that critical thinking activities enhance the curriculum and accelerate language acquisition, because students are thinking and communicating on a different level.

3. **Schools don't provide much training.** Doing effective critical thinking takes training. It takes a lot of practice and training for teachers to be good and making critical thinking a part of their curriculum. Many teachers don't know how to help their students think more critically and unfortunately a lot of schools don't provide enough support in this area.

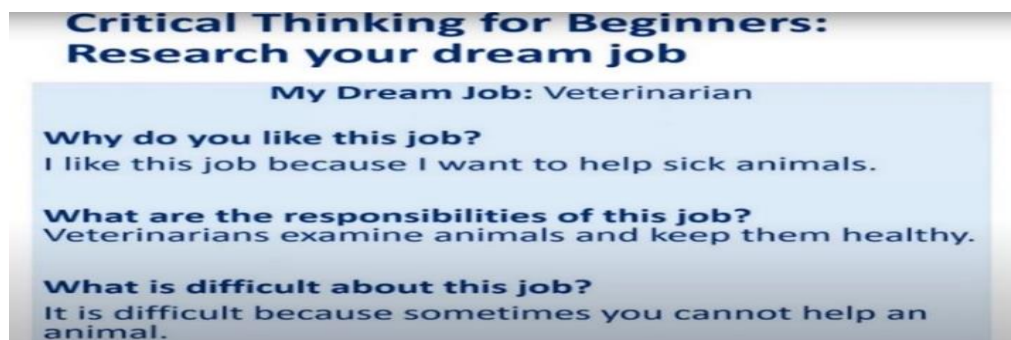
4. **Some think it's just for advanced learners.** Teachers of beginning levels feel that critical thinking is just for advanced learners and suppose that they can't teach critical thinking when their student's level of proficiency is low. However, I disagree. I am going to show you some ways to help your beginning students think critically as well. These challenges are important to consider. Hopefully though you'll see that the benefits outweigh the challenges.

Even beginning students can be taught critical thinking skills. Let's look at how you can incorporate critical thinking for beginners.

For example, beginners typically learn a list of occupations or jobs such as teacher, doctor or accountant. Well, it is fine to have your students learn vocabulary list, you can push them further to think critically. Here are some questions you can ask them:

- 1) Which 3 jobs are the most difficult, and why?
- 2) Which job would you like the most, and why?
- 3) Which job is the most important? Why do you think that?

Getting beginning students to talk about the occupations helps them to engage with the vocabulary and leads to better language acquisition. To follow up with this activity you can have your beginning students research and present their dream job. In this example (pic.1) students choose a veterinarian as a dream job:



(Pic.1)

In this activity you force your students to do much more than just memorize a list of jobs. They are practicing critical thinking. After this activity you can push their learning even further by asking questions that help them reflect on the activity (Pic.2)

<b>Critical Thinking for Beginners</b>	
<b>Pillars of Critical Thinking</b>	<b>Example Beginner Questions</b>
<b>Reflect on your own learning</b>	What did you learn from this activity?
<b>Consider different perspectives</b>	How is your dream job different from your classmates' dream job?

(Pic.2)

Asking the first question allows them to reflect on what they are learning, which is one of the pillars of critical thinking. By asking the second question, this helps students to consider different perspectives, which is another pillar of critical thinking. This is an overview of critical thinking. The next step is asking Open-Ended Questions. This is a key to critical thinking. Firstly, let's define what the Open-Ended Questions are:

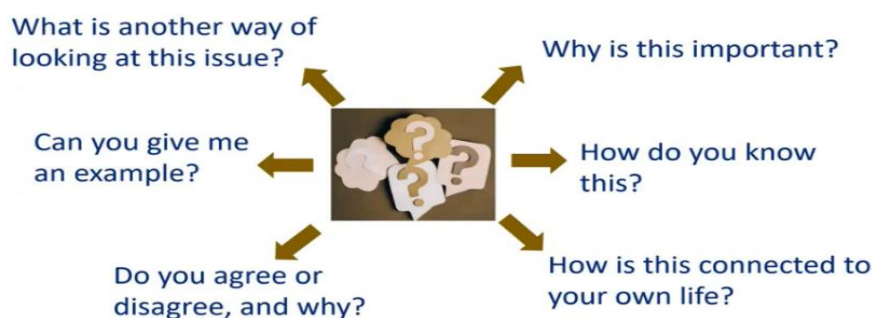
The questions that can't be answered with just a simple "yes" or "no". Instead, these questions require students to elaborate or give more information and examples. Students will need to support their answers not just say "yes" or "no". So, why ask open-ended questions?

