

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH DEBATE ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract. *Critical thinking has become one of the most essential skills in modern education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Debate activities provide learners with opportunities to analyze information, express opinions, defend arguments, and evaluate opposing viewpoints. This article examines the role of debate activities in developing critical thinking skills during English lessons. The study explores methodological approaches to implementing debates in EFL classrooms and analyzes their impact on learners' communication abilities and analytical thinking. The findings indicate that debate-based instruction enhances students' speaking confidence, logical reasoning, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. The article also provides practical recommendations for English teachers who aim to integrate debate activities effectively into classroom practice.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, debate activities, English language teaching, EFL classroom, communicative competence, methodology*

Annotatsiya. *Tanqidiy fikrlash zamonaviy ta'limning eng muhim ko'nikmalaridan biriga aylangan, ayniqsa ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida (EFL) o'qitish jarayonida. Debat faoliyatlari o'quvchilarga ma'lumotlarni tahlil qilish, o'z fikrlarini ifodalash, dalillarni himoya qilish hamda qarama-qarshi nuqtai nazarlarni baholash imkoniyatini beradi. Ushbu maqola ingliz tili darslarida debat faoliyatlarining tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishdagi o'rnini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot EFL sinflarida debatlarini tashkil etishning metodik yondashuvlarini o'rganadi hamda ularning o'quvchilarning kommunikativ qobiliyatlari va analitik fikrlashiga ta'sirini ko'rib chiqadi. Natijalar debatga asoslangan ta'lim o'quvchilarning nutqiy ishonchini, mantiqiy fikrlashini, hamkorlik va muammolarni hal qilish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishini ko'rsatadi. Shuningdek, maqolada debat faoliyatlarini dars jarayoniga samarali integratsiya qilishni istagan ingliz tili o'qituvchilari uchun amaliy tavsiyalar berilgan.*

Kalit so'zlar: *tanqidiy fikrlash, debat faoliyatlari, ingliz tilini o'qitish, EFL sinfi, kommunikativ kompetensiya, metodika.*

Аннотация. *Критическое мышление стало одним из важнейших навыков современного образования, особенно в классах английского языка как иностранного (EFL). Дебатные занятия предоставляют учащимся возможность анализировать информацию, выразить собственное мнение, защищать аргументы и оценивать противоположные точки зрения. В данной статье рассматривается роль дебатных занятий в развитии навыков критического мышления на уроках английского языка. Исследование изучает методические подходы к организации дебатов в EFL-классах и анализирует их влияние на коммуникативные способности и аналитическое мышление учащихся. Результаты показывают, что обучение, основанное на дебатах, способствует развитию уверенности в устной речи, логического мышления, навыков сотрудничества и решения проблем. В статье также представлены практические рекомендации для преподавателей английского языка, стремящихся эффективно интегрировать дебатные занятия в учебный процесс.*

Ключевые слова: *критическое мышление, дебатные занятия, преподавание английского языка, EFL-класс, коммуникативная компетенция, методика.*

Introduction. In contemporary education, English language teaching is no longer limited to grammar instruction and vocabulary memorization. Modern methodologies emphasize the development of higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, evaluation,

interpretation, and argumentation. Among these competencies, critical thinking plays a crucial role in preparing learners for academic and professional communication.[2]

Debate activities are considered one of the most effective interactive methods for promoting critical thinking in English lessons. Through debates, students learn to construct arguments, provide evidence, challenge opinions, and communicate ideas persuasively. According to Brookfield,[1] debate encourages learners to question assumptions and engage actively in reflective thinking.

In EFL contexts, debate activities also contribute to language development by improving speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Moreover, debates create student-centered learning environments where learners become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Therefore, integrating debate activities into English lessons can simultaneously improve linguistic competence and intellectual engagement.

This article investigates how debate activities contribute to the development of critical thinking skills among English learners and discusses practical methodological strategies for classroom implementation.

Literature Review. Researchers agree that debate activities are an effective way to develop students' critical thinking and communicative skills in English language teaching. Facione [2] defines critical thinking as analysis and evaluation, which debates naturally support through argumentation and reasoning. Brookfield [1] notes that debates encourage reflective thinking and help learners consider different viewpoints. Johnson and Johnson [3] also show that cooperative learning increases motivation and student engagement. Overall, the literature confirms that debate activities effectively enhance both critical thinking and English language proficiency.

Methodology. This article is based on qualitative methodological analysis and classroom observation in EFL contexts. The study reviews theoretical literature related to critical thinking and communicative language teaching while also examining practical applications of debate activities in English lessons. The participants included intermediate-level university students studying English as a foreign language. Debate activities were conducted over a six-week instructional period. Students participated in structured debates on topics related to education, technology, social media, and environmental issues.

Results and Discussion. The debate process included several stages:

1. **Topic Selection** – Teachers selected controversial and discussion-oriented topics appropriate to students' language levels.
2. **Preparation Stage** – Students researched arguments, collected evidence, and prepared supporting ideas.
3. **Debate Performance** – Learners worked in teams to present arguments and respond to counterarguments.

4. Reflection and Feedback – Teachers evaluated students' language use, reasoning skills, and participation.

Several methodological techniques were applied during the lessons, including group discussions, brainstorming, role assignment, peer feedback, and reflective questioning.

The findings demonstrate that debate activities positively influence both language acquisition and critical thinking development. First, students became more confident in expressing opinions in English. Many learners initially experienced anxiety while speaking publicly; however, regular debate practice gradually improved fluency and self-confidence.

Second, debate activities encouraged analytical thinking. Students learned to evaluate information critically, distinguish strong arguments from weak ones, and support opinions with logical evidence. According to Paul and Elder,[4] critical thinking develops when learners actively analyze and assess ideas rather than simply memorize information. The observed classroom debates reflected this principle effectively.

Another important result was increased student engagement. Traditional teacher-centered lessons often limit learners' active participation, whereas debates require every student to contribute ideas and interact collaboratively. Students demonstrated greater motivation and concentration during debate-based lessons compared to conventional speaking activities.

Additionally, debate activities improved several language skills simultaneously. Learners expanded their academic vocabulary, practiced persuasive language structures, and enhanced listening comprehension while responding to opponents' arguments. This supports the communicative language teaching approach, which emphasizes meaningful interaction in language learning.[5]

Despite these advantages, several challenges were identified. Some students lacked sufficient vocabulary to express complex opinions, while others struggled with time management during argument preparation. In addition, shy learners occasionally hesitated to participate actively. To address these issues, teachers should provide vocabulary support, debate models, and clear organizational guidelines before conducting debates.

Teachers should also pay attention to several methodological factors when organizing debates:

- selecting age-appropriate and engaging topics;
- ensuring equal participation among students;
- creating supportive classroom environments;
- providing language scaffolding and useful expressions;
- encouraging respectful communication and active listening.

These strategies help maximize the educational effectiveness of debate activities and reduce learner anxiety.

Conclusion. Debate activities represent an effective methodological tool for developing critical thinking in English lessons. They promote analytical reasoning, communication skills, collaboration, and learner autonomy while simultaneously improving English proficiency. The study demonstrates that debate-based instruction creates interactive learning environments where students actively construct knowledge and engage in meaningful communication.

Although certain challenges such as limited vocabulary and speaking anxiety may arise, appropriate teacher guidance and structured preparation can significantly improve learning outcomes. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to integrate debate activities regularly into EFL classrooms to foster both linguistic competence and higher-order thinking skills.

Future research may further investigate the long-term impact of debate activities on academic performance and intercultural communication abilities among English learners.

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