



WAYS TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING ABILITIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article deals with one of the most essential issues in methodology. Everyone agrees that if a language learner masters good critical thinking ability he or she will not face any challenge in using a language skill. As we produce a foreign language data our speaking or writing materials are based on our thinking abilities. When one faces with the disputable theme to discuss he should ponder over that issue to express his or her ideas to the listener. Critical thinking abilities help a foreign language learner to ponder over the issue by categorizing, identifying the main concept, by discussing it objectively based on his or her previous knowledge. Modern methodology requires teachers to be able to boost learners' critical thinking abilities in order to form easy flowing of information in the process of using the language. There are some steps and ways how teachers can form or develop critical thinking abilities of their learners, how they themselves can enhance their abilities. It is not so difficult to teach or involve them into activities that demand using critical thinking ability, the main issue is to help them to get out of the box.

Keywords: independent mindset, common sense, logical thinking, creativity, innovation, mind-maps, problem-solving, logical, concepts, to reason, compare and contrast, resolve issues, to establish arguments, to expose the logic, critical thinker.

Introduction

Today foreign language teaching methodology is developing day by day. New activities, technologies guarantee learners have a good opportunity to master the language. Language learners should practice language skills for long time to master a foreign language. Critical thinking ability is a key element in the process of language teaching and learning. It is the ability which is responsible for discussion, for thinking over the problem, thoroughly, for looking into the matter from different angles, for being able to ponder over the issue.

Critical thinking is a process in which someone evaluates an issue from multiple perspectives to be critical and logical in their evaluation. In critical thinking, one asks critical questions that lead to developing a critical understanding of a problem.

When herd mentality is becoming increasingly and frighteningly common, critical thinking is becoming rarer and more sought after than ever. Being able to think critically means that you can take your beliefs through the filters of logic. It also means that you are capable of constant introspection, clarity, and an independent mindset.



Critical thinking allows us to methodically resolve issues, filter our unnecessary and irrelevant ideas, comprehend the logical reasoning behind concepts, identify logical gaps in reasonings, establish watertight arguments, analyse others' arguments and others.

Common sense tends to combine being skeptical with being indecisive, indifferent, hesitant, insecure, irresolute. In fact, skepticism is the foundation of critical thinking and can become a valuable tool for developing this skill.

What comes to the history of critical thinking process we can say that even ancient scientists focus on this concept substituting it with another name. As Descartes stated in the "Discourse on Method" in 1637, methodical doubt is the means to reason. It was in Ancient Greece that this concept was born, underlying the study of philosophy. Even without knowing it at the time, Socrates would come to be considered the Founder of Critical Thought, as this concept was only coined as such in the 20th century. Socrates left the Socratic Questioning present - a form of disciplined and systematic questioning that allows to elevate logical thinking, exposing the logic behind someone's thinking. It consists of a discussion carried out by a person who does nothing but ask questions, and where each question is based on the answer given to the previous question. Due to its antiquity, the concept has evolved in theoretical and practical terms, molding itself to multiple contexts. Initially, the philosophical approach conceptualized a hypothetical and idealized critical thinker, enumerating qualities and characteristics of this profile rather than specific behaviors. Later, Cognitive Psychology characterizes the critical thinker through measurable skills, reinforcing that this is a skill that can be learned and improved.

Everyone agrees that critical thinking ability is important for all spheres in life including education. Below we are going to describe essential advantages of critical thinking ability. The development of the ability to think critically allows for effective reflection and a more objective view. These capabilities are what distinguishes us from machines, and therefore, the "gold mine" that must be invested in to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Having a good critical thinking ability also helps to avoid conformism and to move forward as human beings.

The practical effects of developing Critical Thinking:

Helps make decisions that are likely to yield better results

Help to take perspective of your knowledge and strengths, as well as what you don't know or are less good at

Leaders with Critical Thinking tend not to be afraid of having a team with as much or more knowledge than they do, as they want to be surrounded by the best

Promotes creativity and innovation. Critical Thinking is linked to creativity as it translates into the ability to look at a problem from different perspectives.

Promotes the ability to argue

There are some recommendations presented by scientists that may assist anyone including foreign language learners in developing or forming critical thinking abilities that can help in every day life matters, business including education and foreign language learning.

Take any major area of your life you're focusing on at the moment. You might want to skyrocket your career growth at work, improve the relationship with your partner, grow your business, or start a



healthy lifestyle. Take the time to think of an improvement that will take you one step closer to your goal. Do not focus only on massive game-changing ideas. Minor improvements tally up to exponential returns in the long run. For example, if you're thinking how to earn a promotion at your job, do not only focus on executing a gigantic project. Think how can you draft better emails and build better rapport. They might seem like tiny improvements, but when you implement many such changes day in and day out the results out shadow a single major idea. Analyze failures and mistakes. Apology for mistake. Recall any mistake or failure and analyze what went wrong. Use your judgment to decide how to avoid a similar error the next time. Your mistakes do not have to be as massive as the one which leaves you bankrupt or end your relationship with your partner. Ask yourself the reason behind simpler missteps like uttering the wrong words, gobbling unnecessary calories, or missing a deadline. The petty mistakes have petty reasons which are easier to correct. In the long run, the compound effect of avoiding such errors pays handsome rewards. The technique applies to students, working professionals, entrepreneurs and in personal life alike.

