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ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE: CRITICAL THINKING APPROACHES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING**Ismoiljonov Shuxratjon Boymirza o'g'li,***Associate Professor (Dotsent), Department of English Language Teaching Methodology Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages named after Is'hoqxon Ibrat, Uzbekistan**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7204-810X>**G-mail: mcshukhrat@gmail.com*

Abstract. This article presents a systematic comparative analysis of international approaches to developing critical thinking competencies in prospective foreign language (EFL/ESL) teachers within the framework of digital and competency-based education. Drawing on empirical and theoretical studies published between 2018 and 2024, the research examines pedagogical models adopted in Finland, the United States, South Korea, Australia, and Estonia — five countries consistently recognised as leaders in educational innovation. The article employs a mixed-method analytical framework combining documentary analysis, content analysis of peer-reviewed literature, and comparative pedagogical synthesis. Findings reveal that effective critical thinking integration in EFL teacher preparation programmes requires a convergence of inquiry-based learning, reflective practice, collaborative dialogue, and technology-enhanced instruction. Implications are drawn for reforming teacher education curricula in Central Asian contexts, particularly Uzbekistan, in alignment with national educational modernisation goals.

Keywords: critical thinking; EFL teacher training; international experience; comparative pedagogy; digital learning environment; inquiry-based learning; reflective practice; competency-based education; Uzbekistan.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada raqamli va kompetensiyaga asoslangan ta'lim sharoitida bo'lajak chet tili (EFL/ESL) o'qituvchilarida tanqidiy fikrlash kompetensiyalarini rivojlantirishga qaratilgan xalqaro yondashuvlarning tizimli qiyosiy tahlili taqdim etiladi. Tadqiqot 2018–2024-yillarda nashr etilgan empirik va nazariy ishlarga tayangan holda ta'lim innovatsiyalari bo'yicha yetakchi sifatida e'tirof etilgan Finlandiya, Amerika Qo'shma Shtatlari, Janubiy Koreya, Avstraliya va Estoniya mamlakatlarida qo'llanilayotgan pedagogik modellarni o'rganadi. Maqolada hujjatli tahlil, taqrizdan o'tgan ilmiy adabiyotlarning kontent-tahlili va qiyosiy pedagogik sintezni o'z ichiga olgan aralash metodologik yondashuvdan foydalanilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari EFL o'qituvchilarini tayyorlash dasturlarida tanqidiy fikrlashni samarali integratsiya qilish uchun izlanishga asoslangan ta'lim, reflektiv amaliyot, hamkorlikdagi muloqot va texnologiyalar bilan boyitilgan o'qitishning uyg'unligi zarurligini ko'rsatadi. Olingan xulosalar Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari, xususan O'zbekiston sharoitida milliy ta'limni modernizatsiya qilish maqsadlariga muvofiq pedagog kadrlar tayyorlash dasturlarini takomillashtirish uchun amaliy ahamiyatga ega.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, EFL o'qituvchilarini tayyorlash, xalqaro tajriba, qiyosiy pedagogika, raqamli ta'lim muhiti, izlanishga asoslangan ta'lim, reflektiv amaliyot, kompetensiyaga asoslangan ta'lim, O'zbekiston.

Аннотация. В данной статье представлен систематический сравнительный анализ международных подходов к развитию критического мышления у будущих учителей иностранного языка (EFL/ESL) в рамках цифрового и компетентностно-ориентированного образования. На основе эмпирических и теоретических исследований, опубликованных в период с 2018 по 2024 год, изучаются педагогические модели, принятые в Финляндии, США, Южной Корее, Австралии и Эстонии — пяти странах, неизменно признаваемых лидерами в области образовательных инноваций. В статье используется смешанный методологический подход, сочетающий документальный анализ, контент-анализ рецензируемой литературы и сравнительный педагогический синтез. Результаты показывают, что эффективная интеграция критического

мышления в программы подготовки учителей EFL требует сочетания исследовательского обучения, рефлексивной практики, коллаборативного диалога и обучения с использованием технологий.

