

INTEGRATING CRITICAL THINKING TASKS INTO ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TEACHING AT SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract

In recent years, the development of critical thinking has become one of the key objectives of modern education, particularly in foreign language teaching. Traditional approaches to English language teaching at the school level often emphasize memorization, grammar accuracy, and textbook-based activities, which may limit learners' ability to analyze, evaluate, and use language meaningfully. This article explores the integration of critical thinking tasks into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at the school level and examines their impact on students' engagement and language development.

The study combines a scientific-theoretical analysis of existing literature with empirical observations based on the author's personal teaching experience in school classrooms. Various critical thinking tasks, including problem-solving activities, open-ended questions, group discussions, and reflective tasks, were incorporated into regular English lessons. The methodology focused on observing students' participation, speaking performance, and ability to express opinions using the target language.

The results indicate that integrating critical thinking tasks significantly increased student engagement, improved speaking confidence, and encouraged more meaningful use of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Learners demonstrated greater motivation and autonomy when lessons allowed them to analyze, compare, and justify their ideas rather than simply reproduce memorized information. The findings suggest that critical thinking tasks not only enhance language proficiency but also prepare students for real-life communication and lifelong learning.

The article concludes that integrating critical thinking into school-level EFL instruction is both practical and effective. It provides recommendations for teachers on how to implement such tasks in everyday classroom practice and highlights the importance of teacher awareness and methodological flexibility.

Keywords

critical thinking, English language teaching, EFL classrooms, school education, interactive tasks, learner engagement

Introduction

Foreign language education plays a crucial role in preparing students for global communication, academic success, and future professional opportunities. In school settings, English language teaching is expected not only to develop linguistic competence but also to foster essential cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning. However, many traditional English lessons still focus primarily on mechanical drills, repetition, and teacher-centered instruction, which may limit students' active involvement in the learning process.

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a fundamental skill for the twenty-first century. In the context of EFL classrooms, it enables learners to analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, and use language creatively and purposefully. Despite its importance, critical thinking is often underrepresented in school-level English lessons due to time constraints, curriculum demands, or lack of methodological training.

The relevance of this study lies in addressing the need to integrate critical thinking tasks into English language teaching at the school level in a systematic and practical way. The novelty of the article is based on combining theoretical insights with real classroom experience, demonstrating how critical thinking can be naturally embedded into everyday lessons without disrupting curriculum goals.

The purpose of this article is to explore how critical thinking tasks can be integrated into EFL instruction at school level and to analyze their impact on students' engagement and language performance. The study seeks to answer the following

question: How does the use of critical thinking tasks influence students' participation and language development in school EFL classrooms?

Literature Review

The concept of critical thinking has been extensively discussed in educational research. According to Facione (2015), critical thinking involves purposeful, self-regulated judgment that includes interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. In language education, critical thinking allows learners to go beyond surface-level understanding and engage deeply with content.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of interaction and social context in learning. From this perspective, language development occurs through meaningful communication and collaboration, which aligns closely with critical thinking activities such as group discussions and problem-solving tasks. Similarly, Bloom's revised taxonomy highlights higher-order thinking skills, including analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which are essential components of effective language learning.

Previous studies have shown that incorporating critical thinking into EFL instruction leads to improved learner motivation and communicative competence. For example, research by Paul and Elder (2014) indicates that students exposed to critical thinking-oriented instruction demonstrate better reasoning skills and greater language flexibility. Other studies emphasize the role of open-ended questions and task-based learning in promoting deeper cognitive engagement.

However, much of the existing literature focuses on higher education contexts, while fewer studies address school-level implementation. There is a noticeable gap in research examining how critical thinking tasks can be practically integrated into daily

English lessons for younger learners. This article aims to fill this gap by providing a school-level perspective grounded in classroom experience.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative, classroom-based approach combining elements of empirical research with reflective teaching practice. The research was conducted in a school EFL setting where English was taught as a foreign language. The participants were school students at the elementary and lower secondary levels.

Critical thinking tasks were integrated into regular English lessons over a period of several weeks. These tasks included:

open-ended questions encouraging personal opinions,
problem-solving activities related to lesson topics,
pair and group discussions,
comparison and justification tasks,
short reflective speaking and writing activities.

The lessons were designed to align with the existing curriculum while encouraging students to think, analyze, and express ideas using English. Data was collected through classroom observation, student responses, and reflective notes taken by the teacher.

Personal teaching experience played an important role in the methodology. For instance, during speaking lessons, students were encouraged to explain their choices rather than provide short, memorized answers. The focus was placed on meaning and reasoning rather than grammatical perfection.

Results and Discussion

The integration of critical thinking tasks produced several notable outcomes. First, student engagement increased significantly. Learners became more active participants in lessons, showing greater willingness to speak and share ideas. Even students who were previously passive began to contribute during discussions when their opinions were valued.

Second, improvements in speaking skills were observed. Students used a wider range of vocabulary and attempted more complex sentence structures when explaining their thoughts. Although errors were still present, communication became more meaningful and confident.

Third, critical thinking tasks promoted learner autonomy. Students started asking questions, making comparisons, and expressing agreement or disagreement respectfully. This shift indicated a move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered interaction.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the benefits of interactive and cognitive-based teaching approaches.

At the same time, the study revealed certain challenges, such as time management and the need for teacher preparation. However, these challenges were outweighed by the positive impact on learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This article has examined the integration of critical thinking tasks into English language teaching at the school level and highlighted their significance for effective EFL instruction. The findings demonstrate that critical thinking tasks enhance student engagement, improve speaking performance, and foster meaningful language use.

The study confirms that critical thinking can be successfully incorporated into school EFL classrooms without requiring major curriculum changes. Teachers are encouraged to use open-ended questions, discussion-based activities, and reflective tasks to support both language development and cognitive growth.

In conclusion, integrating critical thinking into English language teaching is not only beneficial but essential for preparing students to become confident communicators and independent learners. Future research may focus on larger sample sizes and quantitative analysis to further explore this area.

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