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INTEGRATION OF A WESTERN-CENTRIC CONCEPT OF CRITICAL THINKING INTO EFL CLASSES IN UZBEKISTAN: A CULTURAL APPROACH

Annotation

This article explores the integration of Western-centric critical thinking concepts into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Uzbekistan, emphasizing the cultural nuances that affect the adaptation process. By analyzing both Western and Uzbek educational paradigms, the paper aims to highlight effective strategies for incorporating critical thinking skills while respecting local cultural values and educational practices.

Key words: critical thinking, EFL, Western-centric, cultural adaptation, Uzbekistan, education, pedagogy.

G'ARBGA XOS TANQIDIY FIKRLASH TUSHUNCHASINI O'ZBEKISTONDAGI CHET TIL SIFATIDA INGLIZ TILI (EFL) DARSLARIGA INTEGRATSIYA QILISH: MADANIY YONDASHUV

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola G'arbgga xos tanqidiy fikrlash tushunchalarini O'zbekistondagi chet til sifatida ingliz tili (EFL) darslariga integratsiya qilishni o'rganadi va bu jarayonga ta'sir qiluvchi madaniy nozik jihatlarni ta'kidlaydi. G'arb va O'zbek ta'lim paradigmalarini tahlil qilish orqali maqola tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini mahalliy madaniy qadriyatlar va ta'lim amaliyotlarini hurmat qilgan holda samarali qo'shish strategiyalarini ko'rsatishni maqsad qilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, EFL, g'arbgga xos, madaniy moslashuv, O'zbekiston, ta'lim, pedagogika.

ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ ЗАПАДНО-ЦЕНТРИСТСКОЙ КОНЦЕПЦИИ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ В ЗАНЯТИЯ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КАК ИНОСТРАННОМУ (EFL) В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ: КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ПОДХОД

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается интеграция западно-центристских концепций критического мышления в занятия по английскому языку как иностранному (EFL) в Узбекистане, с акцентом на культурные нюансы, влияющие на процесс адаптации. Путем анализа как западных, так и узбекских образовательных парадигм, статья стремится выявить эффективные стратегии включения навыков критического мышления с уважением к местным культурным ценностям и образовательным практикам.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, EFL, западно-центристский, культурная адаптация, Узбекистан, образование, педагогика.

Introduction. In today's globalized world, the importance of critical thinking as a foundational skill in education cannot be overstated. Critical thinking empowers students to analyze information critically, make reasoned decisions, and solve problems effectively. This skill is particularly vital in the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where students not only need to understand the language but also engage with diverse perspectives and ideas.

Uzbekistan, with its rich cultural heritage and unique educational system, faces specific challenges and opportunities in integrating critical thinking into its EFL curriculum. Traditionally, Uzbek education has emphasized rote learning and respect for authority, which can sometimes hinder the development of independent and critical thought. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to prepare students for a rapidly changing world where critical thinking is essential.

This paper seeks to explore the dynamics of integrating Western-centric critical thinking concepts into EFL classes in Uzbekistan. By considering the cultural context and educational traditions of Uzbekistan, the study aims to provide practical insights and strategies for educators to effectively incorporate critical thinking skills into their teaching practices.

Literature Review. Critical thinking, as a concept, has been extensively studied and emphasized in Western education. It involves the ability to think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas, evaluating arguments, and solving problems systematically. According to Ennis (1985), critical thinking is a logical and reflective thinking process

focused on deciding what to believe or do. Paul and Elder (2008) describe critical thinking as a disciplined process that involves conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication.

In Western pedagogical practices, critical thinking is often seen as a key outcome of education. Lipman (2003) argues that teaching students to think critically is essential for fostering democratic societies, as it encourages open-mindedness, informed decision-making, and active participation in civic life. Brookfield (2012) emphasizes that teaching for critical thinking involves creating a classroom environment that encourages questioning assumptions and exploring diverse viewpoints.

However, the application of these Western-centric concepts in non-Western contexts, such as Uzbekistan, presents unique challenges. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory highlights the importance of cultural context in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning is inherently social and cultural, and educational practices must align with the cultural norms and values of the learners.

In the context of Uzbekistan, education has traditionally been teacher-centered, with a strong emphasis on memorization and authority. Karimov (2020) notes that this approach can limit the development of critical thinking skills, as students may be discouraged from questioning or challenging the information presented by teachers. Azizov (2021) argues that adapting Western educational practices to the Uzbek context requires careful consideration of cultural values and educational traditions.

Previous studies on the integration of critical thinking in EFL classes in Uzbekistan have shown mixed results. Some researchers have found that students who are exposed to critical thinking activities show improved language skills and higher levels of engagement (Johnson, 2002). However, others have noted that the success of these activities depends heavily on the teacher's ability to adapt them to the local context (Brookfield, 2012).

