

THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING COMPETENCE BASED ON A DISCURSIVE-CRITICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This article discusses the concept of developing students' critical thinking competence through a discursive-critical approach in English language teaching. The paper analyzes the theoretical and methodological foundations of critical thinking, discourse analysis, communicative competence and task-based learning. Special attention is paid to the relationship between discourse, context, argumentation, reflection and independent judgment. The article substantiates that a discursive-critical approach enables students to analyze texts, identify implicit meanings, evaluate arguments, understand the author's position and express their own reasoned viewpoints in English. A conceptual model based on awareness, analysis, evaluation, argumentation and reflective conclusion is proposed as an effective methodological basis for developing students' critical thinking competence.

Keywords: Critical thinking, critical thinking competence, discursive-critical approach, discourse analysis, English language teaching, argumentation, reflection, communicative competence, task-based learning.

Introduction

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada ingliz tili ta'limida diskursiv-tanqidiy yondashuv asosida talabalarning tanqidiy fikrlash kompetensiyasini rivojlantirish konsepsiyasi yoritiladi. Maqolada tanqidiy fikrlash, diskurs tahlili, kommunikativ kompetensiya va topshiriqqa asoslangan ta'limning nazariy-metodologik asoslari tahlil qilinadi. Diskurs, kontekst, argumentatsiya, refleksiya va mustaqil xulosa chiqarish o'rtasidagi bog'liqlikka alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Maqolada diskursiv-tanqidiy yondashuv talabalarga matni tahlil qilish, yashirin ma'nolarni aniqlash, dalillarni baholash, muallif pozitsiyasini anglash va ingliz tilida asosli fikr bildirish imkonini berishi asoslanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, tanqidiy fikrlash kompetensiyasi, diskursiv-tanqidiy yondashuv, diskurs tahlili, ingliz tili ta'limi, argumentatsiya, refleksiya, kommunikativ kompetensiya, topshiriqqa asoslangan ta'lim.



Аннотация

В статье рассматривается концепция развития компетенции критического мышления студентов на основе дискурсивно-критического подхода в обучении английскому языку. Анализируются теоретико-методологические основы критического мышления, дискурсивного анализа, коммуникативной компетенции и обучения на основе заданий. Особое внимание уделяется взаимосвязи дискурса, контекста, аргументации, рефлексии и самостоятельного вывода. Обосновывается, что дискурсивно-критический подход позволяет студентам анализировать текст, выявлять скрытые смыслы, оценивать аргументы, понимать позицию автора и выражать собственную обоснованную точку зрения на английском языке.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, компетенция критического мышления, дискурсивно-критический подход, дискурсивный анализ, обучение английскому языку, аргументация, рефлексия, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение на основе заданий.

Introduction

The development of students' critical thinking competence has become one of the most important objectives of modern higher education. In the context of globalization, digital communication, academic mobility and intercultural interaction, students are expected not only to acquire professional knowledge but also to analyze information critically, evaluate arguments, identify hidden meanings and formulate independent conclusions. This requirement is especially significant in English language teaching, where language functions not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument of interpretation, reasoning, discussion and reflection.

Critical thinking competence can be understood as an integrated ability of a student to perceive information consciously, analyze it logically, evaluate the reliability of arguments, compare alternative viewpoints, express a reasoned position and reflect on the quality of one's own thinking. Peter A. Facione defines critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation¹. This definition shows that critical thinking is not limited to disagreement or criticism. It is a complex intellectual activity based on evidence, logic, interpretation and reflection.

In English language teaching, the formation of critical thinking competence is closely connected with communicative competence. Dell Hymes argues that language competence includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts². Therefore, when students express their opinion in English, they must take into account the communicative purpose, the addressee, the situation, the genre, the style and the pragmatic effect of their speech. This means that critical thinking in English classes should be developed through meaningful communication, problem-based tasks and discourse-oriented activities.

