

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS VIA TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The current article highlights the educational potential of the foreign language as a university subject and to verify theoretically and practically the possibility of developing critical thinking skills of students in the process of foreign language acquisition at the tertiary level of education. It includes, as a demand, annotation, keywords, introduction, main part(methods,results and discussion),conclusion and reference list.

Key words: *critical thinking, tertiary education, intellectual skills, communicative approach, interrelated teaching, language skills, educational potential, foreign language.*

ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada chet tilining oliy ta`lim muassasasi predmeti sifatidagi ta`lim salohiyatidagi o`rni yoritilgan va ta`limning uchinchi bosqichida chet tilini o`zlashtirish jarayonida talabalarning tanqidiy fikrlash qobiliyatlarini rivojlantirish imkoniyatlarini nazariy va amaliy jihatdan sinovdan o`tqazish ko`zda tutilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: *tanqidiy fikrlash,o`rta maxsus ta`lim,intelektual qobiliyatlar, kommunikativ yondashuv,o`zaro bog`liqlikdagi o`qitish,til uslublari,talimiy potensial,xorijiy til.*

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье освещается воспитательный потенциал иностранного языка как вузовского предмета, а также теоретически и практически проверяется возможность развития навыков критического мышления студентов в процессе овладения иностранным языком на уровне высшего образования. Он включает, как требование, аннотацию, ключевые слова, введение, основную часть (методы, результаты и обсуждение), заключение и список литературы.

Ключевые слова: *критическое мышление, высшее образование, интеллектуальные способности, коммуникативный подход, взаимосвязанное обучение, языковые навыки, образовательный потенциал, иностранный язык*

INTRODUCTION

Modernization processes taking place in the system of worldwide tertiary education outline fundamentally new approaches to the realization of the educational potential of academic disciplines, and therefore, to the development of cognitive abilities and intellectual skills of students. According to the experience of world methodologists and teachers, one of such areas is the development of the critical thinking (CT) of students. The question of the development of critical thinking skills (CTS) of students is important for many humanitarian and science disciplines. If so, what the critical thinking is?

We often make the mistake of confusing being critical with being negative or “nit-picking” and this is unfortunate. It is a skill that is taught at school or universities not only gather proper data or information but to examine it carefully and question its reliability. But its main purpose is to better equip you to understand the world, to make more sense of vast amount of information that is available to us and to avoid, being manipulated.

The possibilities and specifics of the development of CTS of students of different ages are thoroughly investigated in modern pedagogical science. The relevance of the study is confirmed by the fact that CT is considered to be one of the key competencies in modern education as it is highly demanded on the job market, on the one hand, and the interest of the scientific community to this problem, on the other hand. This is substantiated by a large number of scientific research in this field of pedagogical science (Khabarova and Sadova, 2020; Kavenuke, Kinyota, and Kayombo, 2020; Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 2017; El Soufi and See, 2019). Nowadays, the issue of CTS development becomes more important in tertiary education. It requires a completely new view on the realization of the educational potential of university disciplines. It also allows looking at the subject “Foreign Language” from a different angle in terms of the feasibility of using technology for CT development while teaching a foreign language. The importance of addressing the issues of optimal use of the educational potential of a foreign language in higher education is also necessitated by the formation of global information space and a huge increase in the volume of information, including information in foreign languages. It assumes not only a sufficient level of a specialist’s communicative competence but also the ability to critically assess reliability and relevance of information, the ability to work effectively with information (receive, store, interpret, and use), recognize problems and find quick but balanced ways to solve them. Obviously, these skills and abilities cannot be developed only while learning a foreign language in a traditional way.

They require intentional training within the framework of a specially organized educational process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodological aspect of developing CT has been profoundly studied by Western scientists. Its history goes back to 1915s .Dewey studied the issue of reflective thinking and viewed it as an active, persistent and attentive consideration of any opinion or form of knowledge in the light of the foundations it rests on and the analysis of the conclusions it leads to. Glaser (1941) noted that CT calls for a constant effort to explore any belief or form of knowledge through the prism of the facts that serve as their proof, and the conclusions to which they lead. According to Ennis (1996), CT helps to make irrevocable decisions about what to do and what to believe. The analysis of studies and concepts on the problem of CT allowed us to develop a working definition relevant to this research. We define CT as a special type of a person's reflexive mental activity aimed at a conscious engagement into the process of thinking while evaluating and verifying facts, hypotheses, and opinions, analyzing and solving problem situations, making decisions, and defending one's point of view. The analysis of research on students' education by Stepanova (1974), Zimnyaya (1989), Lomteva (2001) shows that the student age is a period of intensive development of mental cognitive processes and abilities. The intellectual development of students is the main direction of personal development at this age and is connected with education as the basic activity of the student. In psychology, the student age is a sensitive period for the development of an individual's intellectual sphere in general, and the development of critical thinking in particular.

