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THE FORMATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE ON THE BASIS OF CRITICAL THINKING TECHNOLOGY

Abstract

This article investigates the formation of high school students' communicative competence through the integration of critical thinking technology in English language education in Kazakhstan. Drawing on current educational reforms and theoretical models, the study reviews the conceptual foundations of communicative competence and critical thinking, examines their interrelation, and proposes pedagogical strategies for implementation. It highlights the potential of debates, project-based learning, problem-solving, and reflective writing to enhance both communicative competence and higher-order thinking. By situating the analysis within the context of Kazakhstan's trilingual education policy, the article provides recommendations for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Keywords: *critical thinking, communicative competence, English language teaching, high school students, Kazakhstan, 21st-century skills, collaborative learning, reflective practice, problem-solving activities, project-based learning, pedagogical innovation, competence-based education*

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ЖОҒАРЫ СЫНЫП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІН СЫНИ ОЙЛАУ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯСЫ НЕГІЗІНДЕ ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада Қазақстандағы орта мектеп оқушыларының ағылшын тілі сабағында коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін сыни тұрғыдан ойлау технологиясын қолдану арқылы қалыптастыру қарастырылады. Қазіргі білім беру реформалары мен теориялық модельдерге сүйене отырып, мақалада коммуникативтік құзыреттілік пен сыни ойлаудың тұжырымдамалық негіздері, олардың өзара байланысы және іске асыруға арналған педагогикалық стратегиялар қарастырылады. Дебаттар, жобалық оқыту, мәселелерді шешу және рефлексивті жазудың коммуникативтік құзыреттілік пен жоғары деңгейлі ойлауды дамытудағы әлеуеті атап көрсетілген. Қазақстанның үштілді білім беру саясаты аясында талдау жасай отырып, мақала оқу бағдарламасын жасаушыларға, мұғалімдерді даярлаушыларға және саясаткерлерге ұсыныстар береді.

Кілт сөздер: *сыни ойлау, коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, ағылшын тілін оқыту, жоғары сынып оқушылары, Қазақстан, ХХІ ғасыр дағдылары, бірлескен оқыту, рефлексивті тәжірибе, мәселелерді шешу, жобалық оқыту, педагогикалық инновациялар, құзыреттілікке негізделген білім.*

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТАРШЕКЛАСНИКОВ НА ОСНОВЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается формирование коммуникативной компетенции старшеклассников в процессе обучения английскому языку с использованием технологии критического мышления в Казахстане. Опираясь на современные образовательные реформы и теоретические модели, авторы раскрывают концептуальные основы коммуникативной компетенции и критического мышления, анализируют их взаимосвязь и предлагают педагогические стратегии для реализации. Подчеркивается потенциал дебатов, проектного обучения, решения проблем и рефлексивного письма в развитии коммуникативной компетенции и навыков высокого уровня мышления. Анализ проводится в контексте политики трехязычного образования Казахстана и содержит рекомендации для разработчиков учебных программ, преподавателей и политиков.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение английскому языку, старшеклассники, Казахстан, навыки XXI века, совместное обучение, рефлексивная практика, решение проблем, проектное обучение, педагогические инновации, компетентностный подход.

Ключевые слова: рефлексивное обучение, преподавание английского языка (ELT), многоязычное образование, система образования Казахстана, рефлексия учителя, рефлексия учащегося, профессиональное развитие, самостоятельность обучающихся, критическое мышление, педагогические инструменты, подготовка учителей, образовательные реформы.

Introduction

Over the past decade, Kazakhstan has prioritized aligning its education system with international standards and best practices. The State Program for Education Development (MES RK, 2020) emphasizes the formation of functional literacy, communicative competence, and critical thinking as core outcomes for secondary education. In this context, English language instruction is positioned as a powerful platform for cultivating these competencies simultaneously, particularly among high school students preparing for higher education, employment, and intercultural exchange.

Communicative competence is a multidimensional construct encompassing grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). High school students must go beyond vocabulary and grammar drills to develop the ability to interact meaningfully, negotiate meaning, and adapt language use to different audiences. Critical thinking (CT), defined by Facione (1990) as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, underpins effective communication by enabling learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, draw inferences, and articulate coherent arguments.

