THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES IN LANGUAGE LESSONS FOR ENHANCING COGNITIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS OF B1 LEVEL LEARNERS.

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Abstract: *Critical thinking and problem-solving activities in language lessons are essential for developing the cognitive and communicative skills of B1-level learners. Critical thinking develops students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, while problem-based tasks enhance their ability to apply language knowledge in real-world situations. By incorporating these activities into language lessons, teachers can help students not only learn the language, but also understand it more deeply and use it more effectively. This study highlights the importance of developing these skills in B1-level learners who are moving from basic to intermediate levels. The article discusses a variety of activities designed to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, highlighting their importance for students' independence, fluency, and overall communicative competence.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, problem solving, cognitive skills, communicative skills, fluency, communicative competence, interactive activities, real-life application.*

In the twenty-first century, learning a language requires more than just learning grammar and vocabulary, it also requires developing problem-solving,

critical thinking, and effective communication abilities in a variety of settings. Improving cognitive and communication skills is crucial for B1 learners navigating the complexities and challenges of a new language, and it heavily depends on critical thinking and problem-solving exercises. Much criticism has been leveled at traditional English teaching methods for their lack of advancement and inability to enhance students' thinking or communicating abilities more than contemporary alternatives. Since students must comprehend and evaluate the text according to its meaning in order to use the language freely in any circumstance, critical thinking is essential for learners to swiftly assess, evaluate, and further enhance their learning.

Self-directed, self-disciplined thinking that enables individuals to think fairly and at the greatest possible level is known as critical thinking. It entails the capacity to impartially assess and analyze a situation, considering all relevant factors prior to reaching a choice or conclusion (Elder, 2007; Villacís & Hidalgo, 2019). People are encouraged to think critically, challenge presumptions, and consider the effects of their decisions carefully. The examination of eleven examples serves as an example of the critical thinking process, which is composed of many mental states and cognitive acts that support its implementation. The first stage in identifying the aptitudes, competencies, attitudes, behaviors, and dispositions that support critical thinking is the identification, classification, and characterisation of these elements (Hitchcock, D. 2018).

The process of recognizing an issue, formulating potential fixes, and acting to resolve the issue is known as problem solving. According to Dolapcioglu and Doğanay (2022), in order to address problems successfully, one needs not only logical thinking but also creativity and adaptability. The mental processes that allow someone to learn, reason, recall, and solve issues are referred to as cognitive skills. Cognitive skills are defined as mental capabilities that associate acquiring knowledge and comprehension along with memorization, reasoning, perception, and problem-solving (Sternberg, R. J., & Sternberg, K. 2016). They are essential

for comprehending, analyzing, and reacting to the information we encounter. Hitchcock (2018) asserts that cognitive abilities are the cornerstone of critical thinking and are essential for academic achievement, especially in language learning, where learners must efficiently process information and make defensible choices.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a language teaching approach that emphasizes interaction and communication as the primary goal of language learning. Rather than focusing solely on memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary, CLT encourages students to use language in real-world situations to develop their communicative competence. Communicative competence is the ability to use language effectively in a variety of contexts, both socially and pragmatically. This concept, introduced by Dell Hymes (1972), goes beyond grammatical correctness to include knowledge of how, when, and why to use language correctly in different situations. It includes four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. In language teaching, communicative competence is a goal that helps students engage meaningfully in real-life situations (Thamarana, 2015).

Laurie Rozakis states that there are eight categories for critical thinking exercises:

- Activities that involve recognition and recall, Mind Squeeze, Trivia Trackdown, Wordplay, and Making Menu can be examples.
- Differentiating and visualizing tasks (Set the Scene, Triangle Challenge, and Tricky Twins)
- Activities for classifying and following instructions (Turn-Around Numbers, Quick Draw, and Wrong Rhymes)
- Activities that include sequencing and prediction, for instance Gomuku, Pressed for Time, and The Survival Game
- Inference and conclusion-drawing exercises (Surf and Turf, Constant Confusion, and Q&A)

- Activities such as "You Decide," "Fact or Opinion," and "My Book Review" are evaluated.

- Examining activities (Scavenger Hunts: What Do They Mean?)

- Activities that involve synthesis, such as Magic Squares and Change the World

The critical thinking exercises that Laurie Rozakis has divided up are well-organized and span a wide variety of cognitive abilities. Moving from simple memory to higher-order thinking skills like assessment and synthesis, it is consistent with Bloom's Taxonomy (Rozakis, L. 1998).

Through deeper mental engagement, critical thinking exercises help students analyze, synthesize, and assess language and information. For example, problem-solving exercises and discussions of intricate situations compel students to organize and recollect material, which improves their ability to retain it. By doing this, kids also enhance their memory and meaningful usage of language structures. These kinds of assignments can put students in situations where they must evaluate a situation critically, consider the available information, and make decisions—all of which help them develop their cognitive skills.

Furthermore, problem-solving exercises are a great way to promote critical thinking. Learners improve their capacity to deconstruct difficult language concepts into manageable parts by completing assignments that call for them to examine linguistic patterns or apply linguistic rules in context. A common illustration of this would be a group exercise in which students are required to solve a language-based puzzle, like recognizing dialogue faults or forecasting a conversation's conclusion based on context. These kinds of exercises help students develop their analytical thinking skills by getting them to consider language usage and structure critically.

In conclusion, developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in B1 level students is crucial for improving their cognitive and linguistic abilities. By encouraging recall, analysis, and reasoning, these exercises not only stimulate

students' intellectual abilities but also enhance their capacity for successful communication in a variety of real-world contexts. These exercises help students develop well-rounded language abilities that are necessary for both academic performance and everyday communication by promoting a collaborative learning environment and encouraging them to take linguistic risks.

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