**Amiryan Narine**
*Artsakh State Umiversity*
narine.amiryan@inbox.ru
**Durasanyan Narine**
*Artsakh State Umiversity*
narine.durasanyan@mail.ru

# CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AS AN INTELLECTUAL ABILITY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EFL TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

The ability to think critically has been important at all times, but in the 21st century, when the world has entered a period of global change, when constantly changing conditions require the ability to solve emerging innovative and non-standard problems, critical thinking is inevitable.

The main goals of teaching are the formation of creative and critical thinking, the ability to use the information received and apply knowledge in practice in various situations, thus, allowing a specialist to be successful in modern society.

Today, no one doubts that students should be involved in research and creative activities in order to understand, invent, master new things, express their thoughts, make decisions, be able to critically evaluate the reliability, accuracy of something; i.e. take a critical look at any situation in general.

**Key words:** *critical thinking, analytical thinking, Bloom's taxonomy, creativity, workplace, curricula, analyze, evaluate, collaborate, communication, collaboration, education.*

# РЕЗЮМЕ
# НАВЫКИ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ КАК ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛЬНОЙ СПОСОБНОСТИ В РАМКАХ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В ВУЗЕ

Способность критически мыслить была важна во все времена, но в XXI веке, когда мир вступил в период глобальных изменений, когда в постоянно изменяющихся условиях требуется умение решать возникающие новые, нестандартные проблемы, умения критически мыслить становится неизбевным.

Сегодня ни у кого не вызывает сомнения тот факт, что студенты должны быть вовлечены в исследовательские и творческие занятия, чтобы научиться понимать, изобретать, осваивать новое, выражать свои мысли, принимать решения, уметь критически оценивать достоверность, точность чего-либо, критически воспринимать ситуацию в целом.

Формирование креативного и критического мышления, умение оперировать полученной информацией и применять знания на практике в различных ситуациях позволяет специалисту быть востребованным в современном обществе.

*Ключевые слова:* критическое мышление, аналитическое мышление, таксономия Блума, креативность, рабочее место, учебная программа, анализировать, оценивать, коммуникация, сотрудничество, образование.

# ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ
## ՔՆՆԱԴԱՏԱԿԱՆ ՄՏԱԾՈՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀՄՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԻԲՐԵՎ ՄՏԱՎՈՐ ԳՈՐԾՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆՈՒՄ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆԻ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿ

Քննադատորեն մտածելու կարողությունը կարևոր է եղել բոլոր ժամանակներում, սակայն այն առավել արդիական և անխուսափելի է 21-րդ դարում, երբ հարափոփոխ պայմանները պահանջում են նորարարական և ոչ ստանդարտ խնդիրներ լուծելու կարողություն:

Դասավանդման հիմնական նպատակներն են ստեղծագործական և քննադատական մտածողության ձևավորումը, տարբեր իրավիճակներում ստացված տեղեկությունը և գիտելիքները գործնականում կիրառելու կարողությունը:

Անկախ ուսանողները պետք է ներգրավվեն հետազոտական և ստեղծագործական գործունեության մեջ, որպեսզի հասկանան, ստեղծեն, տիրապետեն նոր հմտություններին, արտահայտեն իրենց մտքերը, որոշումներ կայացնեն, կարողանան քննադատորեն գնահատել ինչ-որ երևույթի հուսալիությունը, ճշգրտությունը. այսինքն՝ ընդհանրապես քննադատաբար դիտարկեն ցանկացած իրավիճակ:

*Բանալի բառեր`* *քննադատական մտածողություն, վերլուծական մտածողություն, Բլումի տաքսոնոմիան, ստեղծարարություն, աշխատավայր, առարկայական ծրագրեր, վերլուծել, գնահատել, համագործակցել, հաղորդակցություն, կրթություն:*

The 21st century has witnessed significant changes in all aspects of life, including education. Due to COVID-19 and the everlasting changes in the world the education system has also become dynamic. The key issue of the 21st education still remains to prepare students for a different social life, a different economic world and a more demanding

and skills-oriented workplace, as it is the century of digital literacies, technological advances, multicultural societies, human mobility, global communication, social networking, innovations, creativity and inclusiveness.

Entering today's global marketplace employers look for graduates who are able to transfer their critical thinking abilities to the workplace (Tapper, 2004) and use a language in the service of thinking and problem solving (Cummins, 1981). In order to be prepared for success in future, education must focus on developing the critical thinking skills of students. With these skills students will be prepared to cooperate successfully, think critically and analytically, communicate effectively and solve problems efficiently in the workplace (Atkinson, 1997).

