



THE USE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING TASKS IN DEVELOPING CRITICAL
THINKING THROUGH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: *In contemporary language education, developing critical thinking skills has become one of the most important educational goals alongside linguistic competence. Traditional teaching methods often focus on memorization and grammatical accuracy, while modern pedagogical approaches emphasize learner autonomy, analytical reasoning, and communicative problem-solving. This paper explores the role of problem-solving tasks in developing critical thinking through language learning. The study examines how task-based learning activities encourage learners to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and make reasoned decisions while using a foreign language. A qualitative approach is applied, drawing on classroom-based observations and analysis of task performance in English language learning contexts. The findings suggest that problem-solving tasks significantly enhance students' engagement, promote deeper cognitive processing, and improve their ability to express complex ideas in English. Furthermore, such tasks create authentic communicative situations that require learners to negotiate meaning and justify opinions. The study concludes that integrating problem-solving activities into language instruction contributes not only to linguistic development but also to higher-order thinking skills essential for academic and real-life success.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, problem-solving tasks, language learning, task-based learning, cognitive skills, English teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of critical thinking has become a central objective in modern education systems, particularly in the field of foreign language learning. As globalization increases the demand for individuals who can communicate effectively and think independently, language classrooms are no longer limited to grammar instruction and vocabulary acquisition. Instead, they are evolving into interactive spaces where cognitive skills and communicative competence are developed simultaneously.

Critical thinking refers to the ability to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and form reasoned judgments. In language learning environments, these skills are particularly important because learners must not only understand linguistic input but also interpret meaning, compare perspectives, and express their own viewpoints clearly. Problem-solving tasks offer a practical framework for achieving these goals.

Unlike traditional exercises that focus on mechanical repetition, problem-solving tasks require learners to actively engage with language in meaningful contexts. For example, students may be asked to discuss solutions to social issues, analyze case studies, or make decisions based on conflicting information. These activities encourage deeper



cognitive involvement and help learners move beyond surface-level language use. The aim of this study is to investigate how problem-solving tasks contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in English language learning contexts. The study also explores how such tasks influence student motivation, interaction, and linguistic performance.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the relationship between problem-solving tasks and critical thinking development in language learning. The research is based on classroom observations, task-based activity analysis, and student response evaluation in English language courses at Fergana State University.

The participants included undergraduate students at the Bachelor level who were engaged in English language learning as part of their academic curriculum. The selected problem-solving tasks were integrated into regular classroom instruction over a semester and included activities such as decision-making discussions, role-play scenarios, and group-based case analyses.

Data collection focused on students' verbal responses, written reflections, and interaction patterns during task completion. Special attention was given to how students justified their opinions, negotiated meaning with peers, and used English to express complex reasoning.

The analysis followed a thematic approach, identifying recurring patterns in student behavior and language use. These patterns were then interpreted in relation to critical thinking indicators such as analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. The study also considered the role of teacher guidance in facilitating cognitive engagement during tasks.

Results

The analysis of classroom data revealed that problem-solving tasks had a positive impact on both language development and critical thinking skills. Students demonstrated increased engagement when tasks were presented in the form of real-life scenarios requiring active decision-making.

One key observation was that learners began to use more analytical language when discussing solutions. Instead of producing simple descriptive sentences, they increasingly used comparative structures, conditional statements, and evaluative expressions. This shift indicated a deeper level of cognitive processing.

Another significant finding was the improvement in collaborative interaction. During group tasks, students frequently negotiated meaning, asked clarifying questions, and defended their viewpoints using logical arguments. For example, when discussing environmental problems, learners compared different solutions and justified their preferences based on practicality and effectiveness.

Problem-solving tasks also encouraged learners to move beyond memorized vocabulary and experiment with new linguistic forms. Even students with limited proficiency attempted to express complex ideas, which contributed to both linguistic risk-taking and cognitive development.

Furthermore, tasks that involved conflicting information or multiple possible solutions were particularly effective in stimulating critical thinking.



Students were required to evaluate alternatives, identify advantages and disadvantages, and reach a collective decision.

This process naturally activated higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the idea that problem-solving tasks play a crucial role in developing critical thinking through language learning. By engaging students in meaningful and context-rich activities, these tasks transform language learning from passive reception into active cognitive participation.

One of the most important aspects of problem-solving tasks is their ability to create authentic communicative situations.

When students are required to solve problems, they must use language as a tool for reasoning rather than simply as a system of rules. This shift encourages deeper engagement with both content and language structure.

The results also highlight the importance of interaction in developing critical thinking.

Through group discussions and collaborative decision-making, learners are exposed to multiple perspectives, which helps them refine their own ideas and improve argumentation skills. This interactive dimension is essential for developing both linguistic fluency and intellectual flexibility.

Additionally, the study shows that problem-solving tasks increase learner motivation. Students are more likely to participate actively when tasks are meaningful and connected to real-life situations.

This increased motivation leads to greater exposure to language use and more opportunities for cognitive development.

However, the effectiveness of these tasks depends on careful design and appropriate teacher support. Without clear instructions or scaffolding, students may struggle to engage deeply with the task or remain focused on surface-level language use. Therefore, the role of the teacher is essential in guiding reflection and ensuring that tasks achieve both linguistic and cognitive goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, problem-solving tasks are an effective pedagogical tool for developing critical thinking skills in language learning environments.

They encourage learners to analyze information, evaluate options, and communicate ideas in a foreign language, thereby integrating cognitive and linguistic development.

The study demonstrates that such tasks enhance student engagement, promote interactive learning, and support the development of higher-order thinking skills.

By creating meaningful communicative contexts, problem-solving activities help learners move beyond memorization and develop the ability to think critically and express themselves effectively.

Future research may focus on comparing different types of problem-solving tasks or examining their effectiveness across different proficiency levels and educational contexts.



Expanding the scope of research would provide further insight into how critical thinking can be systematically developed through language education.

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