Despite policy emphasis, traditional classroom practices continue to dominate in many schools. Teachers frequently rely on rote learning, limited interaction patterns, and teacher-centered instruction, leaving insufficient room for students to practice CT and authentic communication (Myrzatayeva et al., 2023). Integrating critical thinking technology—defined as a systematic application of CT-oriented tasks, pedagogies, and digital tools—offers a pathway to align instructional practice with national educational goals. Such integration not only improves students'

English proficiency but also prepares them for the cognitive demands of the 21st century, including adaptability, collaboration, and responsible digital citizenship.

Literature Review

Communicative Competence in English Language Education

Hymes (1972) first proposed communicative competence as an alternative to purely grammatical models of language ability, highlighting the social and functional aspects of language use. Canale and Swain (1980) expanded the concept into four components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Later studies (Bachman, 1990) emphasized the role of pragmatic knowledge and metacognitive strategies in language learning. In Kazakhstan, the trilingual education policy amplifies the need for communicative competence as English becomes a tool not only for language learning but also for accessing content in other subjects.

Critical Thinking in Language Learning

Critical thinking, as characterized by Facione (1990), Paul and Elder (2006), and Halpern (2014), involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. In language learning, CT tasks help learners to process authentic input, evaluate sources, and produce coherent discourse. Studies by Davidson and Dunham (1997) and Zare and Othman (2015) demonstrate that debate-based instruction improves both oral proficiency and critical thinking skills. In Kazakhstan, Meiramova (2017) found that CT-based instruction in English classes enhances student motivation and engagement, while Kabysheva (2025) argues for embedding higher-order skills in teacher education curricula.

Integrating Critical Thinking and Communicative Competence

The intersection of CT and communicative competence is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of 21st-century education. Myrzatayeva et al. (2023) highlight that systematic teacher preparation in CT methods leads to improved student outcomes. Internationally, the shift toward competence-based education frameworks encourages tasks that simultaneously build language skills and higher-order thinking. This dual approach reflects a broader pedagogical shift from transmission models to constructivist, student-centered learning.

Research Context and Rationale

Kazakhstan's secondary schools operate within a multilingual and multicultural environment, providing fertile ground for integrating CT and communicative competence. High school students often have varying levels of English proficiency and exposure to critical thinking tasks. While urban schools may have access to advanced digital resources and teacher training, rural schools face constraints in infrastructure and professional development. This disparity underscores the importance of developing scalable and context-sensitive methods for fostering CT and communicative competence across diverse settings.

The rationale for focusing on high school students stems from their developmental stage: they are cognitively ready for higher-order thinking and socially motivated to engage in authentic communication. Moreover, high school marks the transitional phase before tertiary education or entry into the workforce, making communicative competence and CT particularly valuable. English lessons offer opportunities to incorporate debates on current events, project-based assignments on global themes, and digital collaboration with peers abroad. By embedding CT technology into English instruction, teachers can transform the classroom into a microcosm of real-world communication, equipping students with skills that transcend subject boundaries.

Methodological Considerations

Although this article is primarily conceptual, it draws upon established pedagogical practices and empirical findings to outline practical strategies for teachers. The methodological approach integrates qualitative evidence from Kazakhstani studies (Myrzatayeva et al., 2023; Meiramova, 2017) with international research on critical thinking in language learning (Davidson & Dunham, 1997; Zare & Othman, 2015). This blended perspective allows for triangulation of insights and highlights both global trends and local adaptations.

In practice, implementing critical thinking technology in high school English classrooms involves several steps: identifying CT outcomes aligned with communicative goals, designing tasks that elicit higher-order thinking, scaffolding student participation, and providing feedback on both language and reasoning. Teachers may choose from a continuum of activities ranging from tightly structured exercises to open-ended projects. This flexible design accommodates diverse student abilities and classroom contexts.

Pedagogical Strategies and Implementation

Debates and Structured Discussions

Debates are among the most powerful methods for integrating CT and communicative competence. Students research a topic, formulate arguments, anticipate counterarguments, and deliver speeches in English. The preparation stage develops reading comprehension and source evaluation, while the delivery stage enhances speaking, listening, and interaction skills. Teachers can scaffold debates by providing templates for arguments, vocabulary banks, and feedback rubrics assessing both language and critical reasoning.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) requires students to work collaboratively on extended tasks such as creating a podcast, a digital magazine, or a public service announcement in English. This approach fosters authentic language use, critical evaluation of information, planning, teamwork, and digital literacy. In rural schools with limited resources, PBL can take the form of low-tech projects such as posters or classroom exhibitions, still emphasizing inquiry and presentation skills.