Meanwhile the manner of particular thinking must be resolved using alternative teaching methods for enhancing critical thinking. To put it another way, a lecturer must improve his books, digital or print materials, lectures dealing with the ways to teach thinking. It is worth mentioning, that comparing the situation concerning critical thinking in education, there is a lack of material, methods, strategies and practice of developing critical thinking, and the problem concerns both lecturers and students, device-rich millennials. The curricula of educational institutions must be thoroughly elaborated to provide a special system to develop the ability to think critically. Students face the problem of teaching critical thinking when a lecturer makes a commitment to allowing students employ in learning that is both meaningful and enthusiastic, he/she is contributing to efforts of critical thinking. To overcome the barriers and inspire students to develop critical thinking skills and dispositions, auditoriums should be *interactive*, *vibrant*, *authentic*, *explicit* and *scaffolded*.

Another challenge facing critical thinking in education is using teaching/learning activities via tests. As a fact, most of the examinations at school, colleges and universities contain test papers, which checks knowledge and comprehension levels. Nevertheless we put forward the

view that students must analyze, evaluate and synthesize information, instead of giving short and brief answers.

At this point, we shall take a more detailed look at the changing learning situation, which influences the 21st century education. A lecturer should facilitate learning by improving the connectivity in the learning environment, which means involving various real-life or more realistic situations in the teaching and learning materials (Hanratty, 2012).

As far as it concerns lecturers, they must contribute a collaborative process to establish areas that enable instructors to individualize the teaching of basic knowledge and make this basis to help students use new knowledge to resolve problems conveying key skills for future jobs.

To supply various learning styles and priorities, lecturers must stimulate flexibility in the kinds of areas that include auditorium environments. Auditoriums should make easy group debate, teamwork, peer-to-peer learning and make available individual learning establishments to contribute computer-driven instruction. The area of flexibility and the area for student tendency have become much more critical components in contributing student achievement as we develop a generation that learns variously and one day or another will keep on solving unexpected challenges (Cassel, Kolstad, 1998).

Accordingly, critical thinking is cognitive process in which the students are emerged to use their minds to observe, think, categorize, and hypothesize. Therefore, it is not one-shot treatment, but it is a long journey treatment to make the students become critical and more independent. We adhere to the opinion given by (William, Burden, 1997) and want to mention the four fundamental skills the 21st century student should obtain.

- *Communication*.
- *Creativity*.
- *Critical Thinking*.
- *Collaboration*.

As a rule, due to these skills our students will be more successful in the 21$^{st}$ century. It should be stated that the 21$^{st}$ century skills are being developed and taught in educational settings of various countries. Numerous schools are engaged in teaching these skills and it cannot be argued that the English language auditorium is really the exact place to create the 21$^{st}$ century skills. In essence, the English language auditorium exists to prepare students to communicate via cultures, via boundaries, via perspectives. Factually, basic language skills are important. Nevertheless, in the same manner students' ability to think independently, discover resolutions to future difficulties, cooperate and achieve an agreement via cultural and national boundaries are very important (Burge, Starbird, 2012).

D. Jackson and P. Newberry (2015) state that evidences play an important role for teaching critical thinking in the auditoriums. Acquiring information, particularly in the internet era, is not sufficient in today's advanced courses. Lecturers must be capable to use that information as never before by applying it in different situations and critically assessing the results of others doing the same.

Currently there is some disagreement as to whether language forms one's process of thought or thought guides one's linguistic development, however, all agree that there is an interaction between language and thought (Bowerman and Levinson, 2001; Chomsky, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Whorf, 1956). It is obvious that language and thought are interrelated, so educators must inevitably train students to develop their linguistic and cognitive skills by comparing and contrasting the target language with their own language, hypothesizing the grammatical rules of the target language, and reflecting on content based on their personal experiences and knowledge from other areas of studies.

Benjamin Bloom's (1956) taxonomy first emphasized critical thinking (Duron, et al., 2006) and brought our attention to the two levels of cognitive development. The first one consists of knowledge, comprehension, and

application. These are called – lower order thinking skills or LOTS. The second level, high order thinking skills or HOTS consists of the skills to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate, is regarded as more complex cognitive ability and includes critical thinking (Duron, et al., 2006; Savich, 2008).

However, even though critical thinking has been valued in various disciplines, and assessments to evaluate critical thinking skills have also developed (ex. California Critical Thinking Skills Test (Facione, 2000), the dispositions and types of activities offered to students are not discipline-specified and as Table 1 shows they generally fall in the domain of the humanities or are interdisciplinary. Another truth is that colleges and universities do not teach these skills explicitly, hoping that students will pick them up in several years, through a series of levels, with LOTS starting the cycle of learning.

