

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING SPEAKING

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15022547>

Kuchkorova Zebo Mansur qizi

Uzbekistan State World Languages University student

Supervisor: Isakova Dilafruz Fakhriddinovna

Uzbekistan State World Languages University teacher

Abstract

Critical thinking activities are crucial in elevating students' speaking skills and encouraging analysis, reasoning, problem-solving, and creativity. These activities are helpful for many students who struggle with expressing their ideas clearly and engaging in meaningful conversations. This article aims to define the concept of "critical thinking" and to discuss the role of critical thinking in the development of speaking skills. It explores the relationship between critical thinking and speaking, emphasizing how essential strategies of thinking contribute to improving fluency, coherence, and engagement. In addition, it includes a literature review examining previous studies on the impact of critical thinking in language learning, presents a detailed research methodology, and discusses various critical thinking activities that can be integrated into speaking lessons. The paper highlights the benefits and challenges teachers and students face while implementing these activities and provides recommendations for educators to overcome obstacles in fostering students' critical thinking in speaking.

Keywords

Critical thinking, English language speaking activities, speaking skills, discussion, thought, giving opinion.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, English is necessary as it has influenced some sectors such as education, economics, society, technology, politics, culture, etc. Everyone needs to learn and master English especially students, because it has some roles for students' learning and future. Language competence refers to the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various communication settings, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Canale & Swain, 1980). Among these skills, speaking is crucial as it enables individuals to express

ideas clearly, engage in discussions, and negotiate meaning in real-time interactions.

However, the majority of learners struggle with speaking because of various challenges, such as a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, difficulty organizing thoughts, and fear of making mistakes. One of the main reasons is that conventional speaking instruction often focuses on memorization of dialogues and mechanical practice, which can limit students' ability to engage in spontaneous communication. To tackle these problems, adapting critical thinking activities in speaking instruction can be highly effective. Critical thinking helps students to analyze information, evaluate various viewpoints, give logical arguments, and express their ideas clearly. The importance of critical thinking comes from that critical thinking is a domain-general thinking skill and promotes creativity through self-reflection and justifies our ways of life and opinions. In addition to that, critical thinking improves language and presentation skills by knowing how to think clearly and systematically (University of the People, 2021).

Furthermore, critical thinking is also vital in shaping creative and effective future English teachers. According to Radhakrishnan (2009) when EFL teachers become familiar with these characteristics of critical thinking and do their best to apply them in their teaching career, they will become successful. In the twentieth century, learning to think is the fundamental objective of education (Dewey, 1939). In education, critical thinking refers to the ability of learners to actively analyze, evaluate, interpret, and synthesize information to form informed judgments, solve problems, and reach conclusions, rather than simply accepting information. It involves questioning assumptions, examining evidence, and considering different perspectives to reach a well-reasoned opinion. The students should think critically to come up with creative solutions for a problem. It must also be purposeful – new ideas should be both practical and relevant to the given task. Wilson (2017) said that in critical thinking, knowledge is not enough, you should have the competency to analyze data and real issues in a manner that makes sense of the information you have.

This study examines the role of critical thinking in improving the speaking skills of students who learn English as a second language. It highlights the relationship between critical thinking and language proficiency, demonstrating that students who engage in critical thinking activities develop stronger communication skills, fluency, and confidence in speaking. The paper also explores different activities that can enhance both skills simultaneously and discusses the impact and challenges of integrating critical thinking activities into speaking lessons.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking is not the same as disagreement, as some people think. There is a considerable difference between them. In order to distinguish between these two concepts, we first need to define what critical thinking is. There are a wide range of definitions of critical thinking have been presented by several scholars and researchers.

Critical thinking does not aim to embarrass or humiliate, and it does not allow you to dominate somebody else. Thinking critically does give one a kind of power. After all, if you can be determined and assess the reasons for a belief if you can make a discussion more enlightening, you stand a good chance of getting to the nub of an issue, of solving problems, of gaining greater control over your life, of attaining truth. In short, critical thinking does help you gain knowledge, and knowledge, as commonly observed, is a kind of power (Barry, 1984).

