CRITICAL THINKING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the mere transmission of language knowledge. In today's globalized world, the ability to think critically is highly valued, as it allows individuals to navigate complex situations, analyze and evaluate information, and make informed decisions. Integrating critical thinking into TEFL has emerged as an essential aspect of effective language instruction, as it not only enhances language proficiency but also develops learners' cognitive skills. This article explores the significance of incorporating critical thinking in TEFL and its impact on language acquisition and cognitive development.
Keywords: critical thinking; EFL; problem-based learning.

Critical thinking is a cognitive process that involves analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to form reasoned judgments and make informed decisions. In the era of information technology, the speed and amount of information are changing day by day, and the current information become insufficient to keep up with the age. Therefore, in today's education system, it aims to educate those who can build knowledge through their own cognitive filters, not just by memorizing existing knowledge [1, p. 58]. In this case, individuals need to have a higher level of order thinking ability, such as self-regulation strategies, critical thinking, problem solving, and metacognitive thinking. Among these skills, critical thinking is the key skill that is used in most thought processes. It goes beyond memorization and rote learning, encouraging learners to engage actively with the language and think independently. Critical thinking skills include questioning assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, identifying biases, and applying logical reasoning. These skills are highly relevant in today's information-driven society, where individuals need to sift through vast amounts of information and make sound judgments.

Integrating critical thinking in TEFL involves creating a classroom environment that fosters active engagement, inquiry, and problem-solving. «Critical thinking has become a high priority in almost every institution and educational system around the world, particularly since the second half of the 20th century. Developing the learners' critical thinking skills has become an educational ideal that schools strive to achieve» [2, p. 26]. It requires teachers to design instructional activities that challenge learners to think critically while using the English language. Various strategies can be employed to incorporate critical thinking into language instruction, such as problem-solving tasks, debates, case studies, and critical reading and writing activities. These activities prompt learners to analyze language structures, evaluate arguments, and express their opinions effectively in English.

Critical thinking activities provide learners with opportunities to apply their language skills in meaningful and authentic contexts. By engaging in tasks that require analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, learners deepen their understanding of language structures, vocabulary usage, and cultural nuances. This leads to improved language proficiency, as learners develop the ability to communicate more effectively and fluently [3, p. 401]. Challenges and Considerations in Integrating critical thinking in TEFL comes with certain challenges that need to be addressed. Teachers may require additional training and support to design and implement effective critical thinking activities. They need to create a classroom environment that encourages open dialogue, respect for diverse perspectives, and risk-taking. Here are some examples of activities that promote critical thinking in the language classroom. Problem-solving tasks is to present learners with real-life scenarios or challenges that require them to analyze the situation, brainstorm possible solutions, and evaluate the pros and cons of each option.

Problem solving is an important part of teaching and learning, and teachers should emphasize and promote problem solving through daily practice. It is worth mentioning that teachers are expected to involve students in problem-solving tasks, thus triggering their intellectual and creative abilities. English teaching can be improved further if students have the opportunity to solve unknown problems through oral and written communication skills to facilitate teaching. English teachers need to encourage their students to conduct conduct challenging activities with four language skills and considering students' cognitive abilities [4]. For example, a teacher can ask students to work in groups and propose solutions to an environmental problem or simulate a business negotiation where they must consider various perspectives and generate creative solutions. Debate and discussion is to engage learners in debates or discussions on controversial topics or current issues. Assign roles and encourage students to research and present arguments based on evidence and logical reasoning.

Critical reading and writing refers to assigning reading materials that challenge learners to think critically. For instance, provide an article or a short story and ask students to analyze the author's arguments or identify logical fallacies. Additionally, assign writing tasks that require learners to express their opinions and support them with evidence, encouraging them to think critically about the topic and communicate their ideas effectively. Information evaluation teaches learners how to critically evaluate online sources of information. Providing them with examples of credible and unreliable sources and guide them through the process of analyzing bias, identifying misleading information, and verifying sources. This activity helps learners develop the necessary skills to navigate the vast amount of information available online and make informed judgments.

Problem-Based Learning is to resent learners with authentic, language-related problems that require critical thinking to solve. For example, give students a task to plan a trip to a foreign country, where they must research transportation options, accommodation, and cultural considerations while considering budget constraints. This activity promotes critical thinking, research skills, and language use in a practical context [4, p. 67].

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an effective approach to promote critical thinking in TEFL. Here are some additional examples of problem-based learning activities that can be incorporated into the language classroom:
-    allocate time for small-group or whole-class discussions where learners can share their insights, perspectives, and solutions;
-    encourage learners to listen actively to their peers, ask clarifying questions, and provide constructive feedback;
-    facilitate the discussion by posing thought-provoking questions that stimulate critical thinking and promote deeper analysis of the problem [5, p. 92].

The think-pair-share technique can be used to promote individual reflection and collaborative discussion. First, learners are asked to individually reflect on the problem or task and generate their ideas or solutions. Then, students are paired to discuss their thoughts and reasoning with a partner. Finally, the pairs gather to share their ideas with the whole class. This structured approach allows for both individual reflection and collaborative sense-making. Incorporate opportunities for learners to provide peer feedback on each other's problem-solving processes or solutions. Encourage learners to offer constructive criticism, ask probing questions, and provide suggestions for improvement. This peer feedback process stimulates reflection and encourages learners to critically evaluate their own work and the work of their peers [6, p. 65].

At the end of the problem-based learning activity, teachers should allocate time for learners to engage in a summative reflection. Students can be asked to reflect on their overall learning experience, the skills they developed, and how they can apply their learning to real-life situations [7, p. 42]. This reflective exercise helps consolidate learning, reinforces critical thinking skills, and encourages learners to make connections between the problem-based learning activity and their broader language learning goals. By incorporating these strategies,

we can create a supportive and reflective learning environment where learners actively engage in critical thinking. Critical thinking activities in TEFL foster the development of higher-order cognitive skills. Analyzing and evaluating information, forming arguments, and solving problems require learners to engage in critical thinking processes such as reasoning, analysis, evaluation, and creativity. These skills enhance learners' overall cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making skills, which are transferable to various aspects of their lives and empowers learners to think critically about their own language use, identify areas for improvement, and seek resources independently.

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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PIANO PERFORMANCE

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This paper aims to analyze the effective practice strategies for undergraduate pianist students in China, focusing on theoretical foundations, practical experiences, and potential implications. The study explores the nature of musical practice, pedagogical approaches, and the impact of practice routines, repertoire selection, and performance preparation on the musical development of pianist students. By examining the experiences and challenges faced by undergraduate pianist students, the paper provides insights into enhancing practice strategies and promoting holistic musical development. The findings offer valuable recommendations for educators and administrators to support the musical growth and well-being of undergraduate pianist students in China.
Keywords: effective practice strategies; undergraduate pianist students; musical development; pedagogical approaches; performance preparation.

The pursuit of excellence in piano performance requires not only talent and dedication but also effective practice strategies. For undergraduate pianist students in China, the development of comprehensive and efficient practice techniques is essential for honing their musical skills and achieving artistic proficiency. This paper aims to analyze the effective practice strategies for undergraduate pianist students in China, examining the theoretical foundations, practical experiences, and potential implications for musical development.