

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

Nuriya Yelamanova

Tashkent state university of economics

The teacher of Turtkul faculty

Email: n_yelamanova@tsue.uz

Abstract: Nowadays, in educational context, critical thinking has emerged as an essential skill for lifelong learning and effective communication. The improvement of this competence has become a vital pedagogical goal in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. This article explores the role of collaborative speaking activities in fostering critical thinking skills among university-level learners. Drawing on constructive and socio-cultural learning theories, the study shows the effectiveness of interactive speaking tasks, such as debates, problem-solving discussions, and project-based collaboration- in enhancing students’ analytical and reflective abilities. Also, the article presents insights from recent research, highlights pedagogical implications for EFL instructors, and provides practical recommendations for integrating collaborative speaking activities to promote critical thinking in language classroom.

Introduction

In an era defined by rapid globalization and information exchange, critical thinking is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of communicative competence. Language learning today goes beyond the acquisition of grammatical structures; it involves the ability to reason, evaluate evidence, and express ideas logically. For EFL learners, developing critical thinking skills through language use represents both a linguistic and cognitive challenge. Among different types of pedagogical approaches, collaborative speaking activities have proven to be an effective means to encourage students to think critically while communicating meaningfully. Unlike teacher-centered instruction, collaborative learning provides opportunities for negotiation of meaning, argumentation, and reflection—core processes that stimulate critical thinking (Vygotsky, 1978; Brookfield, 2012). The aim of this article to analyze how collaborative speaking activities contribute to the development of critical thinking skills among EFL students. It will review theoretical foundations, examine previous research, and suggest methodological strategies for educators seeking to integrate critical thinking development into their speaking lessons.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Critical Thinking

As Paul and Elder (2008) note that critical thinking is commonly defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in order to make reasoned judgments. It involves questioning assumptions, identifying biases, and drawing conclusions based on evidence. According to Facione (2011), critical thinking encompasses interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, and self-regulation—skills vital for academic and professional success. In EFL education, critical thinking is closely tied to communicative competence. Learners who engage in reflective dialogue demonstrate deeper understanding and improved decision-making abilities. As Richards and Schmidt (2010) argue, speaking is not merely a linguistic act but also a cognitive process that requires organization, justification, and interactional sensitivity.

2.2. Collaborative Learning and Speaking

The foundation of collaborative learning lies in Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory, which posits that cognitive development occurs through social interaction within the “zone of proximal development.” When learners collaborate, they co-construct knowledge and extend their thinking beyond individual limits. Collaborative speaking tasks—such as pair discussions, group debates, and problem-solving projects—encourage active participation and negotiation of meaning (Nunan, 2004). Through interaction, learners are exposed to diverse viewpoints that challenge their assumptions, prompting deeper cognitive engagement and critical reflection (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Thus, collaborative learning creates a dynamic environment in which learners not only exchange linguistic input but also co-construct meaning and cognitive understanding. Language learning is not a passive process of memorizing vocabulary and grammar; rather, it is an active process of meaning negotiation, hypothesis testing, and feedback reception (Long, 1996).

2.3. Linking Collaboration and Critical Thinking

Research demonstrates that structured interaction in speaking activities fosters critical thinking. For instance, Ku (2009) found that students engaged in group discussions develop stronger analytical reasoning. Similarly, Gokhale (1995) concluded that cooperative learning improves both problem-solving and conceptual understanding. Critical thinking thrives in environments where learners articulate opinions, defend arguments, and evaluate alternatives. Speaking activities that require justification, comparison, and synthesis naturally elicit these cognitive processes (Halpern, 2014). Thus, when learners collaborate to solve communicative challenges, they are simultaneously cultivating the ability to think critically.

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in qualitative descriptive research focusing on university-level EFL learners. The data and insights are drawn from classroom observation,

reflective journals, and teacher interviews over a 12-week period. Participants were B1–B2 level students from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course.

3.1. Research Questions

1. How do collaborative speaking activities promote critical thinking among EFL learners?

2. What specific types of speaking tasks most effectively stimulate analytical and reflective thinking?

3.2. Procedures

Students participated in three main types of collaborative speaking activities:

- Debate sessions on social and ethical issues.
- Problem-solving tasks, requiring group decisions supported by evidence.
- Project-based presentations, where teams analyzed real-world challenges and proposed solutions.