Consider the pros and cons and tick and cross. Not every decision is straightforward. At times, you're confused if you're making the right choice or not. In such cases, list out all the pros and cons of each option that you can think of. For the method to work, you have to jot down all the positives and negatives with utmost honesty without favoring one choice discreetly. Make sure you're not under the influence of confirmation bias where the process turns into a sophisticated method of deceiving yourself. Once you have the list of pros and cons, reconsider your choice. The right decision isn't choosing the option with the longest set of positives and the least number of negatives. One single advantage or disadvantage can sway the judgment in any direction.

"Why list the pros and cons if one pointer can change the decision altogether?" you ask. That's because when you have all the positives and negatives noted down, you'll know what your opportunities, risks, and consequences are.

Use mindmaps. One of my favorite activities during my thinking time is creating mindmaps. They're best suited when you're in an early stage of an idea. By using mindmaps, you can expand from a central theme and let your thoughts run wild. Do not worry about following the traditional rules used to create them. Mindmaps work best when you apply commonsense and capture ideas in a format that makes sense to you. If you have never created a mindmap before, here is the process to create one. As a quick example, let's say you have set yourself a target of losing weight. To begin, you start with the central block, 'I need to lose weight.' For the first level of branching, you choose different ways you can achieve that goal.

Consider tried and tested method vs out of the box solutions man with idea. When you have an idea in mind, you'll have to think of a method to execute it. When you have more than one method to implement a task, consider which path will you choose. Each choice has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, consider the goal of starting a business. You can choose any of the two routes: tried and tested: in such businesses, you follow a conventional method which has worked before instead of building a new idea. For example, starting a restaurant business involves a standard procedure of chefs, inventory, storage, billing, and service.



The advantage of a known approach is you know what pitfalls to avoid. You'll also have references and benchmarks from other people who delved into the same concept. But, a tried and tested method isn't a guaranteed recipe for triumph. Besides, because the method is well known, you'll face competition. Also, old techniques fade out for different reasons, and replicating success isn't an easy feat.

Thinking out of the box: you can achieve the same goal by starting a disruptive business that the world has never seen before. For example, when Uber or Twitter first entered the market, nobody had heard about a similar idea. A brand new product adds oomph and an element of surprise. Also, the first person to enter the market gains a slight edge over the competitors that follow. But such shiny ideas come with challenges of their own. The most prominent problem is the uncertainty around it and the time required for growth. A few businesses work like a charm while the rest fade into darkness. These two approaches do not only apply while starting a business. You can choose between the two methods when you're planning a vacation (commercial spot or unknown place), picking a career (software or beatboxing), or impressing your crush (sunflowers or roses). In fact, you already do that subconsciously. When you're applying your critical thinking skills, decide which approach do you want to follow. The out of the box approach seems captivating in most cases, but you must apply your judgment to pick the most rational choice.

6. Consider risk and reward. When you're making a decision, measure the risk against the reward to determine if you're making the right choice. You can choose various methods to achieve your target. You can head to the nearest casino and try your luck at the roulette table. You can set up an illegal business of smuggling and drugs. You can invest in high-risk stocks. You can diversify over different businesses and investments to play a long game. As you can see, the gravity of risk in each method is significantly different. Investing in a high-risk stock or gambling at a casino can wipe out what you currently have or yield massive returns in a short time. An illegal business can make you a multi-millionaire and also throw you into prison. Diversifying the risk in different businesses takes boatloads of effort and patience. Only you can decide which method works the best for the goal you're targeting. Another essential recommendation for developing critical thinking ability is thinking of new ideas. Research has time and again shown that the human brain works like a muscle. The more you put it to work, the stronger it gets. Thinking of new ideas is one of the most interesting ways to stimulate your brain. Besides, it is also another way to sharpen your problem solving skills along with your critical thinking. If you have no clue where to begin, start with the goal you're trying to achieve.

Ask yourself what are the different ways to reach your target without worrying about implementation. Map your skills with the methods to find suitable tactics to accomplish your goals. To illustrate that in practice, here is how I came up with the idea of starting Productive Club. I have a goal of running successful businesses. One of the businesses I had in mind was around blogging and self-publishing.

Any foreign language teacher should ask himself why his students are facing with challenges to create something new, why their opinions are ordinary, why they are repeated and why there are no any discussion points in their speeches. It probably cause of lack of critical thinking process. No matter what type of teacher you are, you can help students think critically by modelling these behaviours



themselves during class time. By critical thinking skills research, teachers ask critical questions that lead to developing a critical understanding of a problem.

Teachers should also define goals for their students and provide clear criteria for what success looks like in relation to those goals. In addition, they can teach students how to identify patterns and underlying assumptions when considering various points of view. So how do we teach students to be critical thinkers? To be honest, it is not that difficult and here are some suggestions on how you can do the same.

