

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
EDUCATION

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This article explores the significance of integrating critical thinking into English Language Education (ELE). In the era of information abundance, learning English extends beyond mastering grammar and vocabulary; it requires the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in a foreign language. The paper discusses the theoretical foundations of critical thinking in ELT (English Language Teaching), analyzes cognitive barriers faced by language learners, and proposes practical pedagogical strategies to foster analytical skills in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms.

Modern English language education is undergoing a paradigm shift. The ultimate goal of language learning has evolved from basic linguistic competence (knowing rules) to communicative and intercultural competence (using language to solve complex problems). In this context, critical thinking (CT)—defined as the intellectually disciplined process of actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, and evaluating information—becomes a core component of language literacy. For EFL students, expressing thoughts critically in a second language is doubly challenging. They must manage both cognitive processing and linguistic encoding simultaneously. Without critical thinking, language production remains superficial, limited to rote memorization and mechanical reproduction of texts. Therefore, investigating the integration of CT into English classrooms is essential for developing autonomous, lifelong learners.

Theoretical Framework: Language and Cognition.

The relationship between language and thought has long been established in cognitive linguistics. According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, language is the primary tool for

thought development. In ELT, this relationship is best visualized through **Bloom's Taxonomy**, which divides cognitive domains into Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) and Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Higher-Order Skills (HOTS) ---> Creating, Evaluating, Analyzing
▲ | (Transition Zone) ▼

Lower-Order Skills (LOTS) ---> Applying, Understanding, Remembering

To understand why critical thinking is vital to language learning, one must explore the intrinsic relationship between thought and language. The famous Vygotskian socio-cultural theory posits that language is not merely a vehicle for expressing pre-existing thoughts, but the foundational psychological tool that actively shapes and constructs human consciousness and cognitive processes [4]. When an individual learns a foreign language, they are not simply acquiring new labels for old concepts; they are developing an entirely new cognitive operating system.

In modern educational design, this intersection of cognition and language is best mapped through the lens of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy [5]. This cognitive hierarchy divides learning objectives into two fundamental domains: Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) and Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Traditional EFL methodologies operate heavily within the domain of LOTS. Students spend years remembering, understanding, and applying rule-based patterns. While these lower-order skills are undeniably necessary for building a foundational linguistic scaffold, they fail to transition students into sophisticated users of the language [6]. Advanced communicative fluency requires an ongoing, deliberate leap into the realm of HOTS, where language is weaponized as a tool for independent analysis and original intellectual creation.

Methodology.

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research methodology combined with a targeted content analysis of higher education English philology curricula. The research design was driven by two central questions:

- 1. How does the transition from LOTS-based activities to HOTS-based tasks affect the communicative confidence of language learners?*
- 2. What distinct cognitive barriers do students face when attempting to express critical thoughts in English?*

The data collection process involved open classroom observations conducted across multiple academic semesters within advanced English language seminars for bachelor students. Over 60 hours of classroom interactions were recorded and analyzed. The observation focused on student participation patterns during two distinct configurations of learning tasks:

Phase A (Traditional Dynamic): Text comprehension checks, mechanical grammar conversions, and literal textual summarization.

Phase B (Critical/Analytical Dynamic): Socratic discussions, blind text analysis for ideological bias, and open, unscripted peer debates on controversial ethical topics. Additionally, a qualitative evaluation of student-produced argumentative essays was executed to trace the development of rhetorical cohesion and logical structuring under the influence of systematic critical thinking training.

References

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