

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN EFL THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Living in the 21st century means we have to deal with loads of information, where it can be hard to separate facts from misinformation. To succeed in all spheres of life, young people need to develop critical thinking skills, which are essential for making informed decisions. These skills need to be practiced and improved throughout their lives. One way to help learners build these skills is by using authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons by bringing real-world content into the classroom. Teachers can create activities that not only help students improve their English but also teach them how to think critically—something they can use in all areas of life.

Authentic materials, like newspapers, magazines, brochures, and advertisements, connect what students learn in class to real-life situations. These materials show learners how English is used in everyday contexts and introduce them to different cultural aspects. Lessons based on authentic materials are often more interesting for students because they feel more connected to the real world. Critical thinking tasks encourage students to think deeply about what they're reading while also improving their language skills.

This paper will explore how using authentic materials in EFL classrooms can help students develop critical thinking skills. It will look at the benefits of these materials, such as increasing student motivation and participation, as well as encouraging higher-level thinking. This study aims to show how authentic materials can play a key role in helping students become better thinkers who are ready to face the challenges of today's complex world.

The ability to analyse information, compare it and highlight the truth is part of critical thinking. Elder and Paul consider that it is the ability to *take charge of one's own thinking* and identify criteria and standards for analysing it. Moreover, they develop framework of critical thinking which is called the Paul-Elder framework. It contains such points as analysis of thinking, evaluation of thinking and improvement of thinking.[1]

Thornbury defines authentic materials as resources *created for real-world communication rather than pedagogical purposes*, such as menus, advertisements, or news articles. Unlike traditional textbooks that explicitly teach grammar or vocabulary, these materials put learners in unmodified linguistic contexts. Their primary aim is to replicate the natural English-speaking environment, encouraging learners to analyse cultural nuances, infer meaning, and develop problem-solving strategies used by native speakers. [2, p.21]

Why is critical thinking important? The answer is simple, those who can think critically are able to understand themselves better than others and have fewer chances of being influenced by manipulation. Among wide range of advantages can be also highlighted such as: creative approach to problem-solving; distinguish the truth among lies; better decision-making. Nowadays people are surrounded by various sources of information. Some contains the truth and others try to manipulate. So, teachers should develop students' critical thinking to help them successfully exist in modern world.

Authentic materials have benefits for developing practical skills as well as for motivation. Such materials can be exposed to learners during speaking, grammar or reading lessons. Including learning materials from native speaking environment has a positive effect on oral language development (learners hear how native speakers speak and see the way they pronounce every word); reading skills and learning new words (authentic materials represent context of the word as well as the way it can be used in real world); writing proficiency (the more they absorb the information the more they develop skills to use it in different forms). [3]

But it is equally important that they boost students' motivation. No one will argue that when you understand native speakers in your L2 it increases your motivation. So, it is a great decision to involve these learning materials as early as possible in order to draw students' attention to learning. As a result, when students have motivation, they avoid just memorizing tasks or do something only for a higher mark. While you are interested in learning you analyze the information, estimate it and decide whether it is true or not. These actions mean that you develop critical thinking for small task and then will use it in every day life.[5]

However, not every piece of news, article or video is appropriate for classroom studying. There are three different categories of authentic materials, peculiarities in how to choose it and present. The first authentic listening materials (they include TV news, films or their parts, songs etc.) are everything you can use to improve listening skills. Second, authentic visual materials (pictures, traffic signs etc.) are good to introduce the word with a picture that explains the meaning. Last, authentic printed materials (for example, magazines, menu, tickets etc.) are perfect for analyzing reading tasks, comparative tasks and so on. [6]

When we know what kind of learning materials can be taken from native environment, we should be able to choose the right materials. While looking for it, we should consider the following questions: What is language proficiency level of students? What grammar, functional language or vocabulary do we want to teach? What topics are interesting to students? Apart from these more general questions, we should pay attention to other features. Texts must be challenging enough for students to encourage them instead of stopping. When some authentic materials are chosen, it is time to think about a range of tasks that can be created for it.

What is important to consider is the way we present these materials. Critical thinking can be boosted when students are attracted by the presentation. A teacher shouldn't use pure text, it decreases not only motivation and desire to do something, but number of tasks students can do. If authentic material doesn't have pictures, diagrams or eye-catching titles, you should create it. It is crucial since pictures can be used as a lead-in. When a picture relates to the text, a teacher might ask students to think about the idea of a text. Tasks like this one not only activate students' schemata but make them think critically and analyze the piece of information they have. [7,8]

For example, the activity 'Think Pair Share' helps students come up with their own questions based on the text. Make pairs or groups in the class and ask the students to discuss the questions together. This activity drives student engagement and supports higher-order thinking skills among students. [9]

The paper draws attention to the benefits of authentic materials in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and higher-order thinking. Tasks like predicting headlines and analyzing content allow learners to practice critical thinking while improving their

language skills. Drawing on frameworks such as Elder and Paul's model of critical thinking, the study emphasizes how these resources can help teachers promote problem-solving strategies. Effective presentation techniques, such as incorporating visuals or interactive tasks, are shown to boost motivation and activate students' critical thinking processes.

By integrating authentic materials into EFL lessons, teachers can help students develop skills that are not only essential for language learning but also applicable to everyday life challenges in a complex information-driven world.

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