Problem-Solving and Case Studies

Teachers can design case studies relevant to students' lives, such as devising a recycling campaign, improving school policies, or analyzing intercultural misunderstandings. Students collect data, analyze options, and propose solutions in English, thereby practicing analytical thinking and persuasive communication. Group discussions following case studies encourage negotiation of meaning, strategic competence, and respectful disagreement.

Reflective Writing and Digital Portfolios

Maintaining journals or digital portfolios encourages students to reflect on their learning process, self-assess progress, and set goals. This metacognitive practice strengthens written accuracy, self-regulation, and long-term retention of both language and CT skills. Teachers can prompt reflections with guiding questions (e.g., "What evidence supports your view?" or "How did your team reach consensus?"), fostering a deeper link between thought and language.

Media Literacy Tasks

Analyzing foreign news, advertisements, or social media content allows students to practice critical reading and intercultural awareness. Teachers can ask students to compare different sources on the same issue, identify bias, and discuss implications. This task develops vocabulary, reading comprehension, and ethical reasoning while building resilience to misinformation.

Collaborative Digital Platforms

Using tools such as Google Docs, Padlet, and Jamboard for group brainstorming, commenting, and editing promotes digital communication and teamwork. Students learn to negotiate meaning in writing, provide constructive feedback, and co-create texts. Teachers can monitor participation and offer targeted feedback on both language and reasoning.

Safe and Ethical Digital Behavior

Explicitly addressing online etiquette, privacy, and intellectual property in English assignments helps students become responsible digital citizens. For example, a lesson on creating a class blog might include a mini-module on citing sources and protecting personal information. These discussions reinforce both communicative and ethical competencies.

Findings and Discussion

Synthesizing evidence from research and classroom practice reveals several key findings:

Enhanced Engagement: CT-oriented tasks increase student motivation and participation compared to traditional drills. Students perceive debates, projects, and case studies as meaningful and relevant to real life.

Improved Language Proficiency: Integrating CT technology leads to gains in vocabulary, discourse coherence, and fluency. Students use more complex language structures to express nuanced ideas.

Development of Higher-Order Skills: Students demonstrate improved ability to analyze information, evaluate sources, and justify arguments, reflecting a transfer of CT skills beyond the classroom.

Collaboration and Social Skills: Working in teams on CT tasks enhances leadership, conflict resolution, and respect for diverse viewpoints, all expressed through English.

Digital Literacy and Ethical Awareness: Incorporating digital tools and media analysis builds students' competence in navigating online environments safely and effectively.

The discussion also highlights challenges. Teachers require training to design and facilitate CT tasks effectively. Assessment frameworks must capture not only linguistic accuracy but also critical reasoning and interaction quality. Moreover, disparities between urban and rural schools in access to digital resources necessitate differentiated implementation strategies.

Implications and Recommendations

For Teachers:

- Integrate CT tasks gradually, starting with guided activities and moving toward student-led discussions and projects.

- Provide explicit instruction on CT skills (analysis, evaluation, inference) alongside language objectives.

- Use rubrics that assess both communicative and critical thinking outcomes.

For Curriculum Designers:

- Embed higher-order learning outcomes into English syllabi.

- Develop teacher guides with sample CT tasks and scaffolding tips.

- Encourage cross-disciplinary projects linking English with subjects like history, science, and ICT.

For Policymakers and Teacher Educators:

- Offer professional development on CT pedagogy and digital tools.

- Support resource-sharing platforms to reduce inequities between schools.

- Align national assessment frameworks with competence-based education goals.

Conclusion

Forming high school students' communicative competence through critical thinking technology represents a transformative approach to English language teaching in Kazakhstan. By merging language learning with higher-order thinking, teachers prepare students for academic success, professional communication, and civic participation in a globalized, information-rich society.

The evidence presented in this article shows that CT technology strengthens all components of communicative competence, fosters motivation and collaboration, and builds digital citizenship. With adequate teacher training, curricular support, and assessment reform, Kazakhstan can leverage English lessons as a platform for cultivating adaptable, critically minded, and articulate young citizens.

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