



INTEGRATING CLT, CRITICAL THINKING, AND DIGITAL SYNCRETISM: A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL DIGITAL AGENCY IN EFL

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Annotation: *This article interrogates the traditional silos of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Critical Thinking (CT), and Digital Technology (DT) within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. Proposing a shift toward Critical Digital Agency (CDA), the study argues that meaningful language acquisition occurs when students move beyond functional fluency into the realm of digital syncretism. Through the lens of high-stakes, project-based learning—such as “Algorithm Audits” and “Disinformation Labs”—the author demonstrates how digital tools can be leveraged not as mere instructional aids, but as catalysts for cognitive inquiry. By emphasizing the “human-in-the-loop” approach to technology, the article provides innovative, practice-oriented solutions for educators seeking to align language instruction with the complexities of the 21st-century information landscape.*

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Critical Digital Agency, Digital Syncretism, Project-Based Learning (PBL), Critical Thinking in EFL, Educational Technology Integration, Disinformation Literacy, Pedagogical Innovation.*



Аннотация: Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o‘qitishda (EFL) kommunikativ yondashuv (CLT), tanqidiy fikrlash (CT) va raqamli texnologiyalarning (DT) an’anaviy tarzda bir-biridan ajralgan holda qo‘llanilishi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda “Tanqidiy raqamli agentlik” (CDA) modeliga o‘tish taklif etiladi va til o‘rganish jarayoni talabalar shunchaki funksional nutqdan raqamli sinkretizm bosqichiga o‘tgandagina samarali bo‘lishi asoslanadi. Muallif “Algoritm auditi” va “Dezinformatsiya laboratoriyasi” kabi yuqori natijadorlikka yo‘naltirilgan loyihaviy o‘qitish metodlari orqali raqamli vositalarning nafaqat yordamchi element, balki kognitiv tadqiqotlar uchun katalizator bo‘lishini ko‘rsatib beradi. Texnologiyalar jarayonida “inson omili”ga urg‘u berish orqali maqola til o‘rgatishni XXI asr axborot muhitining murakkabliklariga moslashtirishni istagan pedagoglar uchun innovatsion va amaliy yechimlarni taqdim etadi.

Калит so‘zlar: Kommunikativ til o‘qitish (CLT), tanqidiy raqamli agentlik, raqamli sinkretizm, loyihaviy o‘qitish (PBL), EFLda tanqidiy fikrlash, ta’lim texnologiyalari integratsiyasi, dezinformatsiya savodxonligi, pedagogik innovatsiya.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается традиционная разобщенность коммуникативного обучения языку (CLT), критического мышления (CT) и цифровых технологий (DT) в методике преподавания английского языка как иностранного (EFL). Предлагая переход к модели «Критического цифрового агентства» (CDA), автор утверждает, что подлинное освоение языка происходит тогда, когда учащиеся переходят от функционального владения речью к сфере цифрового синкретизма. На примере высокоэффективных проектных методов обучения, таких как «Аудит алгоритмов» и «Лаборатория дезинформации», демонстрируется, как цифровые инструменты могут быть использованы не просто как вспомогательные средства, а как катализаторы когнитивного поиска. Делая акцент на подходе «человек в центре технологического процесса», статья



предлагает инновационные практические решения для педагогов, стремящихся адаптировать обучение языку к вызовам информационной среды XXI века.

***Ключевые слова:** Коммуникативное обучение языку (CLT), критическое цифровое агентство, цифровой синкретизм, проектное обучение (PBL), критическое мышление в EFL, интеграция образовательных технологий, грамотность в области дезинформации, педагогические инновации.*

The evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT) has reached a critical juncture where traditional Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is no longer sufficient on its own. In an era dominated by rapid digital transformation and the rise of artificial intelligence, the objective of the EFL classroom must shift from mere "functional fluency" to Critical Digital Agency (CDA). While CLT focuses on the learner's ability to convey meaning, it often overlooks the cognitive depth required to navigate today's complex information landscape. This article argues that true pedagogical innovation lies in the syncretic integration of language instruction, critical thinking, and digital literacy. By moving beyond "digital decoration"—the superficial use of technology—and implementing high-stakes, project-based learning, we can transform the classroom into a space for authentic inquiry. The following sections explore practical frameworks that empower students to use English not just as a subject of study, but as a strategic tool for navigating the digital frontier with intellectual independence.

Since the 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has prioritized "fluency over accuracy." While successful in developing basic social competence, it has reached a "**Communicative Plateau.**" In today's digital age, being able to function in a social context is no longer enough; students need the cognitive depth to navigate professional and information-heavy environments.



The limitation of traditional CLT lies in its transactional nature. Standard activities—like role-playing or simple discussions—rarely challenge a student's critical faculties. Moreover, the rise of Generative AI tools means that "basic communication" can now be automated. If a student can achieve perfect output through a machine, the motivation to master linguistic nuances diminishes. To break this stagnation, we must move from "speaking" to "interrogating." By integrating Critical Thinking (CT), we transform the learner from a passive communicator into a strategist. In this new framework, English is not just a subject of study, but a tool for intellectual survival and agency in a world of complex digital narratives.