### Table 1. Typical Language and Thinking in Tasks

| Bloom's taxonomy (HOTS) | Tasks |
|---|---|
| • *Understanding* | *To predict what will happen* |
| • *Applying* | *To describe (record) what they observe* |
| • *Analyzing* | *To find patterns, notice similarities and differences* |
| • *Evaluating* | *To compare results and draw conclusions* |
| • *Synthesis/Creating* | |

These cognitive skills provide students from lower level thinking to a higher level thinking. Indeed, thinking critically leads students to engage in the offering personal opinions or life experiences to address a topic yet the challenge for lecturers is to move students generate individual thoughts and minds. Obtaining additional thinking skills encourages students to enlarge their critical thinking. According to educators, critical thinking is a valuable skill for college students' development, but trying to teach this kind of skill in auditorium is often easier to be said than done. Lecturers must be conscious about where to begin, how to motivate their students, and how to construct learning effects. A variation in the lecturer's

standpoint toward teaching critical thinking must be acquired. The lecturer must be able to think critically in order to be able to teach the student to think critically (Moore, Parker, 2008).

It is increasingly important to promote analytical thinking learning, to help students develop strategies, to use contemporary knowledge to the difficult situations in their day-to-day business and activities (Black, 2005). Moreover, being open-minded and starting to think reasonably gives students the following:

· to apply new knowledge to prior conception and understanding;

· to try to think in abstract and conceptual terms;

· to use specific methods and strategies while dealing with unknown tasks;

· to realize their own way of thinking and learning strategies.

A well cultivated critical thinker

• raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;

• gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively;

• comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards;

• thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing their assumptions, implications and practical consequences;

• communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

Critical thinking is not a matter of accumulating information. A person with good memory and who knows a lot of 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.

It is worth mentioning that 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.

So, we can state that critical thinking is, **self-directed**, **self-disciplined**, **self-monitored**, and **self-corrective** thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism (Richard, Linda, 2008).

The key to critical thinking is to develop an impersonal approach which looks at arguments and facts and which lays aside personal views and feelings. This is because academic discourse is based according to key principles which are described as follows by Northedge (2005):

- **Debate**: arguing different points of view.
- **Scholarship**: awareness of what else has been written, and citing it correctly.
- **Argument**: developing points in a logical sequence which leads to a conclusion.
- **Criticism**: looking at strengths and weaknesses.
- **Analysis**: taking the argument apart, as described above.
- **Evidence**: ensuring that the argument is backed by valid evidence.
- **Objectivity**: the writing should be detached and unemotional and without direct appeal to the reader.
- **Precision**: anything that does not assist the argument should be omitted.

Critical and analytical thinking should be applied at all points in academic study - to selecting information, reading, writing, speaking and

123

listening. Of these, learning to read and evaluate information critically is perhaps the most important skill, which if acquired can then be applied to other areas.

We adhere to the opinions of such famous scholars as D. Atkinson (1997), S. Black (2005), R. N. Cassel, R. Kolstad (1998) and state that the importance of critical thinking is the following.

• *Critical thinking is a domain-general thinking skill*. The ability to think clearly and rationally is important whatever we choose to do. If you work in education, research, finance, management or the legal profession, then critical thinking is obviously important. But critical thinking skills are not restricted to a particular subject area. Being able to think well and solve problems systematically is an asset for any career.

• *Critical thinking enhances language and presentation skills*. Thinking clearly and systematically can improve the way we express our ideas. In learning how to analyse the logical structure of texts, critical thinking also improves comprehension abilities.

• *Critical thinking promotes creativity*. To come up with a creative solution to a problem involves not just having new ideas. It must also be the case that the new ideas being generated are useful and relevant to the task at hand. Critical thinking plays a crucial role in evaluating new ideas, selecting the best ones and modifying them if necessary

• *Critical thinking is crucial for self-reflection*. In order to live a meaningful life and to structure our lives accordingly, we need to justify and reflect on our values and decisions. Critical thinking provides the tools for this process of self-evaluation.

• *Good critical thinking is the foundation of science and democracy*. Science requires the critical use of reason in experimentation and theory confirmation. The proper functioning of a liberal democracy requires citizens who can think critically about social issues to inform their judgments about proper governance and to overcome biases and prejudice.

Here are some examples of a critical thinking activity at EFL classes using short stories:

THE COLONEL'S LADY (W. Somerset Maugham)

**Questions:**

· Speak about Evie Peregrine. What kind of person was she in her husband's opinion? What kind of person was she really? What do you think is the author's attitude towards her?

· Speak about George Peregrine. What kind of person was he? Speak about his way of life, his interests (were they wide or rather limited?), his intellectual and spiritual level, his relations with his wife. Were George and Evie a well-suited pair?

· Point out passages of the story bearing touches of irony directed against George Peregrine.

· How is the character of Evie Peregrine presented, directly or indirectly?

· Make a study of the composition and style of the story?

