

ЕВРАЗИЙСКИЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ИМЕНИ Л.Н.ГУМИЛЕВА



Филологический факультет
Кафедра иностранных языков



СБОРНИК МАТЕРИАЛОВ
международного семинара
**«STRENGTHENING FOREIGN LANGUAGES
TEACHING: CHALLENGES,
APPROACHES AND TECHNOLOGIES»**

27-29 марта 2018 года

Астана, Республика Казахстан

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Сборник содержит статьи участников международного семинара «Strengthening Foreign Languages Teaching: Challenges, Approaches and Technologies». В сборнике рассмотрены актуальные вопросы касательно основных тенденций и особенностей развития современной методики преподавания иностранных языков в средней и высшей школе в условиях полиязычия, проанализирован опыт по реализации инновационных технологий в языковом образовании, рассмотрены вопросы преподавания предметов на иностранном языке, представлены исследования результатов независимого и интегрированного подходов с особым упором на креативность и критическое мышление, необходимых для академического письма в учебной деятельности магистрантов.

Издание адресовано ученым-методистам, докторантам, магистрантам и педагогам-практикам в области обучения языкам, а также широкому кругу читателей.

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учебного процесса, т.е. его применение возможно только там, где это целесообразно.

В ходе данной работы я пришла к выводам, новое время, новые условия потребовали немедленного и коренного пересмотра как общей методологии, так и конкретных методов и приемов преподавания иностранных языков. В свете современных требований целям обучения меняется статус и роль страноведческой информации. Большинство методистов ставят во главу угла современное состояние теории и практики обучения иностранного языка с ярко выраженной коммуникативной направленностью, что способствует всестороннему развитию личности, развитию духовных ценностей учащихся. Универсальным подходам к системе образования становления, становится обучение межкультурной коммуникации. В практическом плане современное преподавание иностранного языка невозможно без привития учащимся иноязычной культуры.

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INCORPORATING CRITICAL THINKING INTO SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Kazakhstan is a dynamically developing country. Currently it is on a way of active integration to the world community. Nowadays special value is given to learning foreign languages, especially English as it is the language of international cooperation.

One of the main objectives of teaching a foreign language in Kazakhstan is training competitive youth who will be able to show excellent foreign language skills and an ability to communicate freely in this language.

Therefore, our country needs specialists with a high level of English. The labor market of modern society needs employees not only with good professional education, but also the ability to communicate with colleagues at conferences, discussions and seminars, to write scientific reports, business letters to the foreign colleagues, and to undertake joint projects and other important activities.

English is one of the important subjects in our country nowadays. And teaching it requires a lot of effort and hard work both from teachers and students.

Students in our university are very good in grammar and spelling. They easily do any grammar exercises and they can compare English grammar structures with the structures in Kazakh or Russian. Students can read materials and are able to summarize texts and memorize a vocabulary. They can understand what they are told or they are able to extract the main ideas from listening and reading. But speaking is one of the skills that is very difficult for our students. It is challenging for them to express their ideas, share their view points, analyze the problems and compare the details in spoken English.

In order to solve these problems teachers themselves must learn to use new forms, technologies, and methods. One of the most effective is the development of Critical Thinking skills of students.

This approach allows students to achieve the following:

- ability to work with an increasing and constantly updated information stream in different fields of knowledge;
- ability to express thoughts (orally and in writing) that are clear, sure and correct in relation to people around them;
- ability to develop their own opinion on the basis of experience, ideas and representations;
- ability to solve problems;
- ability to be engaged in the training independently;
- ability to cooperate and work in groups, and to build constructive relationships.

Critical thinking exercises also help students to solve the problem of communicating as teachers are devoted to teaching them to be responsible for their decision.

Critical thinking exercises provoke positive attitude to language learning, and offer opportunities to practice communication. If you just ask students to read newspapers, magazines, Internet articles, books daily or learn a list of new words, not many of them will respond to the suggestion positively. But if you use critical thinking methods for learning new words at lessons, the attitude and result will be quite different.

Adding critical thinking exercises to the lessons has value in helping students show their individuality. Critical thinking tasks are often open to different answers, solutions and results. Using these tasks a teacher should act like a facilitator or a helper and not like a judge ready to give his strict opinion.

In our study we interviewed at the beginning to measure students' speaking levels in both groups where we were going to use critical thinking exercises and the students we were not going to work with critical thinking exercises. Then, after using critical thinking exercises in our teaching groups for three months, we surveyed students of both groups again to see if critical thinking exercises had contributed to students' improvement of speaking skills and how was students level with non critical thinking lessons.

In this paper we discuss how we tried to improve students speaking skills through critical thinking exercises, we analyze our experimental work with students and give a description for the survey where we asked students' opinions how critical thinking exercises contributed to their speaking skills improvement and made conclusions.