1 Facione, Peter A. Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction. Millbrae, 1990, p. 2–5.

2 Hymes, Dell. On Communicative Competence. Philadelphia, 1972, p. 269–293.



A discursive-critical approach is especially relevant for this purpose. It combines discourse analysis and critical thinking development. Discourse analysis allows students to examine texts, dialogues, academic materials, media messages and public speeches in relation to context, authorial intention, audience, genre and implicit meanings. Teun A. van Dijk emphasizes that discourse should be studied in the unity of text, context and socio-cognitive processes³. From this point of view, a text is not only a set of linguistic units but also a communicative and social phenomenon that reflects certain purposes, values, attitudes and ideological positions.

The critical dimension of the approach requires students to evaluate the content of discourse, identify arguments and counterarguments, determine the reliability of evidence, question assumptions and develop independent judgments. Norman Fairclough notes that critical discourse analysis aims to reveal the relationship between language, power, ideology and social practice⁴. Although English language teaching does not always focus on political or ideological analysis, the ability to recognize authorial position, persuasive strategies and hidden meanings is essential for the development of critical thinking competence.

The relevance of this topic is also supported by the ideas of Uzbek scholars in the field of language teaching and discourse studies. Jamol Jalolovich Jalolov emphasizes the practical and communicative orientation of foreign language teaching and the importance of organizing exercises that develop students' active speech activity⁵. Shakhriyor Safarovich Safarov, in his research on pragmalinguistics, highlights the connection between speech activity, communicative purpose, context and pragmatic intention⁶. These views provide a strong methodological basis for developing students' critical thinking through discourse-based English language activities.

The purpose of this article is to substantiate the concept of developing students' critical thinking competence based on a discursive-critical approach in English language teaching. The article aims to clarify the theoretical basis of the approach, identify its main components and propose methodological conditions for its implementation.

Research Methods

The study is based on theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, generalization, systematization, discourse analysis and methodological modeling. Scientific and methodological sources on critical thinking, discourse analysis, communicative competence, task-based language teaching and reflective learning were studied. Theoretical positions of foreign and Uzbek scholars were analyzed in order to determine the methodological potential of the discursive-critical approach in English language teaching.

The methodological foundation of the study includes several interrelated approaches. The competence-based approach makes it possible to view critical thinking not as isolated knowledge but as an integrated ability to act effectively in educational, communicative and professional situations. The communicative approach focuses on the use of language in

3 van Dijk, Teun A. *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. Cambridge, 2008, p. 17–21.

4 Fairclough, Norman. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London, 1995, p. 54–56.

5 Jalolov, Jamol Jalolovich. *Chet til o'qitish metodikasi*. Tashkent, 2012, p. 42–49.

6 Safarov, Shakhriyor Safarovich. *Pragmalingvistika*. Tashkent, 2008, p. 68–74.



meaningful interaction. The cognitive approach explains critical thinking as a process of analysis, comparison, evaluation and inference. The discursive approach emphasizes the connection between text, context, authorial position, genre and communicative intention. The reflective approach allows students to evaluate their own reasoning and improve the quality of their conclusions.

The study also relies on task-based language teaching. Rod Ellis defines a task as an activity in which learners use language primarily to convey meaning and achieve a communicative outcome⁷. This idea is important because a discursive-critical approach should be realized through meaningful tasks that require students to analyze, evaluate, argue and reflect rather than merely reproduce information.

The following methods were considered as effective tools for developing critical thinking competence: problem-based questions, discourse analysis, argumentative discussion, debate, case-based tasks, text interpretation, media discourse analysis, academic reading, argumentative writing, reflective journal writing and peer assessment. These methods were analyzed in relation to their ability to develop students' cognitive, communicative, discursive and reflective skills.

Results

The analysis shows that the concept of developing students' critical thinking competence based on a discursive-critical approach consists of four interrelated components: theoretical foundations, methodological principles, process stages and expected outcomes. These components form a unified pedagogical and methodological system.

The theoretical foundations include critical thinking theory, discourse theory, communicative competence theory, cognitive analysis, pragmalinguistics and task-based learning. Critical thinking theory explains the intellectual operations involved in analysis, evaluation and inference. Discourse theory provides the basis for studying language in relation to context, genre, authorial intention and social meaning. Communicative competence theory explains how students use language appropriately in real communicative situations. Cognitive analysis focuses on mental operations such as comparison, classification, reasoning and conclusion. Pragmalinguistics helps students understand the communicative purpose and pragmatic effect of speech. Task-based learning provides a practical framework for organizing meaningful activities.

