UDC 378.1

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FACILITATING CRITICAL THINKING AT ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract *Importance of critical thinking both for a successful education and for further employment is given special attention. It is analyzed that there is no single approach to identify critical thinking. Person's abilities with strong critical thinking are identified here. Some examples of practical use of critical thinking at English for Specific Purposes are given by the author.*

Key words: Critical thinking, higher education, university English lessons, Problem-based learning, successful education and carrier

Анотація *Особлива увага у даних тезах приділяється важливості критичного мислення, як для успішного навчання, так і працевлаштування. Проаналізовані підходи до його визначення та наведені відповідні вміння. Автором надані приклади особистого досвіду з практичного використання критичного мислення на заняттях англійської мови у технічному вузі.*

Ключові слова: критичне мислення, вища освіта, уроки англійської у ЗВО, проблемно-орієнтоване навчання, успішна освіта і працевлаштування

Critical-thinking skills are supposed to lead to better outcomes in life. For example, among college students and adults in the community, a standardized measure of critical-thinking skills was significantly related to a set of real-world, interpersonal, business, and financial outcomes [1]. People with higher critical thinking skills were less likely to report experiencing negative real-world outcomes, ranging from "returning a movie you rented without having watched it at all" to "paying rent or mortgage payment at least two months too late" or "receiving a DUI for drunk driving." Students who receive critical-thinking instruction are more willing to accept scientifically based theories [2], and greater critical thinking skills are related to greater political participation [3].

Moreover, 95 per cent of the chief academic officers from 433 higher-education institutions rated critical thinking as one of the most important skills for students to acquire. The interest in critical thinking also extends to international institutions and organizations. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development includes critical thinking as a core skill in college students across the world. Research has found that performance in critical thinking predicts college GPA.

The importance of critical thinking is appreciated in the workforce, where 81 per cent of surveyed employers wanted colleges to place a stronger emphasis on critical thinking. Similarly, a survey given to 400 employers found 92 per cent identified critical thinking as one of the top skills needed in college graduates [4]. In interviews with leaders at 200 companies, critical thinking was one of the most frequently mentioned skills essential for both academic and career success.

Due to significant research around critical thinking, instructors still struggle with what critical thinking actually means. Bahr revealed that instructors teaching critical thinking do not have a clear understanding of what critical thinking means, with 37 per cent of academics acknowledging the dispositional and self-regulatory aspects of critical thinking and only 47 per cent describing critical thinking as involving processes or skills [5].

To put it in simply, critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking. Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following :

• understand the logical connections between ideas

• identify, construct and evaluate arguments

• detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning

• solve problems systematically

• identify the relevance and importance of ideas

• reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values

Critical thinking is not a matter of accumulating information. A person with good memory and who knows different facts is not necessarily good at critical thinking. A critical thinker is able to deduce consequences from what he knows, and he knows how to make use of information to solve problems and to seek relevant sources of information to inform himself.

Critical thinking should not be confused with being argumentative or being critical of other people. Although critical thinking skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can also play an important role in cooperative reasoning and constructive tasks. Critical thinking can help us acquire knowledge, improve our theories, and strengthen arguments. We can use critical thinking to enhance work processes and improve social institutions [6].

While teaching English for Specific Purposes at Technical University, I have found that debating and group discussions are the best and the most suitable ones for fostering critical thinking. It is not that difficult to give them a task for practicing Present Perfect Simple and Continuous where the problem of closing the Influenza Research Centre is discussed. Especially, when Coronavirus is being spread around the globe the topic seems to be in every roundup news. We brainstorm their prior knowledge and opinions, exchange useful tips on how to protect oneself and proceed to perform it. Another way of activating debates is giving them facts quite opposite to the advantages of the cutting-edge technology (e.g. 5G) they have named. They have to find arguments to prove their point of view or look for counterarguments. Another idea for pursuing critical thinking is motivating their groupmates to ask questions after presenting a topic. One another commonly used approach to teaching problem-solving is problem-based learning. The teacher acts as the facilitator and guide, whereas in the instructor-centered approach, the teacher acts as an expert and activity director [7]. The PBL approach involves working through the following process with a set of ill-structured problems:

1. Introduce the problem.

2. Form groups.

3. Brainstorm prior knowledge and opinions on the problem.

4. Identify the needed information to solve the problem.

5. Make a plan.

6. Execute the plan to solve the problem.

7. Evaluate team performance.

In conclusion, I would encourage academics and students to be proactive, not to be afraid of making language mistakes because "Practice makes perfect", and not to be afraid of being not like the others cos' "Truth is born of argument". Some people believe that critical thinking hinders creativity because it requires following the rules of logic and rationality, but creativity might require breaking rules. This is a misconception. Critical thinking is quite compatible with thinking "out-of-the-box", challenging consensus and pursuing less popular approaches. If anything, critical thinking is an essential part of creativity because we need critical thinking to evaluate and improve our creative ideas. I wish our students to have lecturers like my son, a graduate student of Economics, once has had. DNU Professor S.V. Kozlovskyi is considered to be the best lecturer according to the students' survey not only for being proficient in his field like a Sage on the stage but for teaching them to analyze facts and making them think "out of the box".

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