

DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH READING AND SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. *This article examines the importance of developing critical thinking through reading and speaking activities in English language teaching. It discusses the role of critical thinking in modern education and explains how reading activities help students analyze, interpret, and evaluate information. The article also highlights the significance of speaking activities such as discussions, debates, role plays, and problem-solving tasks in improving learners' analytical and communicative abilities. Special attention is given to the integration of reading and speaking skills, the role of the teacher, classroom challenges, and the influence of technology on critical thinking development. The article concludes that reading and speaking activities contribute greatly to forming independent, creative, and reflective learners who are prepared for academic and social challenges.*

Key words: *critical thinking, reading activities, speaking activities, English language teaching, communication skills, analytical thinking, discussions, debates, language learning, problem-solving, classroom interaction, independent learning, education, communicative competence, student development.*

In modern education, the development of critical thinking has become one of the most important goals of language teaching. The rapid growth of information technologies, social media, and global communication requires students not only to understand information but also to analyze, evaluate, compare, and express their own opinions independently.

In English language teaching, critical thinking plays a significant role because students constantly work with texts, ideas, discussions, and communication tasks. Reading and speaking activities are considered especially effective for developing critical thinking skills because they encourage learners to think deeply, interpret information, and interact actively with others.

Critical thinking is usually defined as the ability to think clearly, logically, and independently. It involves analyzing facts, asking questions, solving problems, making decisions, and evaluating arguments. A student with strong critical thinking skills does not simply accept information without reflection. Instead, such a learner examines evidence, considers different perspectives, and forms reasoned conclusions. In language classrooms, critical thinking helps students become active participants in the learning process rather than passive receivers of information.

Reading activities are one of the most powerful tools for developing critical thinking.

Reading is not only a process of recognizing words and understanding grammar structures.

Effective reading also requires interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of ideas presented in a text. When students read carefully, they learn to identify the author's purpose, distinguish facts from opinions, understand hidden meanings, and connect information with their own experiences and knowledge.

Teachers can use different types of reading materials to encourage critical thinking.

Articles, stories, essays, news reports, and opinion texts provide opportunities for students to analyze information from various viewpoints. For example, when learners read a newspaper article about environmental problems, they can discuss the causes of pollution, evaluate possible solutions, and express their own attitudes toward environmental protection. Such activities move students beyond simple comprehension and encourage deeper intellectual engagement.

Pre-reading activities are important because they prepare students to think actively before reading the text itself. Teachers may ask predictive questions, show pictures, or introduce controversial statements related to the topic. These techniques activate students' background knowledge and encourage them to make assumptions. Prediction is closely connected with critical thinking because students begin forming ideas and expectations before receiving complete information.

During-reading activities also contribute significantly to critical thinking development.

While reading, students can underline important information, identify unfamiliar concepts, ask questions, or compare different ideas presented in the text. Teachers may encourage learners to pause and reflect on what they have read. This process helps students become more conscious readers who interact with the text instead of reading mechanically.

Post-reading activities are especially effective for critical thinking because they require learners to respond personally and intellectually to the text. Students may summarize information, debate issues, write reflections, or compare the text with real-life situations. Discussion questions such as "Do you agree with the author?" or "What would you do in this situation?" encourage learners to justify their opinions with evidence and logical arguments. Through such tasks, students learn that reading is not only about understanding words but also about evaluating ideas critically.

Speaking activities are equally important for the development of critical thinking. Oral communication requires students to organize thoughts quickly, express ideas clearly, respond to others, and defend opinions. Speaking tasks create opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving. In communicative classrooms, students become more confident in expressing their viewpoints and listening respectfully to different perspectives.

Discussion activities are among the most common methods of developing critical thinking through speaking. Group discussions encourage students to exchange ideas, analyze problems, and consider alternative opinions. During discussions, learners often face viewpoints different from their own. This experience teaches them to think flexibly and evaluate arguments carefully rather than relying only on personal beliefs.

Debates are another highly effective speaking activity for critical thinking development. In debates, students must prepare arguments, provide evidence, and respond to opposing opinions logically. Debating helps learners develop reasoning skills and improves their ability to speak persuasively. Moreover, debates teach students to respect different perspectives and engage in constructive communication. Even students who initially feel shy often become more confident through structured debate activities.