The need to address the educational potential of academic subjects, such as the foreign language, in terms of the development of CT is confirmed by several studies. Milrud (1992) investigated the problem of the developing potential of the foreign language as a university discipline. The scholar noted that activities involving foreign language texts (reading, listening, and writing in specially created pedagogical conditions) contribute to the development of general intellectual abilities of a person, such as analytical skills, productivity, logical intelligence, intellectual flexibility. These intellectual abilities are related to CTS. Litovchenko (2019) analyzes the features of the use of CTS in the study of the foreign language at a university, emphasizing the relationship between language and thinking and the need to include training in higher-order thinking skills in the curriculum. El Soufi and See (2019) examined various strategies for the development of CT in the process of teaching English to university students and stated their effectiveness.

Grigoryeva, Zimmaya, and Merzlyakova (1985) believe that the concept of interconnected training of language skills might be one of the means of solving the general educational tasks of teaching the foreign language at university. The formation of CTS is not possible without the formation of students' speech activity because it involves the implementation of educational activities that include the reception of information through listening and reading, processing of this information and production of own thoughts through speaking and writing. This way, interconnected training can be viewed as training aimed at the development of CTS in the process of simultaneous interrelated teaching of language skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). These principles of communicative, problem-based learning, as well as interrelated teaching of language skills, formed the basis for the methodology of developing students' CTS.

METHODS

The short-term pilot study was conducted in the Uzbek State World languages university. The study involved 22 fourth-year bachelor degree students majoring in Linguistics and 14 first-year master degree students majoring in Foreign Language and Literature department. The developed methodology was tested at three stages: 1) pre-test questionnaires; 2) experimental training; 3) post-test questionnaires. Placement tests and questionnaires used for this study were an adapted version of critical thinking self-assessment test "Measuring My Critical Thinking, an adapted test "Pre-Test of Critical Thinking" (Starkey, 2004). There were three stages of the experimental training. At the first stage, students were introduced to the concept of CT. The purpose of this step was the formation of knowledge and goal-setting necessary for the development of CT, general ideas about CT, and intellectual skills and abilities that contribute to the development of CT. This stage was represented by the thematic sections "Introduction to Critical Thinking" and "Critical Thinking Activities". The content of this stage was theoretical material on the problem of CT and practical exercises which were used as a means to create a cognitive basis for further educational activities of students.

Criteria for checking of critical thinking skills.

Tasks Reflection of own thinking process:

- Evaluate the process of own thinking, reasoning, presentation of arguments;
- Develop objectivity of thinking, be able to put yourself in the place of others in order to understand and accept different points of view;
- Refrain from hasty judgments, purposefully question facts and information in order to formulate correct and logical conclusions;

– Recognize the degree of influence of extraneous factors (emotions, social stereotypes, own beliefs and ideas) on the thinking process.

Goal-setting skills:

– Analyze own process of setting and implementing life, educational, and professional goals

--Develop strategies to achieve the goal.

Justification of one's position:

– Clearly state own position and be precise in the choice of language tools

– Select and build arguments in defense of your point of view.

Information analysis:

– Evaluate the reliability of information;

– Select necessary and relevant information;

– Obtain necessary additional information through various ways: asking questions, comparing different sources of information.

Analysis and evaluation of arguments:

– Analyze and evaluate quality, validity, reliability, and consistency of statements, assumptions, arguments, conclusions, arguments, evidence.

– Detect the presence or absence of subjective assessments and biases in the sources of information concerning the presented information.

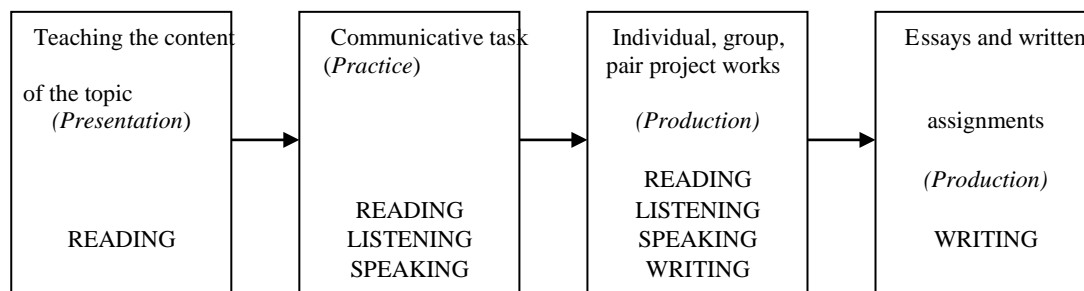
Solving problems:

– Recognize the problem and look at it from different angles, compare and contrast different opinions; – Anticipate and evaluate possible solutions to the problem situation.