Paul and Scriven go on to suggest that critical thinking is based on: "*universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue, assumptions, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions, implication and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints, and frame of reference. Critical thinking - in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes - is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking.*"

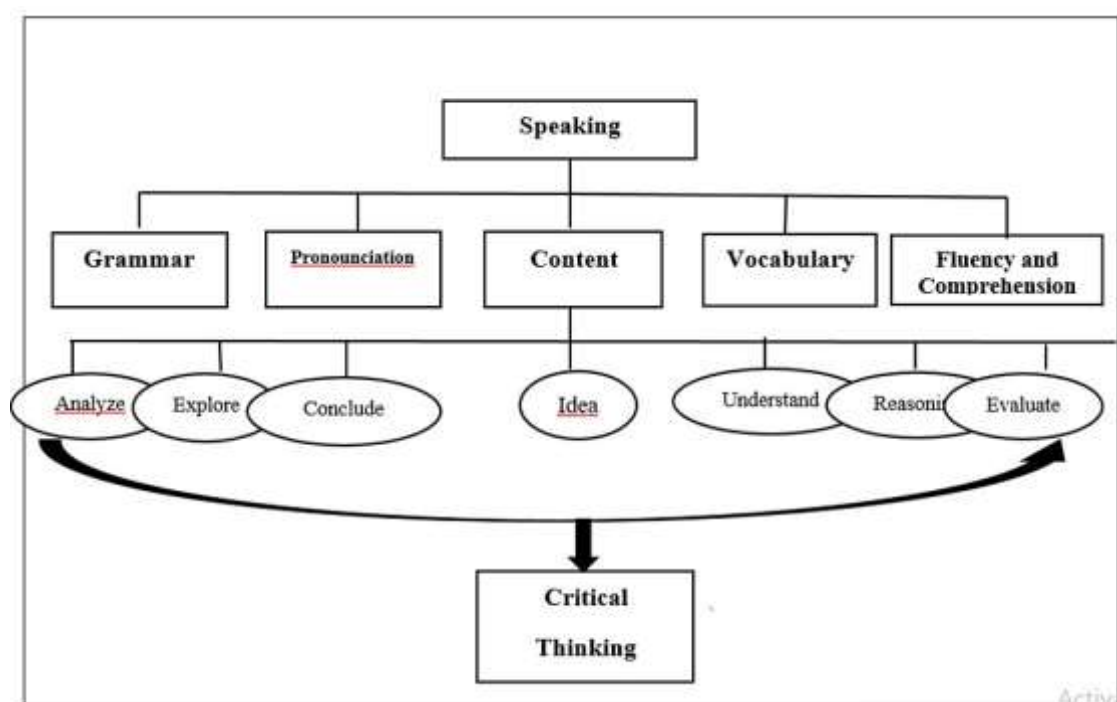
Critical thinking is often defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in a reasoned and reflective manner to make informed decisions or solve complex problems (Facione, 2015). According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking is a process of identifying and questioning certain assumptions, being skeptical of one's own ideas, striving to find new alternatives, and debating the given context.

Many researchers have identified a relationship between critical thinking and language learning, highlighting the key role of critical thinking in enhancing learners' speaking ability. "*No one doubts, theoretically, the importance of fostering thinking skills in school is with a good habit of thinking,*" John Dewey argues (2022). He believes teachers must incorporate critical thinking into learning so students can see the connection between actions and results. Schools must teach subjects and train thought. If the mind is separate from observation, memory, imagination, and

common-sense assessments of people and things, then particular activities should train it.

Paul and Elder (2014) consider critical thinking as an important tool in establishing effective communication because it helps learners to analyze information, structure their thoughts logically, and present ideas earnestly. They emphasize that students who engage in higher-order thinking processes become more articulate speakers because they can organize their ideas coherently and justify their arguments with evidence. Richards (2008) also supports this view, stating that critical thinking helps learners to move beyond rote learning and engage in meaningful discussions. His research found that students who participate in problem-solving and debate activities show significant improvements in fluency and coherence while speaking.

Zare and Biria (2018) examined the impact of critical thinking instruction on students' speaking skills in their study. They revealed that students exposed to critical thinking activities demonstrated enhanced fluency, better argumentation skills, and more structured speech compared to those who were taught using traditional methods. A similar research was done by Halvorsen (2005) who argued that critical thinking fosters independent learning and allows students to engage



more actively in discussions, leading to enhanced speaking skills. Fulcher (2003) said that speaking has some components such as grammar, pronunciation, content, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, which are essential to produce good speaking. The figure below depicts the influence of critical thinking on speaking ability.

Figure 1. The role of critical thinking in speaking

The figure above was taken from some experts. One of them is Hughes (2014) mentioned some indicators of critical thinking, are asking questions and avoiding making assumptions, being able to evaluate information, choosing relevant bits and pieces, ability to question opinions, research, arguments and ideas, reflective reasoning, analyzing material, formulating opinion about it and be able to support opinion, making students autonomous and independent, looking at a problem from a different angle, ask the right questions and weigh up different points of view, identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing the importance of context, imagining and exploring alternatives, and developing reflective skepticism.