· Outline the plot and state its role in the story.

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE (W. Somerset Maugham)

**Questions:**

· Discuss the characters of the story.

· Give a complete portrait of La Falterona.

· Speak about Peter Melrose. What can you say about: a) his appearance, b) his manner of talking and his kind of humour.

· Trace the inner relation between the two characters.

· Point out passages in which the direct method of characterization is used. Does the author use the indirect method as well? (Give examples.)

· Comment on the last passage of the story. Do you agree with the author?

THE CREATIVE IMPULSE (W. Somerset Maugham)

**Questions:**

· Speak about Mrs. Forrester. What kind of person was she? What is the author's attitude towards her as a person?

· Speak about Mr. Forrester. What kind of man was he? What kind of life did he lead in his own house?

· Analyse the methods of characterization used in the story. Which methods prevails?

· Comment on the title connecting it with the contents of the story.

· Discuss the composition, language and style of the story.

· Define the type of the story.

· Give the gist of the story.

· Express your opinion of the detective story as a genre. Why is the genre so popular with the reading public? What are its merits and drawbacks?

· Do you personally like to read detective stories? If so, what kind of detective story do you prefer and why? If not, give your reasons for disliking them.

From the above-mentioned we can conclude that critical thinking is a very crucial aspect in educational settings, as critical thinking helps students to think clearly and rationally, it is the ability of thinking independently and reflectively, it allows students to understand and apply things instead of just remembering and maybe, later forgetting them. Being a good student requires thinking critically about any subject.

Surely, it is worth mentioning that every successful university student is expected to be a good critical thinker.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Atkinson D.** (1997), *A Critical Approach to Critical Thinking.* TESOL Quarterly, 31 (1), 71-94.

2. **Black S.** (2005), *Teaching Students to Think Critically.* The Education Digest, 70(6),

87 p.

3.   **Bloom S. B.** (1956), *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain*, 2nd edition. Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd., 206 p.

4.   **Bowerman M., Levinson, S.C.** (2001). Introduction. In M. Bowerman and S. C. Levinson (eds.), *Language Acquisition and Conceptual Development*,. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-16.

5.   **Burge B. E.** (2012), Starbird Michael, *The 5 Elements of Effective Thinking*. Princeton University Press, 157 p.

6.   **Cassel R. N., Kolstad R.** (1998), *The Critical Job-Skills Requirements for the 21st Century: Living and Working with People*. Journal of Instructional Psychology, 151 p.

7.   **Cummins J.** (1994). *The Role of Primary Language Development in Promoting Educational Success for Language Minority Students*. In C. F. Leyba (Ed.), Schooling and language-minority students: A theoretical framework, 2nd ed., pp. 3- 46.

8.   **Duron R., Limbach, B.,  Waugh W.** (2006). *Critical Thinking Framework for any Discipline*. International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 17(2), pp. 160-166.

9.   **Facione P. A.** (2000). *California Critical Thinking Skills Test: Form 2000*. Millbrae, CA: Insight Assessment.

10.   **Hanratty L.** (2012), *Great Debates – 24 of the Most Important Questions in Modern Society for Teachers of ESL and EAP*. TEFL Ideas, 310 p.

11.   **Jackson D., Newberry P.** (2015), *Critical Thinking: A User's Manual*, 2nd edition. Wadsworth Publishing, 368 p.

12.   **Moore B. N., Parker R.** (2008), *Critical Thinking. McGraw-Hill Education*, 11th edition, 512 p.

13.   **Northege A.** (2005), *Adult Learning*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 64 p.

14. **Richard P., Linda E.** (2008), *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools,* Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 27 p.

15. **Tapper J.** (2004). *Student Perceptions of How Critical Thinking is Embedded in a Degree Program*, Higher Education Research and Development, 23/2, pp. 199-222.

16. **Williams M., Burden R. L.** (1997). *Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach.* UK: Cambridge University Press, 391 p.

**Նարինե Ամիրյան** – բ.գ.թ., դոցենտ, Արցախի պետական համալսարան, Ռոմանագերմանական լեզուների ամբիոն:

**Narine Amiryan** – PhD in Linguistics, associate professor, Artsakh State University, Chair of Romano-Germanic Languages

**Нарине Амирян** – кандидат филологических наук, доцент, Арцахский государственный университет, Кафедра романо-германских языков


**Նարինե Դուրասանյան**– մ.գ.թ., դոցենտ, Արցախի պետական համալսարան, Ռոմանագերմանական լեզուների ամբիոն:

**Narine Durasanyan** – PhD in Pedagogy, associate professor, Artsakh State University, Chair of Romano-Germanic Languages

**Нарине Дурасанян** – кандидат педагогических наук, доцент, Арцахский государственный университет, Кафедра романо-германских языков