In recent decades, it has been discussed a lot in education about the benefits of critical thinking: namely its novelty and the need for teaching foreign languages. Although, it is worth noting that the idea of using critical thinking is not new nowadays. (R.Paul and L.Elder) considering the history of critical thinking came to the conclusion that it starts from the times of ancient Greece and traced in the period of activity of Socrates (369-399 BC). Meanwhile Socrates, based on the dialectical debate between the teacher and the student, asked questions student where student had to think logically. Since then, the idea of Socrates was supported by scholars of the West and Soviet scientists for centuries.

Modern researchers in the techniques of critical thinking, as in the West (D.Halpern, Ch.Temple, S.Wolter, etc.), and Russian (S. Zair -Beck, I. Zagashev, I. Mushtavinskaya etc.) define critical thinking as a set of qualities and skills that determine a high level of research culture of the student and the teacher.

The psychologists, educators and sociologists of the twentieth century gave a great attention to the need to develop thinking (M.Bakhtin, S. Brookfield, A. Butenko , L.Vygotsky, S. Wexler, D. Russell, Teplov, etc.), describing it as a separate property of the person, as the skill of mental activity, as personally and socially significant phenomenon in the priority education.

Not without reason S. Kalinina states that technology of critical thinking opens up the opportunities for student creativity. In addition Bordovskaya N. and Rean A. claim that critical thinking as a type of training:

- Firstly, stimulates the expression of activity, initiative, independence and creativity of students;

- Secondly, it develops intuition and discursive (insight), convergence (opening) and divergence (creative) thinking;

- Thirdly, teaches the art of solving various scientific and practical problems, experience the creative solving theoretical and practical problems.

Russian experts, namely S.Zair -Beck and I.Mushtavinskaya consider the technology development of critical thinking in the following steps:

- 1) evocation - update the existing knowledge; awakening the interest in obtaining new information;

- 2) realization of meaning - new information; adjustment of student's learning goals;

- 3) reflection - meditation, the birth of new knowledge.

According to the American scholar D. Klooster (2005) the development of intelligence is increasingly connected not with the operation of memory, and with the development of independent thinking. According to the author, and understanding not thinking, it is only one of the preconditions of critical thinking.

D. Klooster suggests five aspects that distinguish critical thinking from the other types.

1. Critical thinking is thinking independently.

2. Information is the starting and end point is not critical thinking. Knowledge creates motivation without which one cannot think critically.

3. Critical thinking begins with asking questions and understanding the problems to be solved. Critical thinking is committed to convincing argument.

4. Critical thinking is thinking social.

The notion of "critical" implies an evaluation component, is not synonymous with "criticism".

"When we think critically, - explains D.Halpern - we evaluate the results of our thoughts processes - how well the decision we made, or how well we coped with the task. Critical thinking also includes an assessment of the thinking process - progress in reasoning that led to our B, or our discoveries factors that we take into account when making a decision"

When learners are interested in a topic and are given chances to negotiate meaning, they will be motivated to discuss things critically and at the same time, acquire language to communicate (2006), Rfaner (2006).

We work with university students who are majoring in different specialties including Electronics, Economics, Physics, and Information Technologies. They all have studied English as an obligatory subject in secondary schools since the age of 8 or 9, but their level of English varies greatly among them. We have mixed ability students who have taken IELTS or TOEFL and have high scores; we also have students whose English is at a very low level, that can't understand any English sentence.

In our research, we used both interviews and surveys. Eighty-eight students of L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University majoring in Electronics, Economics, Heating Energetic, Construction, and Finance participated in our experiment.

We interviewed each student at the beginning of the semester to determine their level of English speaking ability. We assessed our students fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and ability to express own ideas in English. Students were marked on a 10 point scale.

We found that overall, that students' level of speaking in English is different. 11 students got 30 - 35 points, 26 students got 22-30 points, 51 students got 11 -15 points.

Critical Thinking exercises fall into three stages: challenges, conception, and reflection.

At the stage of Challenges, different exercises are carried out in order to prepare students for the main stage. We used activities including **individual / pair/group work; brainstorming; contents forecasting; clusters and problem questions**. The previous knowledge is brought to understanding level. And students' knowledge can become the basis for acquiring new knowledge, giving students the chance to connect new information with previous skills more effectively. Students can therefore approach new information more critically.

At the stage of Conception, the students learn to pay attention to gaps that he or she does not understand. This stage is used to compare the information with new knowledge and experience; it focuses on finding answers to the questions, on asking new questions, on defining what is interesting and beneficial, and on preparing for analysis and discussion. The activities we have used in this stage are *Mind Map*, *Ideal*, and *Insert*.