Data were collected through observation checklists measuring indicators of critical thinking, such as reasoning, argumentation, evaluation, and reflection.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Development of Analytical Thinking

Observation revealed that during debates, students demonstrated increasing ability to reason logically and provide evidence-based arguments. They learned to recognize logical fallacies and distinguish between facts and opinions. This aligns with Paul and Elder’s (2008) framework emphasizing reasoning as the foundation of critical thinking. Observation throughout the study revealed a significant improvement in learners’ ability to engage in analytical reasoning during collaborative speaking tasks, particularly in debates and problem-solving discussions. Students progressively moved from expressing opinions in a superficial or emotional manner to constructing arguments grounded in logic and supported by evidence. This shift indicates the development of higher-order thinking skills and the transition from mere language practice to cognitively engaged communication. During debate sessions, learners demonstrated an enhanced capacity to organize ideas logically, use connectors of reasoning (such as *therefore*, *as a result*, *on the other hand*), and draw cause–effect relationships to substantiate their arguments. Initially, many participants relied on memorized expressions or generalized statements. However, as the course advanced, their speech began to reflect structured reasoning—identifying causes, presenting examples, countering opposing views, and drawing reasoned conclusions. Such progression confirms that critical discussion not only strengthens communicative fluency but also refines analytical cognition.

4.2. Collaboration as a Stimulus for Reflection

Collaborative settings encouraged learners to reflect on both language use and content. Negotiating meaning required them to clarify ideas, paraphrase, and

reformulate arguments—practices that enhance both metacognitive awareness and linguistic competence. This confirms Brookfield’s (2012) claim that critical thinking is deepened through dialogue and peer feedback.

4.3. Language Proficiency and Critical Thinking Synergy

The findings suggest a reciprocal relationship between speaking proficiency and critical thinking. As students practiced expressing complex ideas, they improved linguistic accuracy and fluency. Conversely, enhanced critical thinking enabled more coherent and persuasive speech. This dual growth supports Richards and Rodgers’ (2014) view that communicative competence integrates cognitive and linguistic domains.

4.4. Effective Task Types

Problem-solving and project-based speaking activities were found to be the most effective in fostering critical thinking. These tasks required collaboration, hypothesis testing, and consensus building. Debates, while beneficial, sometimes led to dominance by more proficient speakers; however, with structured turn-taking and clear roles, equal participation improved substantially.

4.5. Teacher’s Role

The teacher acted as a facilitator, guiding interaction, posing challenging questions, and providing scaffolding. By modeling critical inquiry and encouraging justification, teachers can create a classroom culture where reasoning and reflection become habitual (Facione, 2011). In addition, the teacher gives a feedback and also gives a guidance for their speaking.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that collaborative speaking activities are powerful tools for developing critical thinking in EFL contexts. Through structured interaction, learners engage in reasoning, negotiation, and self-evaluation, leading to both linguistic and cognitive growth.

To maximize these outcomes, educators should:

1. Design task-based speaking activities that require problem-solving and evidence-based reasoning.
2. Integrate explicit critical thinking training—such as evaluating sources and questioning assumptions.
3. Encourage peer feedback and reflection, which reinforce analytical thinking.
4. Provide balanced group structures to ensure equitable participation and shared responsibility.

By systematically embedding critical thinking within speaking lessons, language educators can prepare learners not only for communicative competence but also for the intellectual demands of the modern world.

References:

- Brookfield, S. D. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Facione, P. A. (2011). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Insight Assessment.
- Gokhale, A. A. (1995). Collaborative learning enhances critical thinking. *Journal of Technology Education*, 7(1), 22–30.
- Halpern, D. F. (2014). *Thought and knowledge: An introduction to critical thinking* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher*, 38(5), 365–379.
- Ku, K. Y. L. (2009). Assessing students’ critical thinking performance: Urging for measurements using multi-response format. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 4(1), 70–76.
- Long, M. H (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). San Diego, CA: Academic Press
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2008). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.