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INTERACTIVE EFL CLASSES FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING IN AGRARIAN UNIVERSITY

The article deals with the peculiarities of developing students' critical thinking in the process of learning English as a foreign language. The main technologies necessary for the formation of students' critical thinking are identified, among them: possibilities and practical significance of students' discussions, collaborative learning, work in small groups, problem-based learning activities, and project method.

Key words: *collaborative learning, critical thinking, EFL (English as a foreign language), flipped classroom, interactive technologies.*

Introduction. The European integration course of Ukraine presupposes the improving of education system. Ukrainian agrarian universities are targeted to provide a higher quality training of future specialists by increasing their competitiveness in the labour market, enabling their active participation in international programs, exchange experience with foreign partners, and efficient foreign language training. In accordance with modern demands, students are to

develop their professional competences, and general competences, as well, among them: the ability to search, process, analyze and synthesize information from various sources; the ability to gain knowledge in practical situations, etc. [9]. This goal can be achieved by implementing technologies for critical thinking development into the educational process at all levels.

Currently, under the conditions of the state of emergency, the issue of developing young people's critical thinking becomes principal. In the period of mass manipulation of information, it is crucial for a citizen to be able to tell between fakes and truth, critically assess everything that is heard or seen. More than ever before, students are in pivotal necessity of critical thinking skills that would allow them to identify the nature of information they are surrounded by; find out if it is useful and credible; protect themselves from misinformation and take control over what they read, listen to or watch in the media [2].

Perspective-oriented higher education should be developed according to the following principles: fostering students' ability to navigate in a rapidly changing world and the ability to comprehend and apply the obtained information. The main task of higher education is the need to teach a person to think critically. The authors have an opinion that critical thinking includes the ability to evaluate not only the result but also the thinking process itself. A modern specialist of agrarian sector should have an independent point of view, be able to apply the acquired knowledge to solve specific problems; master a sustainable command of a foreign language. The foreign language curriculum sets the instructor the following tasks: to form students' research competence (stylistic analysis) and a theoretical basis for understanding the functioning of language aspects: phonetics, grammar, lexicology, and stylistics in their relationship. The acquired knowledge can be further used in professionally oriented education and serve as the basis for the creation of meta-subject connections and the development of the research and creative potential of students.

Review of recent sources of research and publications. The analysis of scientific works showed that significant attention is paid to the issue of the formation of students' critical thinking. Some aspects of the specified problem were

investigated by scientists in the context of effective teaching by means of problem tasks in the ESL classroom [3]; utilizing “brain storm” and discussions in the study of foreign language [8]; implementation of the project method [5; 6]. However, the issues of students’ critical thinking formation in the process of learning a foreign language need to be studied more profoundly.

Setting an objective. The objective of the article is to review the technologies of applying interactive methods of developing students’ critical thinking in EFL classes, namely discussions, collaborative learning, work in small groups, problem-based learning activities, and project work.

Presentation of basic material. Nowadays the stress is on modern learning approaches that contribute to the technological innovations. The objective features of pandemic and post-pandemic reality require a gradual transition from usual lecture-based frontal learning towards primarily “flipped classroom”-based educational process [7].

The premised ground of flipped learning is vectoring a person to construct knowledge in the process of the personalized educational activity. That is, the mechanisms intended for the organization of interactive methods for mastering new knowledge should be aimed, first of all, at the development of critical and productive thinking of students. The effectiveness of interactive methods is revealed not so much in providing direct access to the desired decision, but in preparing the human psyche for the moment of “enlightenment”, in establishing a connection between consciousness and subconsciousness, which extracts the necessary information and contributes to the solution of the task. This complex mental act of extracting relevant information is called actualization, and the involvement of the received information in solving the educational task is called its organization. The mechanisms of updating and organizing information in a heuristically directed search can be different. Some of them are based on recognition in the task of elements that have already been encountered while solving other tasks. Other mechanisms of updating and organizing information are based on the separation of task elements from each other, their combination in the direction required for heuristic search [1]. Interactive methods

provide positive outcomes in group; they enabled a differentiated approach for choosing educational content, taking into account various levels of students' training in EFL, their inclinations, motives, peculiarities of temperament, cognitive properties and memory, emotionality, etc.

