

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH LEARNING ENGLISH

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22840661>

Received: 13 September 2026 • Accepted: 18 September 2026 • Published: 19 September 2026

Abstract:

Critical thinking has become an important component of effective language education, particularly in the context of English language learning. Beyond developing linguistic competence, English lessons can provide learners with opportunities to analyze information, evaluate arguments, consider different perspectives, solve problems, and formulate evidence-based opinions. This article examines the role of English language learning in developing learners' critical thinking skills and discusses effective approaches that can be incorporated into the language classroom. The study is based on an analysis of relevant theoretical and empirical literature concerning critical thinking in English as a foreign or second language. Particular attention is given to problem-based learning, task-based instruction, metacognitive activities, classroom discussion, argumentative writing, information evaluation, and reflective learning. The reviewed literature demonstrates that critical thinking can be intentionally developed through appropriately designed language-learning activities. At the same time, learners may experience difficulties in organizing complex ideas, evaluating evidence, identifying assumptions, and constructing well-supported arguments. Therefore, integrating critical-thinking-oriented activities into English language instruction can contribute not only to language development but also to learners' analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities.

Keywords:

critical thinking, English language learning, EFL, language education, analytical skills, problem-solving, argumentative writing, information evaluation

Introduction.

In the modern educational environment, learning a foreign language involves more than acquiring vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills. English language learners are increasingly expected to analyze information, express reasoned opinions, evaluate different perspectives, and respond effectively to complex problems. These abilities are closely connected with critical thinking, which has become an important component of contemporary education. Critical thinking can be understood as a process of examining information, questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, and reaching reasoned conclusions rather than accepting statements without analysis. In English language learning, this process is particularly relevant because learners regularly encounter different texts, opinions, arguments, and sources of information. Thus, the language classroom can become an environment where students simultaneously develop their linguistic competence and their ability to think analytically. Previous research has emphasized that strategies such as problem-based learning, task-based instruction, and metacognitive training can contribute to the development of critical thinking in English language learning, although their implementation may be affected by factors such as teacher preparation, curriculum limitations, and cultural context [1]. The need to strengthen critical thinking

among English language learners is also supported by empirical evidence. A study of EFL students demonstrated differences in their levels of critical-thinking skills, with particular difficulties observed in inference and identifying assumptions. Such findings indicate that knowledge of English alone does not automatically guarantee a high level of critical thinking and that learners need purposeful opportunities to practice these skills during the educational process [2]. Therefore, examining the relationship between English language learning and critical thinking is important for developing more effective approaches to language education. The present article focuses on how English language instruction can be used to foster critical thinking and considers classroom practices that encourage learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, consider alternative viewpoints, construct arguments, and reflect on their own reasoning. The article also addresses challenges that may limit the effective integration of critical-thinking activities into English language teaching.

Classroom interaction as a means of developing critical thinking. English language classrooms can provide a productive environment for developing critical thinking when learners are encouraged to interact with one another and explain the reasoning behind their ideas. Classroom interaction allows students to move beyond short or predetermined answers and participate in discussions in which they have to clarify, defend, question, or reconsider their positions. Exploratory talk is particularly useful because learners can develop their ideas through interaction with their classmates. Group discussions can encourage students to listen to alternative opinions, identify differences between viewpoints, and provide reasons for their own conclusions. Research in an English-as-a-second-language classroom showed that students demonstrated critical thinking through explicit reasoning and exploratory talk during group discussions. The study also examined WebQuests as an approach for creating opportunities for critical engagement in language learning [3].

For English teachers, this suggests that classroom questions should not always have a single predetermined answer. Questions such as “Why do you think so?”, “What evidence supports your idea?”, “What would happen if the situation changed?” and “Can you suggest another perspective?” can encourage students to use English for analytical purposes. In this way, communication becomes connected with reasoning.

Developing critical thinking through argumentative writing. Writing is another effective area for integrating critical thinking into English language learning. Argumentative writing requires learners to formulate a position, organize their ideas, provide evidence, and consider opposing arguments. These processes require students to use both language and reasoning skills. Research involving EFL students found that critical thinking in argumentative writing was reflected through coherent argumentation, evidence use, engagement with counter-arguments, and organized essay structure. However, students also experienced difficulties in organizing complex ideas, synthesizing information from different sources, and maintaining a balance between creativity and logical reasoning [4]. Therefore, argumentative writing activities should not focus exclusively on grammar and vocabulary. Teachers can ask learners to identify the main claim of an argument, distinguish supporting evidence from unsupported statements, consider an opposing viewpoint, and explain why their own position is reasonable. Peer review can also be useful because students can evaluate each other's arguments and identify areas that require stronger evidence or clearer reasoning.