The methodological principles of the discursive-critical approach include discursiveness, problem orientation, argumentativeness, dialogicity, contextuality and reflectivity. Discursiveness means that language material is analyzed not separately but in connection with text, context and communicative situation. Problem orientation means that students are given tasks that require them to solve a problem or answer an open question. Argumentativeness requires students to support their opinions with evidence. Dialogicity creates conditions for discussion, interaction and comparison of viewpoints. Contextuality helps students understand

⁷ Ellis, Rod. *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford, 2003, p. 9–10.



the social, cultural and situational background of discourse. Reflectivity encourages students to evaluate their own reasoning.

The process stages of developing critical thinking competence may be organized as follows: motivation, awareness, analysis, evaluation, argumentation and reflection. At the motivational stage, the teacher creates interest in the problem and activates students' prior knowledge. At the awareness stage, students understand the general content of the text or communicative situation. At the analysis stage, they identify the main idea, arguments, evidence, authorial position, genre and implicit meanings. At the evaluation stage, they assess the reliability, relevance and persuasiveness of the information. At the argumentation stage, they express their own position and support it with evidence. At the reflection stage, they reconsider their answer, identify strengths and weaknesses and formulate a final conclusion.

The expected outcomes include the development of students' ability to analyze discourse, evaluate arguments, identify hidden meanings, express an independent position, participate in discussion and produce reflective conclusions in English. These outcomes demonstrate that the discursive-critical approach contributes not only to language competence but also to students' academic and professional readiness.

Table 1. Conceptual structure of developing critical thinking competence based on a discursive-critical approach

| Structural component | Content | Methodological realization | Expected result |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Theoretical foundations | Critical thinking theory, discourse theory, communicative competence, cognitive analysis, pragmalinguistics, task-based learning | Analysis of scientific sources, discourse-based interpretation, communicative tasks | Students understand the theoretical basis of critical and discourse-oriented thinking |
| Methodological principles | Discursiveness, problem orientation, argumentativeness, dialogicity, contextuality, reflectivity | Problem questions, dialogue, debate, contextual text analysis, reflective activities | Students analyze information in relation to context and communicative purpose |
| Process stages | Motivation, awareness, analysis, evaluation, argumentation, reflection | Text work, media discourse analysis, evidence evaluation, argumentative writing, reflective journal | Students move from understanding to independent and reasoned conclusion |
| Discursive tasks system | Analytical, interpretative, argumentative, problem-based and reflective tasks | Case study, discussion, academic reading, opinion essay, response paper, peer assessment | Students develop critical thinking through meaningful English language activities |
| Expected outcomes | Independent judgment, reasoned position, reflective conclusion, communicative readiness | Performance assessment, rubrics, portfolio, oral and written argumentation | Students demonstrate critical thinking competence in English communication |



The table shows that the discursive-critical approach is not a single method but a conceptual system. It integrates theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of teaching. The central idea of the concept is that students develop critical thinking more effectively when they work with meaningful discourse, analyze context, evaluate arguments and express their own position in English.

The results also indicate that the development of critical thinking competence requires a special system of tasks. Analytical tasks help students identify the main idea, structure and evidence in a text. Interpretative tasks encourage students to understand implicit meanings and authorial intention. Argumentative tasks require them to defend their viewpoint with evidence. Problem-based tasks involve decision-making and solution finding. Reflective tasks help students evaluate the quality of their own reasoning.

Discussion

The discursive-critical approach changes the traditional role of both teacher and student in English language classes. In a traditional model, students often reproduce grammar rules, translate sentences or retell texts. In a discursive-critical model, students become active participants in meaning-making. They ask questions, analyze arguments, compare viewpoints, identify implicit meanings, express opinions and reflect on their conclusions.

The teacher's role also changes. The teacher does not merely provide ready-made answers but organizes a learning environment in which students can think critically and communicate meaningfully. The teacher selects appropriate texts, formulates problem-based questions, guides discussion, encourages argumentation and supports reflection. This corresponds to H. Douglas Brown's view that interactive language teaching should create conditions for meaningful communication, learner involvement and active construction of meaning⁸.