Critical thinking skills teach different skills that can be applied to any situation in life such as reflection, analysis, and planning. Higher thinking ability produces higher speaking ability. Another role of critical thinking in speaking activities is in students' preparation. Students' preparation before speaking consists of some critical thinking indicators: generating ideas, brainstorming, mind mapping, analyzing and identifying problems, recognizing the main point, and exploring the sentences. If a student does not have good preparation before speaking, he or she will get low on critical thinking and speaking activities. Preparation is one of the essential parts of making a good speech.

After exploring the importance of critical thinking in teaching speaking, we now need how to foster it in the classroom. Several studies have explored different ways to integrate critical thinking into language learning. Here are some activities that help to implement critical thinking in speaking:

- Open-ended questions (encourage students to think deeply and give detailed explanations);
- Socratic method (guide students through a series of questions to uncover assumptions and explore different perspectives);
- Debate activities (allow students to argue different sides of an issue, supporting their claims with evidence);
- Primary source analysis (analyze original documents to critically evaluate historical events);
- Peer review (students provide feedback on each other's work, identifying areas for improvement).

A strong teaching strategy that stimulates critical thinking in the classroom is asking open-ended questions because it encourages learners to engage deeply

in the learning process. Open-ended questions do not have a single right answer, allowing students to explore different perspectives and develop their reasoning skills. By asking thought-provoking questions, teachers create opportunities for students to analyze information, draw connections, and articulate their thoughts creatively. According to Kabilan (2000), debate and problem-solving activities create opportunities for students to analyze different perspectives, develop logical reasoning, and express opinions with clarity. These kinds of activities make students participate actively, as students feel enthusiastic to express their ideas and insights. Additionally, these approaches also foster a dynamic and collaborative learning environment, where students can learn from one another's perspectives. Brookfield (2012) highlights the benefits of Socratic questioning, which encourages students to think deeply and articulate their thoughts with precision. The art of Socratic questioning also plays a key role in critical thinking because the art of questioning is important to the excellence of thought. What the word "Socratic" adds is systematic, depth and a keen interest in assessing the truth or plausibility of things (Elder & Paul, 1998).

These studies suggest that integrating critical thinking activities into speaking lessons leads to significant improvements in students' ability to communicate effectively. However, research also highlighted challenges, such as students' reluctance to participate and the need for teachers to be trained in facilitating critical thinking discussions (Facione, 2011). Some learners might be hesitant to take part in discussions because they fear making mistakes, and some educators also may struggle to implement critical thinking activities in the classroom due to lack of training. EFL teachers must first set up the learning environment so that students are 1) exposed to critical thinking activities, 2) willing to participate, and 3) successful before implementing critical thinking activities in physical education, particularly speaking. Finally, students' oral skills are strengthened with practice by incorporating critical thinking abilities (Anggraeny et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to analyze the effectiveness of critical thinking activities in enhancing students' speaking skills. The study was carried out in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom setting, where students participated in various critical thinking-based speaking activities. This research employed a qualitative research approach to explore the role of critical thinking activities in teaching speaking. The study involved 30 intermediate-level EFL students with the same speaking score at the English language learning center. They were randomly divided into two equal groups to explore whether critical

thinking plays a crucial role in improving speaking or not. The first group participated in weekly critical thinking-based speaking activities, designed to enhance learner's fluency, coherence, and confidence, while the other group followed traditional speaking lessons. In addition, 10 language teachers participated in surveys to gather insights into their experiences integrating critical thinking into speaking lessons.

Data Collection Methods

- Test: A standardized speaking test based on the CEFR framework was conducted before and after the study to assess the speaking proficiency of students
- Observations: To find out how students learn speaking and using critical thinking, speaking lessons containing critical thinking activities such as debates, problem-solving discussions, and Socratic questioning were observed over a period of 8 weeks. Student participation, engagement, and speaking performance were recorded.
- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 students to understand their perspectives on how critical thinking activities influenced their speaking skills.
- Surveys: A questionnaire was distributed among 10 teachers to assess their perceptions of the impact of critical thinking on students' speaking proficiency and the challenges they faced in implementing such activities.

In data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Students' speaking test scores are measured by taking tests. First, classroom observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns in student participation and improvement in speaking skills. Subsequently, student interview transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes related to confidence, fluency, and critical thinking abilities. Teacher survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, highlighting trends in teachers' experiences with integrating critical thinking activities.

RESULTS

The study's findings show that integrating critical thinking activities into speaking lessons had a positive impact on students' speaking proficiency. The results of tests that were taken before and after the study show a significant change in the speaking skills of the two groups. The first group that engaged in critical thinking-based speaking activities showed better results than the second group, which was taught by traditional methods of teaching speaking.