At the Reflection stage, students think of what they have learned in a lesson consolidating new knowledge, actively including them into new ideas. The live exchange of ideas between students gives them the chance to get acquainted with the different points of view, to analyze a subject, and to solve problems. This stage is devoted to creative application of the received knowledge, skills and abilities in the speech.

By the end of our experiment we had the same interview with our students. We found out that the speaking level of our students increased, of course.

19 students got 30 - 35 points, 37 students got 20-25 points, 32 students got 18 -27 points.

We interviewed the students where we didn't use any critical thinking exercises. The results were the same as in the beginning.

More importantly, our students became more confident when speaking. They used more varied grammar structures. They began to give their opinions and even to offer proof for their viewpoints, using the new vocabulary introduced during these classes. Even weaker students showed that critical thinking exercises were helpful for them. They began to speak and sought to work with stronger students. But we can note that three months work is not enough for improvement of English speaking especially when students' level is elementary.

Having used critical thinking exercises in our classes for three months, we conducted a survey with our students. The main aim of this survey was to identify how tasks with elements of critical thinking help students on speaking a second language.

It included the following questions:

- What is your speaking level in English?
- Do you like that the teacher uses different techniques to improve speaking skills in English language?
- How can activities like brain storming, forecasting, clusters and others help you to activate the previously existing knowledge, to awaken interest in the topic?
- How useful are Mind map, Ideal and Insert to receive and apply the new knowledge?
- What do you think of creative assignments?

The results of this survey showed that most students are satisfied with their English classes. Many of them like that different activities are used in classes. 33 participants assess their speaking level as very good, 37 considered as poor and 30 students think that it's difficult to say.

All students like that the teacher uses different techniques to improve speaking skills in English language. Some made the following comments:

1. These methods are helpful.
2. I like the variety.

3. I like when the teachers give creative activities.
4. They arise my interest to studies.
5. I need more oral practice and these exercises helped.
6. I learn more vocabulary.

Many students expressed their ideas regarding the question how can activities like brain storming, forecasting, clusters and others help you to activate the previously existing knowledge, to awaken interest in the topic.

1. We can remember the previous material, develop our brains.
2. They help enlarge our vocabulary.
3. I consolidate my skills.
4. I fix my grammar; better understand the material I have passed.
5. I learn a new vocabulary from my classmates.
6. New activities in each class they are perfect for me to improve my skills

and systematize my knowledge.

7. This is the moment of revision of the previous material that is necessary in learning a new material.

8. Logical tasks are very interesting and beneficial.
9. I like brain storming. I think my brains become more active.

Most students are eager to do the assignments on the stage of conception.

Some of their comments are:

1. They are helpful as I learn a new material and use it in my speech.

2. I like doing Mind map, it is a very interesting activity to learn and apply.

3. It's very interesting to learn new material not only in English but I use it in other disciplines, it helps me to write essays, to speak on the topics.

4. They help to express my own ideas.
5. It's easy to remember the new vocabulary and grammar.
6. Effective method to remember the vocabulary and use it in the future.
7. It's new for me.

Five students wrote: It's difficult to answer. Other responses showed that the activities we used in our classes were difficult for them. Here are some of these comments.

1. For me it's difficult to do these exercises, my level is too weak.

2. Mostly students with good English practice participate in these activities; for me it's hard to think and react quickly.

3. Mind map is good, but other activities are not easy for me. When I do Insert, I make a long list of unknown grammar and vocabulary.

We got the following comments to the question "What do you think of creative assignments?"

1. We develop our speaking skills; we try to express our ideas.
2. We improve our English by means of this activity.
3. I want to have creative activities in other disciplines as well.
4. We share our viewpoints and can compare our minds.
5. They help develop not only speaking but also writing.
6. We try to solve the problems and find the ways of decision.

7. It's interesting to create new ideas on the basis of your knowledge.
8. They are perfect in making decisions and thinking independently.
9. It's very interesting to describe the matter in detail and give your evaluation.

10. I became closer to my classmates; I felt myself alone in my new group.

In general, results showed that using critical thinking exercises was helpful for our students in many ways. They tried to learn a language in a different way, their attempts to share their viewpoints and analyze the matter were successful. They learnt express their ideas and support their partners' opinions.

In this study we showed that most students found it beneficial to use critical thinking activities in English classes. Use of critical thinking activities increased our students' speaking skills. Incorporating three stages of activities helped our students to become more confident in the target language, to practice vocabulary and grammar, to express their opinions, and to compare and analyze the subject. Students have learned a new way of language learning that was effective for them in improving their speaking skills. However, a few students found it difficult to participate in the activities because of their low level of English. It was very hard for them to follow their classmates.

In Kazakhstan, we believe that the progress of our students depends on the teachers. We should always seek for better activities to make our classes more effective and to keep students interested and motivated.

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