Discussions, collaborative learning, work in small groups, problem-based learning activities, and project technique are considered to contribute to students in improving their critical thinking skills because they are designed for exchange ideas about their own and others' view amidst students' group. The relevance of the problem of group interaction of agrarians in their professional activity is determined by the fact that agricultural work has a collective nature and its productivity depends on the coordinated efforts of many specialists in the agricultural sector. The interactive nature of these methods enables forming the skills needed for students' professional activities in future, namely: clearly formulate opinions, express their own view, analyze information, select necessary facts, build them in a logical sequence, discuss and defend their point of view, make arguments and counterarguments. It was emphasized that the learning material is assimilated during the discussion due to the exchange of information between participants; different approaches to the same subject, encouraged by the instructor; coexistence of different ideas up to the opposite points of view; opportunities to criticize and even reject any opinion; search for a group agreement in the form of a common idea or decision [8].

Agricultural students would benefit from improved professional skills in discussion of complex issues. Through group discussion students examine different points of view or perspectives related to an issue. For instance, discussions on topics *“Agriculture is the main cause of water pollution”*, *“Is organic farming the solution for soil pollution?”*, *“Being a vegetarian will help to solve global warming”*, *“Should we ban the utilization of pesticides?”*, *“Utilization of GMOs in food production for population and animal feed”*, etc. might yield a variety of opinions. Participation in the discussions gives the students the opportunity to develop their ability to work in a team, choose suitable partners, be able to concentrate on the essence of the problem and defend their point of view on important agrarian issues.

The discussion implicates consideration of a controversial issue, a sharp conflict of views, as well as greater independence of the participants in the communicative process. Comparing their opinion with others', students can distinguish the strengths and weaknesses of others' and concurrently the errors of their own. Inspired by others' thinking, their own thinking could be improved and expanded [11].

Instructors should work to design various activities and tasks that involve purposeful and meaningful collaboration between students in the EFL classroom [3]. Collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas and evaluation of others' ideas. While it can be challenging to work with others and to understand the approaches that different people take in order to solve problems, the benefits are substantive. Working together requires significant communication, creativity, and innovation. Work in small groups can serve as supportive mechanism to collaborative learning activities because of its positive impact on promoting team collaboration, team cohesion, and higher teamwork satisfaction [4]. The peculiarity of this method is that all students of the group are involved in the work; they learn to work in a group (team); a positive attitude towards the opponent is formed; everyone has the opportunity to offer their own opinion; in a short period of time you can learn a lot of new material; skills of tolerant communication, ability to argue one's point of view, find an alternative solution to a problem are formed [10].

Problem-based activity is one of the methods that could facilitate the students to think critically and to participate actively in the class. This kind of activity challenges students to learn, work in a group and find the solution in the contextual problem. The tasks that involve working with others to solve a problem always require students to think critically. There is an example of the problem: *People are increasingly trying to develop buildings on the banks of small rivers, cutting down large areas of forest. Instance the consequences of such economic activities of people and argue for their confirmation.*

The problem presented should engage students' collaboration to work in a group. The problem should be appropriate to students and must be based on the analysis of students' current knowledge. It should also be challenging if it is used as stimulus for critical thinking. They discuss the problem, synthesis the idea, or negotiate meaning to propose a solution. It allows the students to draw solution from different fields and through this, they will be more motivated to do self-directed learning and encourage lifelong problem solving.

The other effective interactive method is project technique. The project is a collective work, which consists of a synthesis of the individual contribution of each participant and the joint achievement of the final product. Comprehension of self-acquired information is carried out through the prism of personal attitude to it and evaluation of the final results. The project method promotes the formation of students' personal qualities that are acquired only in the activity.