Information evaluation in English language learning. The ability to evaluate information is particularly important in English language education because learners increasingly encounter English-language information through websites, social media, news platforms, videos, and academic sources. Students need to understand not only what a text says but also whether the information is reliable and adequately supported. Critical thinking requires learners to analyze claims, examine evidence, compare sources, and identify possible assumptions or biases. In an academic context, students can be encouraged to ask several questions when working with information: Who produced this information? What evidence is provided? Is the source reliable? Are there alternative perspectives? Do other sources support or contradict the claim? Could personal assumptions influence the interpretation?

Such questions can be incorporated into English reading and research activities. For example, students can compare two texts addressing the same topic and identify differences in their arguments, evidence, language, and conclusions. They can then explain which claims appear better supported and why. This type of activity develops reading comprehension while simultaneously strengthening analytical and information-evaluation skills [5].

A four-stage approach to developing critical thinking. The development of critical thinking in English language learning can be organized as a gradual process rather than as a single classroom activity. One useful framework consists of four interconnected stages: inquire, imagine, create, and reflect or evaluate [6].

The first stage, inquire, requires learners to identify a question or problem and investigate it carefully. In an English lesson, students might examine a controversial topic, identify the main problem, ask questions, and determine what information is necessary to understand the issue.

The second stage, imagine, encourages learners to consider different possibilities and perspectives. Students can examine how the same issue may be viewed differently by different people or groups. This stage is particularly valuable for developing open-mindedness and reducing the tendency to accept only one interpretation.

The third stage, create, involves developing a position, explanation, or solution. Learners use the information they have examined to formulate their own ideas and support them with relevant evidence. In English classes, this stage can take the form of a presentation, essay, debate, project, or problem-solving task.

The final stage, reflect or evaluate, requires learners to reconsider their reasoning and conclusions. Students can ask whether their evidence was sufficient, whether another perspective could change their conclusion, and what weaknesses may exist in their argument. This reflective stage is important because critical thinking does not simply mean defending one's opinion; it also involves being willing to reconsider it when stronger evidence or reasoning is presented.

This four-stage approach can be adapted to different levels of English proficiency. For beginners, teachers can use simple questions, pictures, short texts, and everyday situations. Intermediate learners can work with short articles, comparisons, and problem-solving tasks, while advanced learners can analyze complex texts, debate controversial issues, evaluate sources, and construct evidence-based arguments. Consequently, critical thinking can become an integral part of English language learning when classroom activities are deliberately designed to require questioning, analysis, perspective-taking, reasoning, creation, and reflection. The development of these abilities can make learners more active participants in the learning process and help them use English not only to communicate information but also to examine and construct ideas.

Conclusion. Critical thinking is an essential component of effective English language learning because it enables learners to move beyond the simple acquisition of linguistic knowledge and become active participants in the learning process. English lessons can provide meaningful opportunities for students to analyze information, question assumptions, evaluate evidence, consider different perspectives, solve problems, and communicate well-supported ideas. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that critical thinking can be incorporated into different aspects of English language education. Classroom interaction and exploratory discussion can encourage learners to explain and reconsider their ideas, while argumentative writing can develop their ability to construct logical arguments and use evidence. Information-evaluation activities can further strengthen learners' ability to distinguish reliable information from unsupported claims. A structured process involving inquiry, consideration of different perspectives, creation of solutions, and reflection can provide learners with a systematic way of developing critical-thinking abilities. At the same time, the development of critical thinking requires purposeful instructional design. Teachers should create learning environments in which students feel encouraged to ask questions, express different opinions, justify their ideas, and learn from alternative perspectives. English should therefore be viewed not only as a subject to be mastered but also as a means through which learners can analyze the world, communicate ideas, and develop independent reasoning. In conclusion, integrating critical-thinking activities into English language learning can contribute to both linguistic and intellectual development. A balanced combination

of communication, analysis, problem-solving, writing, information evaluation, and reflection can help learners become more independent, thoughtful, and effective users of English.

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