

ENGAGING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

The article highlights the significance of developing critical thinking skills among university students to ensure their better academic performance and career success. The integration of inquiry-based learning focused on questioning, investigation, and problem-solving is seen as an effective means to achieve this goal. Various learning strategies and techniques applied in foreign language classes to enhance both students' language proficiency and their critical thinking abilities, as well as some challenges connected with them are analyzed in the article.

Key words: critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, learning strategies and techniques

In the era of rapid informatization, the ability to critically evaluate information is essential. Today's students need to be critical thinkers, able to process this huge informational flow and find appropriate solutions to various real-life problems. The more developed their critical thinking is, the better their academic performance will be. Analyzing their employment chances, it should be noted that nowadays employers are seeking individuals who possess strong critical thinking abilities, believing that their agile mind will be able to benefit the company, bringing efficient solutions and creative ideas.

The concept "critical thinking" and its features have been widely examined by J. Dewey, E. Johnson, B. Bloom, M. Lipman, R. Paul and L. Elder, A. Crawford, W. Saul, S. Mathews, and other scholars. Critical thinking is characterized as 'higher-order' thinking that involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information logically and objectively, to distinguish reliable information from the misleading one, to make sound judgments and informed decisions. It involves questioning assumptions, exploring different perspectives, identifying biases, and relying on evidence to draw conclusions. Critical thinking enables individuals to handle existing complex situations effectively.

R. Paul and L. Elder regard critical thinking as the art of analyzing with a view to improving it (R. Paul and L. Elder, 2006). M. Lipman also considers this process to be self-corrective as learners can discover weaknesses in their own thinking and subsequently rectify faults (M. Lipman, 2003).

Thus, the main traits of a critically thinking person include: flexible mind, inquisitiveness, persistency, confidence, search for knowledge, consciousness, readiness to compromise, self-regulation and self-correction.

There is a common misconception that critical thinking is an inherent ability that naturally evolves over time. However, researchers indicate that critical thinking can be explicitly taught and improved through consistent practice, in the educational establishments of different levels, across all disciplines studied. To successfully teach this skill, it must be integrated into curriculum content (R. Paul, L. Elder, 2005).

New university standards emphasize the importance of improving critical thinking skills in university students. Thus, at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, the bachelors' curricula state it is necessary to develop students' ability for abstract thinking, analysis, and synthesis; their ability to search, process, and analyze information from various sources; be critical and self-critical (computer sciences, political sciences, economics, etc.); the ability to make well-grounded decisions, identify and solve professional problems (philology); the ability to critically reflect on the basic theories, principles and methods of natural sciences, the ability to solve complex environmental problems, which involves conducting investigation or implementing innovation (ecology), etc.

Fostering critical thinking skills is a challenging task nowadays. Researchers consider the traditional way of teaching to be less efficient, since students are supposed to develop these skills depending on books, lecture notes, and handouts, having no or little interest in the topics or the learning process itself (R. Paul, L. Elder, 2005). The study carried out by McREL revealed that in over half of the classrooms, learning was centered mainly on the two lowest levels of thinking, 25% - on remembering the information, 32% - on its understanding, and in less than 1/6 of the classrooms, students were training higher-order thinking (Goodwin, 2010). Critical thinking teacher survey conducted among teachers in 81 countries found out that 93% of teachers accept the importance of training students' critical thinking, but only 20% agree that most academic courses adequately support students in their development of these skills, only 33% agree their current material offers appropriate practice in analyzing data, composing texts or evaluating opinions (Unlock).

In comparison to conventional methods of learning, inquiry-based instruction is recognized as an alternative approach that actively engages students in learning through questioning, investigation, and problem-solving. The **aim of our research** is to analyze the ways of developing critical thinking skills among university students at the

foreign language classes, incorporating principles and methods of inquiry-based learning, and some challenges connected with it.

Inquiry-based learning is not a new trend, but still popular today thanks to its benefits. It is an educational approach that emphasizes student-led exploration and discovery. Y. Lee considers it to be an analogy for communicative approach, stating that its principles are compatible with the principles of communicative teaching (Y. Lee, 2014).

Students are no longer seen as passive recipients of information. They are encouraged to generate meaningful inquiries, explore diverse perspectives, get involved in reflective dialogue and, finally, come up with appropriate responses. They not only gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter they show interest in, but also learn to tackle complex real-world issues, collaborating with each other.

Collaboration is a core component of inquiry-based learning. Through group discussions and joint projects, students share their knowledge and build rapport with their peers to achieve collective objectives.

Consequently, students are placed at the center of the learning process, while educators act as facilitators, mentors, and advisors, providing support as students navigate their inquiries. They are also taught to take charge of their learning journey, evaluate their own progress and identify the areas that need further improvement.

In a foreign language classroom, when it comes to improving the critical thinking of students alongside their language proficiency, this approach can be realized through various student-centered activities, including:

a) *questioning (or Socratic questioning)*, which is designed to stimulate deeper interest and understanding of the subject matter. Asking questions, especially by students, is at the heart of the inquiry model. When open-ended questions are posed, favorable conditions for discussing and exchanging ideas are created, which is likely to enhance deep thinking and analysis.

b) *creative debates and discussions*, especially on thought-provoking or controversial topics which push students to generate new ideas, clearly articulate and defend sometimes contrasting viewpoints, give arguments to support or reject them;

c) *project work*, which foresees exploring multiple sources, analyzing and interpreting a huge amount of information, making relevant conclusions, collaborating, presenting findings in a foreign language and reflecting on outcomes;

d) *case studies*, which encourage them to demonstrate their problem-solving skills while dealing with real-life scenarios;

e) *argumentative essay writing*, which enables students to discover their own writing topics, gather and evaluate information, generate and organize ideas in a clear manner, explaining their vision of the problem.

Fostering a critical thinking environment takes students further than simply repeating memorized language patterns or giving correct answers to pass language tests. They become active learners, investigators, eagerly searching for new, non-standard ideas. Since the above-mentioned activities imply processing and assessing a huge amount of information of different origin and quality, a special emphasis should be placed on teaching students how to question the source, its motives and background, and determine the validity of the information they encounter. This can help them become discerning learners, able to adequately evaluate what they read or hear.

It should also be noted that some of the above-mentioned classroom activities can be challenging for some students with limited foreign language proficiency, or those who aren't able to think quickly on their feet, or show reluctance to participate. Teachers should take into account these peculiarities while developing teaching materials and choosing learning techniques.

Conclusion. Developing critical thinking, along with other key soft skills, is a driving force leading to students' academic and career success, making it a vital investment in their future. To achieve this, an inquiry-based approach, with its student-centered focus, may be used. Despite its general efficacy, there are certain challenging aspects which should be considered while integrating it into the learning process. In a foreign language classroom, the activities like discussions, debates, case studies, collaborative projects, and other creative and problem-solving tasks can significantly contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills, in addition to their language proficiency.

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Вікторія Чуєнко

ЗАЛУЧЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ДО КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ ЧЕРЕЗ НАВЧАННЯ НА ОСНОВІ ЗАПИТІВ

У статті висвітлюється важливість розвитку навичок критичного мислення студентів для забезпечення їх кращої академічної успішності та майбутнього кар'єрного росту. Навчання на основі запитів розглядається як ефективний засіб для досягнення цієї мети. Проаналізовано різноманітні навчальні стратегії та прийоми, які можуть бути застосовані на заняттях з іноземної мови як для підвищення рівня володіння мовою здобувачами освіти, так й для вдосконалення їх когнітивних здібностей.

Ключові слова: критичне мислення, навчання на основі запитів (дослідницьке навчання), стратегії навчання та прийоми

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