The use of discourse-based materials is essential in this approach. Texts should not be selected only for vocabulary or grammar practice. They should contain a problem, a debatable idea, a social or cultural issue, an implicit meaning or an authorial position. News articles, interviews, opinion essays, speeches, advertisements, academic texts and social media posts can be used as effective materials. Through these materials, students learn to distinguish facts from opinions, identify persuasive techniques, analyze the author's viewpoint and evaluate the reliability of information.

Argumentation is another key element of the discursive-critical approach. Students should be taught to support their opinions with evidence, consider counterarguments and formulate logical conclusions. Argumentative writing and speaking activities are especially useful in this respect. For example, topics such as *"Should artificial intelligence be used in academic writing?"*, *"Is online education as effective as traditional education?"*, *"Can social media influence students' worldview?"* encourage students to analyze different perspectives and express their own position in English.

Reflection is necessary for transforming ordinary discussion into critical thinking development. Without reflection, students may participate in debates but fail to understand the quality of their

⁸ Brown, H. Douglas. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York, 2007, p. 100–104.



reasoning. Reflective questions such as “*What evidence did I use?*”, “*Was my argument logical?*”, “*Did I consider an alternative opinion?*”, “*What should I improve in my conclusion?*” help students become aware of their thinking process. Richard Paul and Linda Elder emphasize that critical thinking requires intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, logic and fairness⁹. These standards can be used as criteria for evaluating oral and written responses.

The Uzbek methodological tradition also supports the development of this concept. J.J. Jalolov’s idea of practical and communicative orientation in foreign language teaching shows that language learning should be connected with real speech activity. Sh.S. Safarov’s pragmalinguistic approach demonstrates that speech should be analyzed in relation to purpose, context and communicative intention. These ideas strengthen the theoretical basis of the discursive-critical approach because they connect language, thinking, communication and context.

The implementation of the discursive-critical approach requires several pedagogical conditions. Students should feel free to express opinions without fear of mistakes. The classroom should be organized as a dialogic space where different viewpoints are respected. Tasks should be open-ended and problem-based. Assessment should focus not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the quality of argumentation, logical coherence, evidence use, discourse awareness and reflective conclusion.

At the same time, certain difficulties may arise. Some students may lack sufficient vocabulary to express complex opinions in English. Others may be accustomed to reproductive learning and may avoid independent judgment.

Teachers may also find it difficult to design discourse-based tasks and assess critical thinking objectively. These challenges can be addressed through gradual task sequencing, scaffolding, vocabulary support, model answers, assessment rubrics and reflective feedback.

Thus, the discursive-critical approach offers a productive methodological framework for developing students’ critical thinking competence in English language teaching. It connects language learning with analysis, interpretation, evaluation, argumentation and reflection.

Conclusion

The concept of developing students’ critical thinking competence based on a discursive-critical approach is an important direction in modern English language teaching. This approach allows students to learn English not only as a system of linguistic forms but also as a means of understanding discourse, interpreting meanings, evaluating information and expressing independent judgments.

The theoretical basis of the concept includes critical thinking theory, discourse theory, communicative competence, cognitive analysis, pragmalinguistics and task-based learning. Its methodological principles are discursiveness, problem orientation, argumentativeness, dialogicity, contextuality and reflectivity. The process of competence development can be

⁹ Paul, Richard; Elder, Linda. *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*. Tomales, 2014, p. 8–10.



organized through the stages of motivation, awareness, analysis, evaluation, argumentation and reflection.

The article has shown that the discursive-critical approach develops students' ability to analyze texts, identify authorial position, understand implicit meanings, evaluate evidence, participate in discussions, write argumentative texts and produce reflective conclusions. These abilities are important not only for English language learning but also for students' academic, professional and social development.

The proposed concept can be applied in English language classes through discourse-based materials, problem questions, debates, case studies, argumentative essays, media discourse analysis, reflective journals and peer assessment. Its successful implementation requires a supportive communicative environment, carefully designed tasks and assessment criteria that evaluate both language performance and the quality of thinking.

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