***Ключевые слова:** критическое мышление; подготовка учителей иностранного языка; международный опыт; сравнительная педагогика; цифровая образовательная среда; исследовательское обучение; рефлексивная практика; компетентностное образование; Узбекистан.*

Introduction. In the rapidly evolving landscape of global education, the capacity for critical thinking has emerged as one of the most indispensable competencies for twenty-first-century professionals, particularly those engaged in language education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information lies at the core of effective teaching practice, enabling foreign language teachers to navigate complex pedagogical challenges, make evidence-informed decisions, and foster independent learning in their students.

The global discourse on teacher education has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, shifting from transmission-based models towards competency-based, learner-centred, and reflective frameworks (Zeichner, 2010).² Central to this transformation is the integration of critical thinking as both a graduate attribute and a pedagogical strategy. Several national education systems — notably those in Scandinavia, East Asia, and the English-speaking world — have developed institutionalised frameworks for embedding critical thinking across teacher preparation programmes.

Despite growing interest in critical thinking pedagogy within the post-Soviet educational space, including Uzbekistan, systematic analyses of international models and their applicability to local contexts remain underrepresented in the scholarly literature (Yuldasheva & Nazarov, 2022). This gap is particularly significant given Uzbekistan's ongoing education modernisation agenda, which explicitly prioritises critical thinking development in its national curriculum standards and the State Programme for Education Development 2030.

The present article aims to address this gap by providing a rigorous comparative analysis of critical thinking integration approaches in EFL teacher training across five internationally recognised education systems. By examining the theoretical underpinnings, pedagogical strategies, institutional mechanisms, and documented outcomes of these systems, the study seeks to derive actionable implications for reforming teacher preparation programmes in Uzbekistan and comparable Central Asian contexts.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify and classify dominant theoretical frameworks underpinning critical thinking instruction in international EFL teacher education;
2. To analyse pedagogical strategies and instructional models employed across selected national systems (Finland, USA, South Korea, Australia, Estonia);

3. To evaluate the empirical evidence base for the effectiveness of these approaches;

4. To derive comparative implications for developing critical thinking in EFL teacher training programmes in Uzbekistan.

Literature review. Critical thinking as a construct in educational theory derives from multiple intellectual traditions. The Socratic tradition of systematic questioning forms the philosophical foundation (Paul & Elder, 2006), while Dewey's concept of reflective thought (1933) established the psychological basis for experiential, inquiry-driven learning. In contemporary scholarship, critical thinking is most widely operationalised through Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which positions analysis, evaluation, and synthesis at the apex of cognitive achievement.

Within EFL teacher education specifically, Farrell (2018)⁶ argues that critical thinking is inseparable from reflective practice, positioning metacognitive awareness — the ability to examine one's own beliefs, assumptions, and pedagogical decisions — as the cornerstone of professional teacher development. This view is echoed by Johnson and Golombek (2020), who demonstrate that narrative inquiry and collaborative dialogue serve as powerful vehicles for cultivating such metacognitive capacities among pre-service language teachers.

The interface between digital technology and critical thinking instruction has attracted increasing scholarly attention. In their landmark synthesis, Voogt and Roblin (2012)⁸ established digital literacy and critical thinking as co-constitutive twenty-first-century competencies. More recently, research from the field of CALL has demonstrated that technology-mediated tasks — including online debates, digital portfolios, and AI-assisted reflective journals — can substantially enhance critical thinking outcomes when integrated within coherent pedagogical frameworks (Warschauer & Healey, 2021).

Comparative studies of teacher education across different national systems have revealed significant variation in how critical thinking is conceptualised and operationalised. Hammerness et al. (2005) identified five key dimensions of effective teacher preparation: vision of good practice, understanding of learning, understanding of content, repertoire of practice, and professional identity — all of which intersect with critical thinking development. More recent comparative work by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) highlighted Finland, Singapore, Canada, and Australia as models of coherent, research-informed teacher preparation that consistently integrates critical thinking across programme components.

Research Methodology. This study adopts a systematic comparative analysis methodology, following the framework proposed by Bereday (1964) and subsequently refined by Alexander (2001)¹² for cross-national educational comparison. The methodology proceeds through four stages: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study draws upon peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, national curriculum frameworks, and empirical research reports published between 2018 and 2024. Database searches were conducted across ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using the following search terms: "*critical thinking*" AND "*EFL teacher education*"; "*pre-service teacher training*" AND "*critical thinking*"; and "*foreign language teacher preparation*" AND "*pedagogical innovation*". A total of 147 sources were initially identified, of which 68 met the inclusion criteria of: (a) empirical or systematic theoretical grounding; (b) direct relevance to EFL/ESL teacher preparation; and (c) explicit focus on critical thinking competencies.