- Students think more deeply about a topic
- Students practice communication and listening
- Accelerates language learning

- Consider other perspectives

In traditional English as a foreign language classes, we see a lot of questions, where the answers are either “right” or “wrong”. If we want to foster more critical thinking in the classes, we need to ask questions that require deeper thinking. When we ask open-ended questions, students think deeply about the topic. They practice communication and listening which accelerates language learning. It also helps students to consider other perspectives. Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

### **Asking open-ended questions**



(Pic.3)

These questions require reflection and deeper understanding. Don't be satisfied with one-word answers like “yes” or “no”. Push your students to provide examples to explain why this is important or how it is connected to their own lives.

To better illustrate what I am talking about, here is an example of a Close-Ended question that doesn't elicit much critical thinking. “What is global warming?”. There is nothing wrong with this question, but it doesn't push the students to do anything more than give a definition. But we can ask an open-ended question: “How does global warming impact your future, and how do you feel about it? This type of question requires deeper thought and memorizing a definition. It makes a lesson personal and encourages students to think about consequences and causes affects. If students can train their brains to think about the causes and affects and how events connect to their own lives, this is an excellent use of class time.

With open-ended questions be sure to give students time to think and discuss. One activity I'd like to do in my classes with the open-ended questions is called Think-Pair-Share. It is effective because:

- 1) It allows for reflection time
- 2) Students can try out their ideas with a partner first
- 3) It also builds oral communication skills.

Here is how you do Think-Pair-Share (Steps):

**Step 1.** Give students time to think about your question. They can write their thoughts down in a notebook.

**Step 2.** They share their ideas with a partner. Students often get scared to share ideas in front of the whole class, but when with the partner they love sharing. This way they are practicing what they want to say and get to consider their partners' opinions.

**Step 3.** They share the ideas in a group of four or with the whole class. Now, students have one more opportunity to communicate their ideas and by now they will feel more comfortable sharing with a larger group. They are gaining more ideas because they are learning from classmates.

It is a good idea to give students a graphic organizer such as this one when they do Think-Pair-Share.

#### Think-Pair-Share

Topic or Question:		
What I think:	What my partner thinks:	What we will share:

(Pic.4)

Here students write the open-ended question at the top. In the first square on the left they write down their own thoughts about the question. Then, when they pair with the partner, they write down the partner's ideas in the second square. Finally, they both decide what they want to share with the whole class, or a larger group and they will write that in the third square. This graphic organizer is a good example of scaffolding critical thinking. Many of our students are new to critical thinking. It is difficult for them to suddenly give their opinions and have discussions in class. We should provide them with Critical Thinking Scaffolding Support.

Critical Thinking Scaffolding Support is:

- 1) Graphic Organizer; 2) Teach key vocabulary; 3) Tap into prior knowledge; 4) Give reflection time.

Just like when we build a building, we need to put scaffolding up on the outside, so that we can construct the building little by little. We also need to provide scaffolding for students. Someways we can provide scaffolding or to give

them graphic organizer or a worksheet to guide them, teach key vocabulary, so they can understand and discuss the concepts, connect their learning with what they already know, so tap into prior knowledge, so that learning becomes meaningful and personal and give reflection time, so they can elaborate on their answers and give examples.

*Four Corners* activity and *Gallery Work* are great critical thinking activities, because

- 1) Promotes discussion of different perspectives
- 2) Students need to use evidence and examples to support their opinions

So we need to give reasons to back up of what they are saying.

- 3) Students practice communication and listening
- 4) These are also fun activities for kinesthetic learners, because students get out of their seats for these activities.

In *Four Corners* activity students debate a controversy of question.

- 1) Make 4 signs (one for each corner): Strongly agree, Agree, Strongly disagree and Disagree. You should put each of the signs in the corners of your classroom.

2) Write a controversial statement or open-ended question on the board for them to consider. This should be related to theme of what they are studying. For example, you can write: "Social media is harmful" or "Teachers should not give homework".

3) Step three is to give students time to think. Present the question to the students. Give them time to think about your question. They can write down their thoughts independently in their notebooks or on a graphic organizer.

4) Step four is to commit to a corner and discuss. After you give them independent thinking time show the students the signs in the corners and ask them to stand up and move to one of the corners. In the corners students form groups of 2-3 and share their ideas. Be sure to leave time for discussion. The teacher will move from group to group to monitor the discussion.