Role plays and simulations also contribute greatly to critical thinking skills. In such activities, students imagine themselves in real-life situations and make decisions based on specific problems or responsibilities. For example, learners may role-play as government officials discussing environmental policies or as journalists interviewing witnesses about an event. These tasks require creativity, problem-solving, and quick thinking, all of which strengthen critical thinking abilities.

Problem-solving speaking tasks are especially useful in language learning classrooms.

Teachers may present students with a difficult situation and ask them to work together to find solutions. For instance, students might discuss how to reduce school bullying, improve public transportation, or organize a community project. Through collaborative problem-solving, learners practice analyzing information, considering consequences, and making logical decisions.

Questioning techniques used by teachers also have a strong influence on critical thinking development. Open-ended questions are more effective than simple yes-or-no questions because they encourage deeper responses and reflection. Questions beginning with “why,” “how,” and “what if” stimulate analysis and creativity. For example, instead of asking “Did you like the story?” a teacher may ask “Why do you think the character made that decision?” or “How would the ending change if the situation were different?” Such questions challenge students to think more deeply and explain their reasoning.

The integration of reading and speaking activities creates even greater opportunities for critical thinking. After reading a text, students can participate in discussions, debates, or presentations related to the topic. This combination allows learners to process information through multiple skills simultaneously. Reading provides ideas and information, while speaking allows students to analyze and communicate their thoughts actively.

For example, after reading an article about social media influence, students may discuss whether social media has more positive or negative effects on society. During this process, they must refer to ideas from the text, compare them with personal experiences, and support their opinions logically. Such integrated activities help students become independent thinkers and effective communicators.

Technology also plays an important role in supporting critical thinking through reading and speaking activities. Online articles, podcasts, videos, and virtual discussions expose students to diverse perspectives and authentic language materials.

Digital platforms encourage collaboration and interaction beyond the classroom environment. However, teachers must guide students carefully because not all online information is reliable. Evaluating sources and identifying misinformation are important elements of critical thinking in the digital age.

Despite the many advantages of critical thinking activities, teachers may face certain challenges in the classroom. Some students may feel uncomfortable expressing opinions openly, especially in cultures where traditional teaching methods emphasize memorization and passive learning. Others may have limited vocabulary or lack confidence in speaking English. Therefore, teachers should create a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel respected and encouraged to participate without fear of making mistakes.

Another challenge is time management. Critical thinking activities often require more classroom time than traditional exercises. Discussions, debates, and analytical reading tasks cannot always be completed quickly. Nevertheless, the educational benefits are significant because students develop skills that are valuable not only in language learning but also in academic, professional, and personal life.

The role of the teacher is extremely important in promoting critical thinking. Teachers should act not only as information providers but also as facilitators who encourage inquiry, reflection, and independent thought. Effective teachers create opportunities for students to ask questions, share ideas, and explore different viewpoints. They guide discussions carefully, encourage respectful communication, and help students support their arguments with evidence.

Assessment methods should also reflect the importance of critical thinking. Traditional tests focused only on memorization may not accurately measure students' analytical abilities.

Alternative assessment methods such as presentations, projects, reflective essays, and group discussions allow teachers to evaluate students' reasoning, creativity, and communication skills more effectively.

The development of critical thinking through reading and speaking activities has long-term educational value. Students who develop strong critical thinking skills become more independent learners, better communicators, and more responsible members of society. They learn how to evaluate information critically, solve problems effectively, and communicate ideas confidently.

These abilities are essential in the modern world where individuals constantly encounter large amounts of information and complex social issues.

In conclusion, reading and speaking activities are powerful tools for developing critical thinking in English language classrooms. Through reading, students learn to analyze texts, evaluate ideas, and interpret information deeply. Through speaking, they practice expressing opinions, defending arguments, and interacting with others thoughtfully.

When combined effectively, these activities create dynamic learning environments that encourage intellectual growth and active participation. Teachers who integrate critical thinking into reading and speaking instruction help students become not only successful language learners but also thoughtful, independent, and responsible individuals prepared for the challenges of modern society.

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