Decision making: – Consider and evaluate alternatives for a decision;

– Anticipate the consequences of the decisions made.

The second stage of the experiment included the following topics: “Thinking critically About Goals”, “Problem Solving”, “Critical Thinking and Stereotypes”, “Critical Thinking in the Digital Age”, “Decision Making” and other topics. At this stage, the problems related to the expansion of the information space were discussed, the language of mass media and advertising was studied, linguistic and stylistic methods and techniques contributing to misperception of information were studied. Students studied flyers and slogans individually, in pairs and in small groups, analyzed articles of English-language mass media (high-quality and tabloids, “yellow” press, Internet sources, television), solved problems. The methodology of teaching was designed according to the following model:

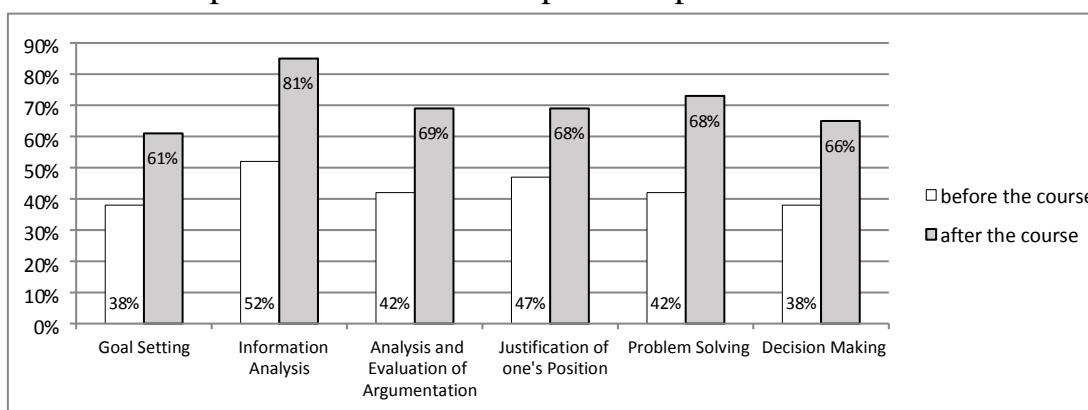


RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Observations carried out during the experimental teaching showed that the indicators of the level of CTS, the ability to apply them in daily life and learning activities have improved considerably in the experimental group. The post-test of students' CTS revealed that students had a much higher evaluation indicator of CTS (89% of students were satisfied with own skills and noted a qualitative change in the CT process).

“Post-Test of Critical Thinking” showed that the increase of the development of CTS level in the experimental group was 26%. The greatest effectiveness of the method was noted for the ability to make balanced and logical decisions (growth rate was 28%), work with information (29%) and solve problem situations (26%). The lowest growth rate was for the ability to justify own position (21%). The effectiveness of the proposed methodology was reflected in the quantitative indicators obtained during the comparison of the input and final results of critical thinking skills tests.

Table 1. Comparative results of the pre- and post-tests of students' CTS:



Students noted that they became aware of the way they think, obtain and process information, read texts. It is the indication of their reflection, which is the most important component of critical thinking, a conscious attitude to their own mental activity. Students highly appreciated the practical orientation of the course, pointing

out the possibility of using the skills and strategies of CT in their daily life and educational activities. Most of the students noted the high communicative value and interactivity of the exercises, the opportunity to express their point of view, to discuss current topics, which also indicates the development of students' communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, students noted that they became aware of the way they think, obtain and process information, read texts. It is the indication of their reflection, which is the most important component of critical thinking, a conscious attitude to their own mental activity. Students highly appreciated the practical orientation of the course, pointing out the possibility of using the skills and strategies of CT in their daily life and educational activities. Most of the students noted the high communicative value and interactivity of the exercises, the opportunity to express their point of view, to discuss current topics, which also indicates the development of students' communicative competence. Critical thinking is not the only educational purpose but also life skill facilitating student`s further achievements.

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