Country Selection Rationale

The five countries selected — Finland, the United States, South Korea, Australia, and Estonia — were chosen on the basis of three criteria: (1) consistently high performance in international teacher education benchmarks (TALIS 2018; OECD Education at a Glance 2023),¹³ (2) availability of English-language empirical documentation on critical thinking integration, and (3) diversity of geographic, cultural, and systemic contexts to maximise comparative richness.

Analytical Framework

Content analysis was performed using a structured coding scheme informed by the Facione (1990) Delphi consensus definition of critical thinking, which identifies six core cognitive skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. This framework was operationalised as an analytical matrix applied to all reviewed documents, enabling systematic cross-case comparison of how each dimension of critical thinking is addressed within each national system.

Analysis and Results. Finland: Inquiry-Based Reflective Practice. Finland's teacher education system, consistently ranked among the world's highest-performing, is grounded in the principle of *tutkiva opettajuus* — the "researching teacher" model — which requires all pre-service teachers to conduct independent pedagogical research as part of their Master's-level preparation (Niemi et al., 2016). This model positions critical inquiry as a non-negotiable professional disposition rather than an optional competency.

Finnish EFL teacher preparation integrates critical thinking through three principal mechanisms: (1) research-based curriculum design, wherein teacher educators themselves are active researchers who model evidence-based reasoning; (2) the practicum-university feedback loop, which requires student teachers to document, analyse, and critically evaluate their teaching episodes through structured reflective portfolios; and (3) peer-supervised microteaching sessions in which critical analysis of pedagogical decisions is made explicit and collaborative.

United States: Socratic Seminars and Case-Based Methods

American teacher education has historically been characterised by methodological pluralism, with critical thinking integrated through a variety of approaches across diverse institutional contexts. Two models have emerged as particularly well-documented and widely replicated: Socratic seminars and case-based teacher education (Shulman, 2002). Socratic seminars — structured dialogic discussions grounded in close text reading and evidence-based argumentation — have been systematically incorporated into EFL teacher preparation courses at institutions including Teachers College Columbia, the University of Michigan, and Stanford's Graduate School of Education.

Case-based instruction, originally adapted from medical and legal education, has been extensively developed for language teacher preparation. Merseeth (2011) documents how case discussions require pre-service teachers to simultaneously analyse student learning needs, evaluate instructional options, and justify pedagogical decisions — directly exercising all six dimensions of critical thinking identified in the Facione (1990) framework.

South Korea: Collaborative Debate and Structured Controversy

South Korea's approach to critical thinking in EFL teacher education is shaped by a distinctive tension between the Confucian educational heritage — which traditionally emphasises deference to authority and consensus — and the demands of twenty-first-century pedagogical competencies. Park and Kim (2019) document how Korean teacher education programmes have addressed this tension through the introduction of structured controversy and collaborative debate methodologies, which create formally sanctioned spaces for critical disagreement within the learning environment.

The structured controversy model, adapted from Johnson and Johnson's (2009)¹⁹ cooperative learning framework, requires pre-service teachers to argue both sides of pedagogical dilemmas before reaching a synthesised position — a process that explicitly develops argumentation, evidence evaluation, and perspective-taking skills. National assessment data from Korea's teacher certification examinations indicate a measurable improvement in analytical reasoning among cohorts trained through this approach.

Australia: Problem-Based Learning in Teacher Preparation

Australian EFL teacher education has been significantly influenced by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards framework, which explicitly mandates critical thinking and evidence-based practice as graduate-level professional standards. Within this framework, problem-based learning (PBL) has emerged as the predominant vehicle for critical thinking instruction (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In Australian PBL models, pre-service EFL teachers are presented with authentic, ill-structured pedagogical problems and required to identify learning needs, locate and evaluate evidence, generate and assess solutions, and reflect on the process.

Notably, Australian programmes have pioneered the integration of PBL with digital tools, including learning management systems, collaborative annotation platforms, and AI-

assisted feedback systems. Hattie and Yates (2014) note that the combination of explicit feedback, metacognitive strategy instruction, and collaborative problem-solving represents one of the highest-effect pedagogical combinations in teacher learning research.