Make them debate. When I was in secondary school, I was put on a debate team. I think a good portion of my critical thinking capabilities can be attributed to that whole experience. Debating is a great way to evolve your skills because you cannot spew random or false facts. You must conduct good research and be backed up by solid and relevant points and facts. It also teaches you to present your arguments in the most convincing way possible. Also, since you will be debating with other people, it teaches you to think of the other side's arguments since you will need to understand the other opponent to counteract their views. Due to all of these, debating can be a great all-around exercise for critical thinking. They can be a lot of fun for students too. Just try to make sure that you choose topics they are interested in, and you will be surprised how much effort they can put in.

Make them ask is the second suggestion we can give to teachers who are aiming to develop their students' critical thinking abilities. Perhaps one of the reasons we do not think critically as much is because we do not ask enough questions. Try to make it a regular thing in your classes to have students ask questions about anything and then discuss in class. Try to make it as open-minded as possible so that the students feel comfortable and interested. If none of the students is willing to bring up questions, you can use a reward system to incentivise them to do so. You can give some questions as examples in the beginning to give them an idea of what to do. Just put the habit of questioning in their minds.

Make them read and write is another way to enhance critical thinking ability. Again, this is something that used to happen in my English classes that I never appreciated. We used to have this homework, sometimes called Newspaper Clipping. It gave us a piece of news to read and then answered some questions and shared our opinions on the news. I now understand how important and valuable it was. It does not have to be straight from the newspapers. You can give your students exciting pieces of information about the world, cultures, sports, phenomenon, current events, or anything that they either need to know or have curiosity in. Let them read and absorb information and then have them write their unfiltered opinions on them. Do not just tell them what they need to believe or think. Instead, you can say to your students why you believe a certain way and then ask them to explain why they believe a certain way as well.

Here are some teaching strategies that can be implemented to encourage and promote critical thinking among students:

1. "Let's think"

It's very easy to always find a solution for a student who needs your help. Avoid that and instead, try responding with "Let's think about how we can do this." Then, you can assist the student in figuring out the best possible solution for the problem.



Creativity should not be underestimated. Many people assume that creative thinking is limited to artistic expression – the ability to draw an interesting or beautiful picture or excelling in the performing arts. However, creative thinking actually involves the use of imagination, communication skills, problem-solving, mathematics, scientific thinking, and interpreting information. Open-ended scenarios are a great way to get children’s creative juices flowing. Choices, comparisons, entertaining new ideas, and formulating personal responses to these problems are all important ingredients in creative thinking. Creative problem-solving activities help children to develop attention skills and cognitive learning. Their imagination is in full use and it encourages them to come up with new ideas and to think outside of the box. Providing activities where there are no right or wrong answers frees students to be bold and audacious with their thinking.

2. Brainstorm

Give students an opportunity to think. Regardless of the subject, have students analyze what they’ll be doing, learning, or reading – before actually starting each activity. Ask lots of questions, like “What do you think this book will be about?” Or “Tell me two things you think you will be learning in this lesson about American History?”

3. Make Connections

Encouraging students to make connections to a real-life situations and identifying patterns is an excellent way to boost their critical thinking skills. Ask students to always be on the look for these connections, and when they find one to make sure they tell you.

4. Compare and Contrast

Have your students compare and contrast just about anything, to get them critically thinking. Compare and contrast is one of my favorite literacy skills to teach early in the year because it is approachable for students and can be used in so many different ways. Comparative thinking is great for building connections between background knowledge and new concepts. It's also great to incorporate into your explicit vocabulary instruction.

Venn diagrams are the most commonly seen graphic organizer for teaching this skill, and it is critical that students are taught how to use this tool to help them organize their thinking. Since they are also commonly included in state assessments, teaching students to use this type of organizer early in the school year can be helpful in easing the stress as testing approaches. Teaching students how to compare and contrast using a graphic organizer is great for supporting higher level thinking skills. Since this is a skill often seen on standardized tests, these are skills students will use far beyond just reading. Science and social studies, for example, consistently involve having students be able to apply these skills to understand the world around them. By explicitly teaching students to compare and contrast in reading, they'll easily be able to access this skill in other contexts.

5. Group Activities

When children are around their classmates working together, they get exposed to the thought processes of their peers. They learn how to understand how other people think. This allows them to become better problem solvers when presented with difficulty.



One of samples of group activity can be “Spaghetti tower” that is conducted by groups of 3–10 students. Divide students into teams and provide them with ‘building’ materials, such as dry spaghetti, marshmallows, string and tape. Set a time limit for designing and building a spaghetti tower (one that’s structurally sound, of course). When their time is up, the tallest freestanding tower wins. Prizes can range from bonus points on a recent assignment to a short extension for their next paper or report. There are several variations on this, such as building a pyramid with paper cups, but the idea is to promote communication and collaboration in a leadership exercise—and provide a little incentive as well.

To conclude we can state that forming and enhancing ways of critical thinking ability should be taught to foreign language learners in details as they can be able to create, to establish new ideas, to find out new innovative, creative ways to develop their language learning process. Critical thinking is considered to be important in the academic fields for enabling one to analyze, evaluate, explain, and restructure thinking, thereby ensuring the act of thinking without false belief. However, even with knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning.

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