DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. This article discusses the importance of developing critical thinking through English language learning activities. In modern education, language learning is not limited to memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Students should also be able to analyze information, compare ideas, express opinions, solve problems, and make logical conclusions. English language classes provide many opportunities for developing these skills through discussions, debates, problem-solving tasks, text analysis, project work, writing activities, and collaborative learning. The article highlights how critical thinking can improve students' communicative competence, academic performance, creativity, and independent learning. It also emphasizes the role of the teacher in organizing meaningful activities that encourage learners to think deeply and use English effectively.

Keywords: critical thinking, English language teaching, language learning activities, communication, analysis, discussion, problem-solving, learner autonomy.

In modern English language teaching, one of the main goals is to develop not only students' linguistic knowledge but also their ability to think critically. Critical thinking means the ability to analyze information, evaluate ideas, compare different opinions, identify problems, and make reasonable decisions. It helps learners understand information deeply instead of accepting it passively. In foreign language education, critical thinking is especially important because students need to use English for communication, academic study, professional development, and intercultural interaction.

Traditional English lessons often focus on grammar explanations, vocabulary memorization, translation, and mechanical exercises. These activities are useful for building basic language knowledge, but they may not be enough to prepare students for real-life communication. In real situations, learners need to express their own opinions, support ideas with examples, ask questions, respond to different viewpoints, and solve communicative problems. Therefore, English language teaching should include activities that encourage students to think, discuss, analyze, and create.

English language classes provide a good environment for developing critical thinking because language itself is connected with meaning, communication, and interpretation. When students read a text, listen to a dialogue, discuss a problem, or write an essay, they work not only with words but also with ideas. For example, while reading an article, students can identify the main idea, distinguish facts from opinions, find arguments, compare information, and express their attitude to the text. Such activities help learners develop both language skills and thinking skills at the same time.

Discussion activities are one of the most effective ways to develop critical thinking. When students discuss a topic, they learn to express opinions, explain reasons, listen to others, and

respond politely. Topics should be interesting, relevant, and appropriate to students' language level. For example, students can discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, the role of technology in education, environmental problems, or the importance of learning foreign languages. During discussion, students learn to support their ideas with arguments and examples. This develops fluency, confidence, and logical thinking.

Debates are also useful for developing critical thinking in English classes. In debates, students take a position on a topic and defend it with arguments. They also listen to the opposing side and respond to counterarguments. This activity teaches learners to organize ideas clearly, use persuasive language, and think from different perspectives. Debates help students understand that one problem may have several possible viewpoints. They also develop speaking skills, analytical thinking, and respect for other opinions.

Problem-solving tasks can make English lessons more meaningful and practical. In these activities, students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to find solutions to a specific problem. For example, they may decide how to improve student motivation, plan a cultural event, solve a travel problem, or choose the best solution for a classroom situation. While completing such tasks, students use English to exchange ideas, negotiate, make decisions, and present results. This develops communication, cooperation, creativity, and decision-making skills.

Text analysis is another important activity for critical thinking development. Teachers can use short stories, articles, essays, interviews, advertisements, and online materials to encourage students to analyze content. Students can answer questions such as: What is the author's main idea? What evidence is used? Is the information reliable? What is the purpose of the text? Do I agree or disagree with the author? These questions help students become more active readers. They also develop academic reading skills and the ability to evaluate information critically.

Writing activities also support critical thinking. When students write opinion essays, argumentative paragraphs, summaries, reflections, or problem-solution essays, they learn to organize ideas, support opinions, and make conclusions. Writing requires planning, selecting information, connecting ideas logically, and revising the text. For example, in an opinion essay, students should not only state their view but also explain reasons and give examples. This process develops both written communication and analytical thinking.

Project-based learning gives students wider opportunities to use critical thinking. In project work, learners choose a topic, collect information, analyze materials, cooperate with group members, and present final results. Projects may include posters, presentations, videos, surveys, reports, or digital stories. For example, students can prepare a project about modern methods of learning English or the influence of social media on students' language development. During the project, students learn to search for information, select important facts, compare ideas, and present conclusions in English.

Collaborative learning is also closely connected with critical thinking. When students work in groups, they discuss ideas, explain opinions, ask questions, and evaluate each other's suggestions. This helps them look at a problem from different angles. Group work also develops social skills, responsibility, and respect. However, teachers should organize collaborative tasks carefully. Clear instructions, time limits, and specific roles can help all students participate actively.

Teachers play an important role in developing critical thinking through English language learning activities. The teacher should not only give information but also ask meaningful questions, create problem situations, encourage students to express opinions, and guide them in analyzing

ideas. Questions such as “Why do you think so?”, “Can you give an example?”, “What is another possible solution?”, and “Do you agree or disagree?” help students think more deeply. A supportive classroom atmosphere is also necessary because students should feel free to share their ideas without fear of making mistakes.

Assessment can also support critical thinking. Instead of using only traditional grammar tests, teachers can assess presentations, discussions, essays, projects, portfolios, and reflective tasks. Rubrics can include criteria such as clarity of ideas, use of arguments, organization, creativity, language accuracy, and participation. When students understand these criteria, they become more aware of how to improve both their language and thinking skills.

There may be some challenges in developing critical thinking in English classes. Some students may be passive because they are used to teacher-centered lessons. Others may have limited vocabulary and may find it difficult to express complex ideas in English. Large classes and limited lesson time can also create difficulties. To overcome these problems, teachers can begin with simple activities, provide useful phrases, use pair work before group discussions, and choose topics that are familiar to students. Gradual practice helps learners become more confident and active.

In conclusion, developing critical thinking through English language learning activities is very important in modern education. Discussions, debates, problem-solving tasks, text analysis, writing activities, project work, and collaborative learning help students use English meaningfully and think independently. These activities improve not only language skills but also creativity, communication, decision-making, and learner autonomy. Therefore, English teachers should integrate critical thinking activities into regular lessons in order to prepare students for academic, professional, and real-life communication.

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