5) Step five is Present. Call on students to present a summary of their opinions (can be oral or written) to share with the whole class. If after hearing the ideas of their classmates, if anyone wants to change corners, they can do so, but they need to explain why.

Here is a Variation of activity that is fun as well (Pic.4) and better for low level students.



(Pic.4)

You can make the signs in the corner A, B, C, D instead and put the question on the board. For example, this question is for the beginning students who are studying the names of countries.

As you can see, this critical thinking activity can work for students at all levels.

The teacher uses the graphic organizer where students give their opinion if they strongly agree, disagree and etc. and provide three reasons why they choose this response. After they go to the corners and listen to the ideas of their group, they can write down three new reasons from their classmates.

Another activity is “Gallery Walk”. This activity is like visiting an art gallery. Meaningful questions, photos, problem-solving situations, or quotations are placed around the room just like an art gallery. Students will walk around the classroom, looking at the gallery and they will work together in small groups to respond to what they see. Four Corners and the Gallery Walk activities are used:

- Before introducing new material to activate prior knowledge
- After a short reading
- To prepare for a test
- Generating ideas for writing

In conclusion, Critical Thinking is very important because: a) Students are engaged and acquire language faster; b) Students become independent thinkers; c) Learning becomes meaningful.

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### **XARİCİ DİL KİMİ İNGİLİS DİLİ SİNFİNDƏ TƏNQİDİ DÜŞÜNCƏ: TƏLƏBƏLƏRİN CƏLB EDİLMƏSİ VƏ MAARİFLƏNDİRİLMƏSİ**

**Açar sözlər:** tənqidi düşüncə, həvəsləndirmə, tələbələr, tapşırıqlar, çətinliklər

#### **Xülasə**

Tənqidi düşüncə – məlumatları səmərəli şəkildə analiz etmək, qiymətləndirmək və əsaslandırılmış mühakimələr formalaşdırmaq bacarığıdır. Ənənəvi siniflərdə əsas diqqət düzgün və ya yanlış cavabların verilməsinə yönəldiyi halda, tənqidi düşüncəyə əsaslanan dərslərdə müəllimlər tələbələri məlumatları dəyərləndirməyə və öz fikirlərini əsaslandıraraq ifadə etməyə təşviq edirlər. Bu yanaşma öyrənməni tələbələr üçün daha mənalı və cəlbedici edir, eyni zamanda müəllimlərə onlara həyat üçün zəruri olan vacib bacarıqları aşılamaq imkanı yaradır. Tənqidi düşüncə tələbələri daha müstəqil və güclü düşünən fərdlərə çevirir. Onlar sadəcə faktları əzbərləməklə kifayətlənmir, həm də necə düşünməyi öyrənirlər. Bu bacarıq sayəsində tələbələr fərqli baxış bucaqlarını nəzərə almağı, məlumatları təhlil etməyi və nəticə çıxarmağı öyrənirlər. Eyni zamanda, bu proses onların daxili motivasiyasını artırır və öyrənməyə daha fəal şəkildə qoşulmalarını təmin edir.

Nəticə etibarilə, tənqidi düşüncə tələbələrin təhsil prosesində aktiv iştirakını gücləndirir, onların yaradıcı və analitik düşünmə bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirir və ümumi öyrənmə təcrübəsini daha mənalı və səmərəli edir.

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### **КРИТИЧЕСКОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ НА УРОКАХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА КАК ИНОСТРАННОГО: ВОВЛЕЧЕНИЕ И ПООЩРЕНИЕ СТУДЕНТОВ**

**Ключевые слова:** Критическое мышление, поощрение, студенты, задания, проблемы

#### **Резюме**

Статья подчеркивает важность критического мышления в процессе изучения английского языка как иностранного. Ключевое преимущество данного подхода заключается в развитии независимого мышления, способности принимать обоснованные решения, анализировать информацию и критически осмысливать собственные знания. Это, в свою очередь, способствует повышению мотивации и более эффективному усвоению языка.

Основные компоненты критического мышления включают ясное изложение идей, самоанализ, рассмотрение различных точек зрения, креативность, применение знаний в новых контекстах, умение решать проблемы, оценивать информацию и формулировать содержательные вопросы. Развитие этих навыков позволяет студентам не просто запоминать факты, но и разумно мыслить, что значительно повышает их образовательный потенциал.

**Rəyçi: dos. Əsədova Məhəbbət Nəcəf qızı**