There are general didactic requirements for the effective use of the project method in the process of developing students' critical thinking skills: the roles of students and educators in the implementation of project tasks should be clearly defined, taking into account the interests of students; students' activities should be based on cooperation, exchange of information, ideas, and support; the subject should be related to specific professional or life circumstances, be part of the range of students' interests, depending on the chosen specialty; project activity should be based on a large number of sources of information, contribute to the integration of knowledge, and include important practical tasks as well [5].

Thus, participating in project work, students acquire the following critical thinking skills: search, selection, analysis, structuring of the necessary information; ability to integrate information from different fields of knowledge; ability to think critically, put forward hypotheses, defend their views; ability to consider the situation through the prism of universal values and norms; ability to work in a team, etc. Working in a team, students learn to interact with each other, resolve possible conflicts, acquire skills of interpersonal communication, take responsibility for choosing decisions, analyze performance [6].

The communicative nature of the above strategies meets the requirements of modern foreign language classes. The process of forming critical thinking merges with the educational process, creating favorable conditions not only for learning a foreign language, but also for self-realization and creative activity of students.

Conclusion. At the result of the study it was found out that in the process of learning a foreign language utilization of critical thinking strategies allows to activate existing knowledge on the issue, effectively generates new ideas, individualizes learning, stimulates students' foreign language speech, and promotes their awareness of language phenomena, development of their linguistic abilities, automation of speech and speech actions, creating communication situations, developing skills of self-esteem and mutual evaluation.

Learning a foreign language using the methods of critical thinking involves not only active cognitive activity of students in search of information, but also the ability to analyze, comprehend, evaluate, compare different points of view, defend, argue, draw conclusions, suggest solutions. Through critical thinking students of agrarian specialties form their own views on certain phenomena and processes, and build a system of arguments to clearly prove and convey their own opinions.

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РОЗВИТОК НАВИЧОК КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ НА ІНТЕРАКТИВНИХ ЗАНЯТТЯХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В АГРАРНОМУ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІ

Анотація. У статті розглядаються особливості розвитку критичного мислення студентів у процесі вивчення англійської мови як іноземної мови. Підкреслюється, що критичне мислення сприяє інтелектуальній діяльності студентів, яка передбачає навчання студентів визнавати або підтримувати аргументи, застосовувати докази своєї позиції; робити аргументовані висновки та використовувати інформацію для вирішення проблем.

Визначено основні технології, які необхідно застосовувати у навчальному процесі для досягнення ефективних результатів у формуванні критичного мислення студентів аграрних спеціальностей. Розглянуто можливості та практичне значення використання дискусій, навчання у співробітництві, роботи в малих групах, проблемного навчання, методу проєктів. Наведено зразки завдань, які можуть бути використані для розвитку критичного мислення студентів.

З'ясовано, що вивчення іноземної мови із застосуванням інтерактивних технологій передбачає не лише активну пізнавальну діяльність студентів із

пошуку інформації, але й уміння аналізувати, осмислювати, оцінювати, порівнювати різні точки зору, робити висновки, пропонувати рішення. Студенти починають співпрацювати та критично мислити, коли вони працюють самотійно або в невеликих групах, щоб вирішувати проблеми шляхом пошуку, дослідження та аналізу.

Так, участь у дискусіях сприяє формуванню умінь чітко формулювати думки, висловлювати власну точку зору, аналізувати отриману інформацію, обговорювати та відстоювати власну позицію, наводити аргументи та контраргументи. Навчання у співробітництві сприяє розвитку критичного мислення через обговорення, роз'яснення ідей і оцінку ідей інших. Діяльність у малих групах сприяє спілкуванню, вирішенню проблем, вислуховуванню різних точок зору та співпраці задля аналізу та синтезу інформації. Вирішення різноманітних проблемних завдань розвиває у студентів також соціальні навички, уміння враховувати думку інших і приймати спільне рішення. Беручи участь у проєктній роботі, студенти вчать взаємодіяти один із одним, вирішувати можливі конфлікти, набувають навичок міжособистісного спілкування, відповідально ставитися до вибору рішень.

Ключові слова: навчання у співробітництві, критичне мислення, англійська мова як іноземна, метод «перевернутого класу», інтерактивні технології.