Groups	Pre-test score	Post-test score	Improvem ent (%)
--------	-------------------	--------------------	---------------------

First group	65.2	82.7	+26.8%
Second group	64.8	71.5	+10.3%

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test results

Students who participated in debates and problem-solving discussions exhibited greater fluency in their speech, indicating that **critical thinking activities helped them structure their responses better and speak more confidently**. They were able to articulate ideas more smoothly and structure their responses logically, aligning with previous studies (Richards, 2008; Zare & Biria, 2018).

Observations and interviews revealed that students became more engaged when given opportunities to analyze and evaluate different viewpoints. Socratic questioning, in particular, encouraged deeper reflection, leading to more meaningful conversations. According to teachers' observations, students in the **first group actively took part** in discussions, whereas the other group students showed **lower engagement and shorter responses**.

Observation Category	First group	Second group
Active Participation	High	Moderate
Engagement in Discussions	Very high	Low
Critical Thinking Skills Displayed	Strong	Minimal
Confidence in Speaking	Improved significantly	Slight improvement

Table 2. Classroom Observations results

Students reported in the interviews that they felt more confident in expressing their opinions, as critical thinking activities helped them develop stronger arguments and justify their viewpoints. This finding supports Kabilan's (2000) assertion that critical thinking promotes self-assurance in communication.

Despite the evident benefits of integrating critical speaking activities, some challenges were noticed. For instance, some students felt hesitant to participate in discussions due to fear of making mistakes. Moreover, students from educational backgrounds that emphasize memorization struggled with critical analysis. Many EFL teachers were unfamiliar with strategies to incorporate critical thinking into speaking lessons, and they expressed the need for more training in facilitating

critical thinking discussions. Also, some teachers found it difficult to incorporate extensive critical thinking activities within limited class time, because many standardized curricula focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than critical thinking. However, **these challenges can be overcome by training teachers appropriately, modifying the curriculum, and encouraging a supportive classroom environment.** Schools and educators should adopt a **gradual, student-centered approach** to foster **critical thinking and effective communication skills.**

CONCLUSION

This study shows the crucial role of critical thinking activities in improving students' speaking skills. Critical thinking helps students form good judgments, solve problems, and reach conclusions by analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, and synthesizing the information. According to findings, integrating debates, problem-solving discussions, and Socratic questioning activities into speaking lessons leads to **notable improvements in fluency, coherence, vocabulary use, and confidence.** The **first group** demonstrated substantial progress compared to the **second group that followed traditional speaking lessons**, confirming the effectiveness of critical thinking strategies in fostering structured and meaningful communication.

Despite some challenges related to teacher training, curriculum limitations, and student readiness, the benefits of integrating critical thinking into speaking instruction outweigh the difficulties. To tackle these problems, educators should receive training on how to facilitate critical thinking discussions effectively, and language programs should allocate sufficient time for such activities. By encouraging critical thinking, language instructors help learners develop a deeper understanding of topics and express their ideas with greater clarity and coherence.

Ur (1996) thinks that good teachers know how to challenge students. They know their students thoroughly and understand each student's learning styles, thus they teach in a way that students will not only learn but also be intrigued by the information provided to them. Critical thinking not only improves speaking skills but also fosters independent learning, decision-making, and analytical reasoning, which are valuable in both academic and professional settings.

REFERENCES

1. University of the People (2021). *Why Is Critical Thinking Important? A Survival Guide.*
2. Radhakrishnan, C. (2009). *Critical Thinking & Practical Strategies to*

promote it in Classroom. Retrieved September 23, 2010 from.

3. Dewey, J. (1939). *Experience and Education*. Colliner Books.
4. Barry, V. E. (1984). *Invitation to Critical Thinking*. CBS College.
5. Brookfield, S. D. (2012). *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions*. Jossey-Bass.
6. Wilson, J. (2017). *Critical Thinking: A Beginner's Guide to Critical Thinking, Better Decision Making and Problem Solving!* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
7. Facione, P. A. (2011). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. Insight Assessment.
8. Halvorsen, A. (2005). *Incorporating Critical Thinking Skills Development into ESL/EFL Courses*. TESL Journal.
9. Kabilan, M. K. (2000). *Creative and Critical Thinking in Language Classrooms*. The Internet TESL Journal.
10. Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2014). *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*. Pearson.
11. Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
12. Zare, P., & Biria, R. (2018). *The Relationship Between Critical Thinking and Speaking Proficiency in EFL Learners*. Journal of Applied Linguistics.
13. Fulcher, G. (2003). *Testing Second Language Speaking*. London: Longman/Pearson Education.
14. Hughes, J. (2014). *Critical Thinking in the Language Classroom*. Eli Press: Oxford
15. Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.