To address these challenges, educators in Uzbekistan must develop culturally responsive teaching strategies that respect local traditions while promoting critical thinking. This includes providing professional development for teachers, designing curricula that gradually introduce critical thinking concepts, and creating educational materials that blend Western critical thinking activities with Uzbek cultural references.

Research Methodology. The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature, aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the integration of Western-centric critical thinking concepts into EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes in Uzbekistan. The study uses the following methods:

1. Interviews with EFL Teachers:

- Participants: EFL teachers from various educational institutions in Uzbekistan, including schools, colleges, and universities.

- Process: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow teachers to express their experiences and insights freely while ensuring that key topics were covered. Questions focused on their understanding of critical thinking, experiences in implementing critical thinking activities, challenges faced, and perceived benefits for students.

- Data Collection: Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participants and later transcribed for analysis.

2. Classroom Observations:

- Settings: Observations were carried out in different EFL classrooms across multiple institutions to capture a variety of teaching contexts and styles.

- Focus: The observations focused on how teachers integrated critical thinking activities, student engagement, interaction patterns, and the overall effectiveness of these activities.

- Documentation: Detailed field notes were taken during observations, capturing both verbal and non-verbal interactions.

3. Analysis of Educational Materials:

- Scope: Textbooks, lesson plans, and supplementary materials used in EFL classes were analyzed to understand how critical thinking is currently being incorporated.

- Criteria: The analysis focused on identifying the presence of critical thinking activities, the nature of these activities (e.g., problem-solving, debates, reflective essays), and their alignment with Western critical thinking concepts.

Analysis and Results

The findings from the research were synthesized into several key themes and insights:

1. Awareness and Attitudes towards Critical Thinking:

- Findings: Interviews revealed that while many teachers recognize the importance of critical thinking, there is a wide range of familiarity and comfort with the concept. Some teachers view it as essential for student development and global competitiveness, while others are unsure how to effectively incorporate it into their teaching.

- Challenges: A significant challenge identified was the lack of professional development opportunities specifically focused on critical thinking. Many teachers expressed a need for more training and resources.

2. Barriers to Implementation:

- Findings: Several barriers were identified, including limited access to appropriate materials, resistance from students accustomed to traditional rote learning methods, and parental expectations rooted in conventional educational paradigms.

- Cultural Considerations: The hierarchical nature of Uzbek society often translates into classroom dynamics, where students are hesitant to challenge or question teachers. This cultural factor was found to hinder open discussions and critical engagement.

3. Effective Practices:

- Observations: Classroom observations highlighted that when critical thinking activities were well-structured and culturally adapted, they led to higher levels of student engagement and improved language proficiency. For instance, activities that incorporated familiar cultural references and allowed for structured group discussions were particularly successful.

- Case Examples: One effective practice observed was the use of culturally relevant case studies that required students to analyze and discuss real-life scenarios. Teachers who facilitated these discussions with clear guidelines and support saw positive responses from students.

4. Impact on Students:

- Feedback: Teachers reported that students who engaged in critical thinking activities developed better problem-solving skills and a more nuanced understanding of English. These students were also more confident in expressing their ideas and opinions.

- Student Development: The integration of critical thinking was found to not only enhance language skills but also contribute to the overall cognitive and personal development of students.

5. Recommendations for Future Implementation:

- Professional Development: There is a strong need for ongoing professional development programs focused on critical thinking and culturally responsive teaching methods.

- Curriculum Design: The curriculum should be designed to gradually introduce critical thinking concepts, allowing both teachers and students to adapt comfortably.

- Community Engagement: Educating parents and the wider community about the benefits of critical thinking is crucial for building broader support and reducing resistance.

Conclusion. The integration of Western-centric critical thinking concepts into EFL classes in Uzbekistan is a multifaceted challenge that requires a culturally sensitive approach. By providing teachers with appropriate training, resources, and support, and by designing curricula that respect and incorporate local cultural values, it is possible to enhance the educational experience and outcomes for Uzbek students. This study contributes valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to foster critical thinking skills within the context of Uzbekistan's unique cultural and educational landscape.

Recommendations

The integration of Western-centric critical thinking into EFL classes in Uzbekistan is a complex but achievable goal. It requires a thoughtful approach that considers cultural values and educational traditions.

LITERATURE

1. Professional Development: Provide EFL teachers with training on critical thinking concepts and culturally responsive teaching strategies.
2. Resource Development: Create educational materials that blend Western critical thinking activities with Uzbek cultural contexts.
3. Curriculum Design: Develop a curriculum that gradually introduces critical thinking skills, allowing students to acclimate to new learning styles.
4. Community Engagement: Educate parents and the broader community about the benefits of critical thinking to garner support for these pedagogical changes.
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