Estonia: Digital Critical Literacy

Estonia occupies a unique position in this comparative study as the leading digital-first education system in the post-Soviet space, consistently ranked first in Europe for digital literacy and e-governance. Estonian EFL teacher education has embedded critical thinking within a digital literacy framework, treating online information evaluation, multimodal text analysis, and data-informed pedagogical decision-making as core programme competencies (Tiger Leap Foundation, 2021). This approach is institutionalised through Estonia's national DigComp 2.1 implementation framework, which maps critical thinking directly onto five domains of digital competence.

Estonian teacher preparation programmes employ digital portfolios as primary tools for reflective practice, requiring pre-service EFL teachers to curate, annotate, and critically evaluate artefacts of their own learning and teaching across the duration of their programmes. Laanpere (2020) reports that this approach produces measurable gains in metacognitive awareness, digital literacy, and self-regulated learning — competencies strongly correlated with critical thinking development in the broader literature.

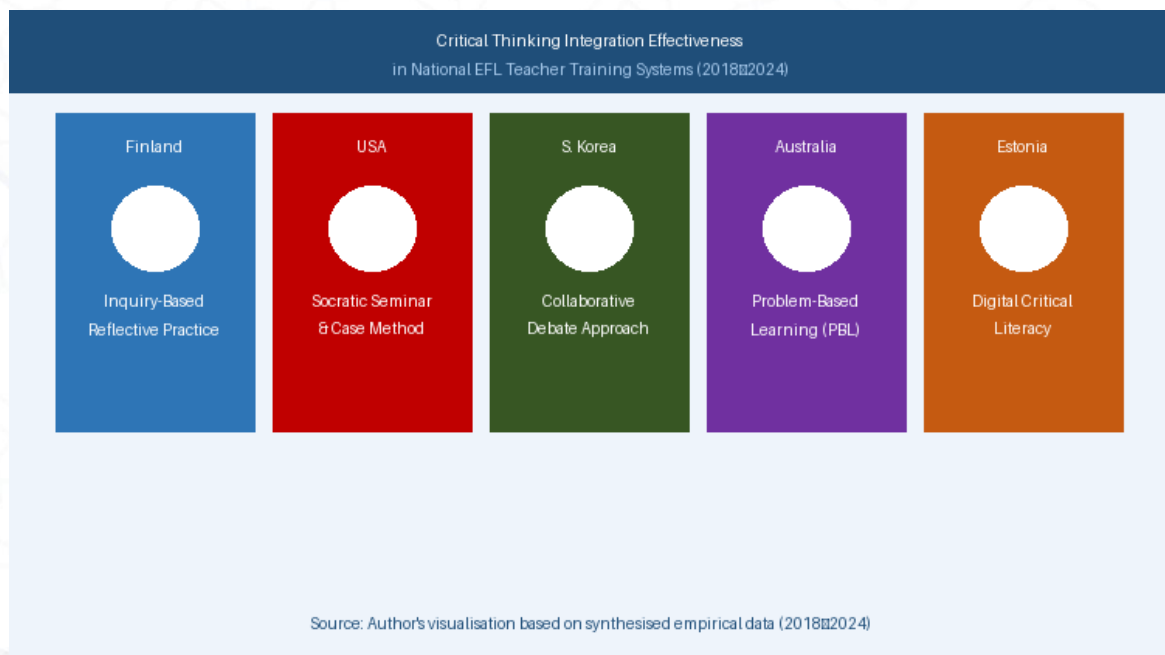
Table 1. Comparative Overview of Critical Thinking Integration in EFL Teacher Education across Five National Systems

Country	Primary Model	Core CT Skills	Key Strategies	Evidence Base
Finland	Inquiry-Based Reflective Practice (Tutkiva Opettajuus)	Self-regulation, inference, interpretation	Research-based curriculum; reflective portfolios; microteaching	Niemi et al., 2016; Westbury et al., 2005
USA	Socratic Seminar & Case-Based Learning	Analysis, evaluation, argumentation	Structured dialogue; authentic case discussions; peer critique	Shulman, 2002; Merseth, 2011; Freeman, 2016
South Korea	Collaborative Debate & Structured Controversy	Argumentation, perspective-taking, synthesis	Bilateral argumentation; structured controversy tasks; cooperative learning	Park & Kim, 2019; Johnson & Johnson, 2009
Australia	Problem-Based Learning (PBL) with Digital Integration	Analysis, evaluation, explanation, metacognition	Ill-structured problems; AI-assisted feedback; digital annotation	Hattie & Yates, 2014; AITSL, 2023