Modern EFL classrooms often suffer from "digital decoration"—using technology as a mere substitute for traditional tools (e.g., a PDF instead of a textbook). True innovation requires moving beyond basic digital literacy toward Digital Syncretism, where technology and cognitive processes merge. In this model, digital tools are not just delivery mechanisms; they are catalysts that change how students analyze language. Instead of using English to learn a tool, students must use the tool to explore the nuances of English. For example, utilizing **Corpus Linguistics** (such as *COCA*) allows learners to move from asking "Is this word correct?" to "Why is this word used in this specific socio-political context?" This shift ensures that technology facilitates deep inquiry rather than distraction. By integrating digital tools into the fabric of critical analysis, we empower students to navigate the complexities of global discourse with precision and agency.

To bridge the gap between theory and classroom reality, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction must adopt **High-Stakes Project-Based Learning (PBL)**. In this framework, language is acquired as a byproduct of solving complex, technology-mediated problems.

Two innovative project structures illustrate this integration:



1. **The "Disinformation Lab":** Students are tasked with identifying linguistic markers of bias in digital news. Using sentiment analysis tools and cross-referencing global sources, they must debate and defend their findings. This shifts the focus from simple reading comprehension to **critical information processing**.

2. **The "Virtual Stakeholder" Simulation:** Using collaborative platforms like Slack or Trello, students simulate multinational teams solving local socio-economic issues. This introduces **Global English (ELF)**, where success is measured by functional efficiency and cross-cultural negotiation rather than native-like perfection.

By treating the classroom as a laboratory for real-world scenarios, these models ensure that English is used as a strategic tool for agency.

In the current educational landscape, the pervasive influence of Generative AI (GenAI) presents a dual-edged sword. While these tools offer unprecedented scaffolding for language learners, they also threaten to cast an "AI Shadow" over the student's authentic voice—a phenomenon where the output is linguistically perfect but cognitively hollow. To innovate truly, the integration of technology must prioritize the human element, ensuring that the student remains the primary architect of meaning.

The "Human-in-the-Loop" Methodology: To mitigate the risk of over-reliance on automated tools, pedagogy must shift toward a **"Human-in-the-Loop"** requirement. This involves designing tasks where AI cannot provide a complete solution. For instance, rather than asking for a generic essay on "Climate Change," the task should require a localized investigation: "How does the recent urban development in your specific neighborhood conflict with global sustainability goals?" This localized specificity creates a barrier for AI, which lacks the real-time, lived experience of the student.



Narrative Identity and Meta-Cognitive Reflection: The most effective way to humanize the output is to incorporate mandatory **Process Documentation (PD)**. In this model, the final product (the essay or project) only accounts for 50% of the grade. The remaining 50% is derived from a meta-cognitive reflection where the student explains:

1. **Linguistic Choices:** Why a specific tone or register was selected for the target audience.
2. **Technological Interaction:** How they used AI tools to refine their ideas, and more importantly, where they disagreed with the AI's suggestions to preserve their original intent.
3. **Critical Friction:** Identifying moments where digital tools provided biased or overly generalized information, and how the student corrected it.

From Information Retrieval to Meaning-Making: The "AI Shadow" is most prominent when tasks are focused on simple information retrieval. To circumvent this, the CLT framework must evolve into a "**Meaning-Making**" framework. When students use English to argue a point based on their cultural heritage or personal ethics, the language becomes a vehicle for their unique identity. This "identity-driven" language use is what distinguishes a human learner from a large language model. By fostering an environment where students feel their personal experiences are the most valuable data point in the room, we ensure that technology serves the learner's agency, rather than replacing it.

Strategic Resistance in Pedagogy: Finally, humanizing the output requires what can be termed "**Strategic Resistance**". This means intentionally including "analog" stages in a digital project—handwritten brainstorming sessions, face-to-face peer debates without screens, and spontaneous oral defenses. These



interventions disrupt the seamless (and often thoughtless) flow of digital production, forcing the student back into the "human" space of immediate, critical thought.

The convergence of Communicative Language Teaching, Critical Thinking, and Digital Technology marks a paradigm shift in the evolution of EFL pedagogy. As demonstrated, the traditional boundaries of the language classroom are dissolving, replaced by a complex, interconnected digital landscape that demands more than just syntactic accuracy or conversational fluency. The integration of these three pillars is not merely an additive process but a transformative one, requiring a fundamental reassessment of the learner's role in the 21st century.

By implementing the "**Critical Digital Agency**" (CDA) framework through project-based learning, we move away from the "mechanical" use of language and toward its application as a tool for social and cognitive influence. The innovative solutions discussed—ranging from disinformation audits to simulated global collaborations—illustrate that when students are challenged to solve authentic, technology-mediated problems, their language acquisition becomes more resilient and contextually grounded.

Furthermore, the role of the educator must evolve from a primary source of knowledge to a facilitator of "digital syncretism." This transition ensures that technology is used to deepen inquiry rather than distract from it. As we look toward the future, the success of English language instruction will not be measured by a student's ability to replicate pre-defined linguistic patterns, but by their capacity to navigate, interrogate, and contribute to the global digital discourse with confidence and critical intent. Ultimately, we are not just teaching a language; we are empowering individuals to assert their agency in a world where the lines between the digital and the real are increasingly blurred.



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