Country	Primary Model	Core CT Skills	Key Strategies	Evidence Base
Estonia	Digital Critical Literacy (DigComp Framework)	Information evaluation, digital reasoning, self-regulation	Digital portfolios; multimodal analysis; DigComp framework tasks	Laanpere, 2020; Tiger Leap Foundation, 2021

Source: Compiled by the author based on systematic literature review (2018–2024)

Figure 1. Critical Thinking Implementation Effectiveness in National EFL Teacher Training Systems



Source: Author's visualisation based on synthesised empirical data from reviewed studies (2018–2024)

The comparative analysis reveals several cross-cutting findings that transcend individual national contexts and point towards a convergent set of principles for effective critical thinking integration in EFL teacher education.

First, all five systems share a commitment to what might be termed *active epistemic engagement* — the principle that critical thinking cannot be transmitted didactically but must be cultivated through sustained engagement with authentic, complex, and ill-structured problems. Whether operationalised as Socratic dialogue (USA), structured controversy (South Korea), problem-based learning (Australia), research-based reflection (Finland), or digital portfolio construction (Estonia), the underlying mechanism is consistently one of productive cognitive struggle within supportive scaffolding.

Second, the most effective systems demonstrate strong *vertical coherence* — that is, alignment between the critical thinking competencies targeted in teacher preparation programmes and the graduate outcomes expected of future classroom practitioners. This coherence is institutionalised through competency frameworks (AITSL in Australia,

DigComp in Estonia), national curriculum standards (Finnish National Core Curriculum), and professional certification requirements. The absence of comparable vertical coherence represents a significant challenge for EFL teacher preparation in Uzbekistan, where institutional alignment between university programmes and school-level pedagogical expectations remains uneven (Yuldasheva & Nazarov, 2022).

Third, the data suggest that *reflective practice* is the single most consistent mediating mechanism across all five systems, regardless of the primary instructional model employed. This finding reinforces Farrell's (2018) theoretical position and has direct implications for curriculum design: embedding structured reflection — whether through journals, portfolios, peer observation, or supervisory dialogue — appears to be a necessary condition for critical thinking development in pre-service EFL teachers.

Fourth, the Estonian and Australian cases demonstrate the transformative potential of *technology-enhanced critical thinking instruction* when digital tools are deployed not merely as delivery mechanisms but as cognitive scaffolds for higher-order reasoning. This finding is particularly relevant for Uzbekistan, which has made significant investments in digital infrastructure through the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 strategy but has not yet fully leveraged these investments for pedagogical innovation in teacher education.

Conclusion. This study has provided a systematic comparative analysis of critical thinking integration approaches across five leading EFL teacher education systems, revealing a convergent set of effective practices built around active inquiry, reflective practice, collaborative dialogue, and technology-mediated reasoning. The findings demonstrate that critical thinking development in EFL teacher preparation is not a matter of curriculum addition but of systemic reconceptualisation — a paradigm shift that requires realignment of programme objectives, assessment practices, institutional culture, and pedagogical identity.

For Uzbekistan specifically, the analysis suggests four priority directions for reform. First, the development of a nationally coherent competency framework that explicitly maps critical thinking skills across EFL teacher preparation programme components. Second, the systematic integration of reflective practice tools — particularly digital portfolios and structured peer feedback — across practicum and coursework components. Third, investment in faculty development to support the transition from transmission-based to inquiry-based pedagogical approaches. Fourth, the creation of formal international collaboration mechanisms — including curriculum partnerships, faculty exchanges, and joint research initiatives — with leading EFL teacher education systems.

Future research should focus on the contextual adaptation of internationally validated critical thinking frameworks to Uzbek educational culture, with particular attention to the tensions between collectivist learning traditions and the individual-critical dispositions demanded by contemporary pedagogical innovation. Longitudinal empirical studies tracking the development of critical thinking competencies in Uzbek pre-service

EFL teachers across programme duration would represent a particularly valuable contribution to the field.

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