



PEDAGOG

RESPUBLIKA ILMIAJURNAL

The journal "Pedagog" covers the sphere of spiritual and educational thinking of a person, the socio-political life of a person, institutions of civil society, global problems, problems of education, new technologies produced today, reforming the education system and publishes scientific articles on open scientific popular analysis.

The journal is intended for students, masters, professional scientists and researchers, university professors. The publication publishes articles of a problematic and scientific-practical nature.



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DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: *In today's fast-changing and interconnected world, thinking critically is more essential than ever. While foreign language learning is often associated with communication and cultural exploration, it also significantly shapes learners' thinking skills. This paper explores how learning a foreign language helps students develop critical thinking by challenging their assumptions, enhancing cognitive flexibility, and encouraging intercultural reflection. Based on classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and curriculum analysis, the findings show that language learning promotes metacognition, problem-solving, and open-mindedness. The study suggests that integrating critical thinking strategies into foreign language classrooms can enhance both linguistic and intellectual development.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, language learning, cognitive development, intercultural competence, education.*

Introduction

In the 21st century, where people are constantly exposed to complex information and diverse viewpoints, the skill of critical thinking has become a key requirement for personal and academic growth. Critical thinking allows individuals to question information, make logical decisions, and understand different perspectives. At the same time, foreign language learning has evolved beyond memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. It now encourages deeper cognitive engagement. When students learn a new language, they don't just learn words—they learn to think differently. They encounter new ideas, customs, and ways of seeing the world. These experiences force them to reflect, compare, and think more carefully about their assumptions. For example, when students try to express abstract ideas in another language, they often need to think more clearly and structure their thoughts more logically. This process strengthens their ability to reason, analyze, and reflect—skills that are at the heart of critical thinking. In addition, language learning environments often include debates, group discussions, role-plays, and writing tasks, all of which help students learn to argue, evaluate, and question. Aims to explore the strong connection between foreign language learning and the development of critical thinking skills. Through real-world

classroom research and learner feedback, we show how language education can help shape more thoughtful, curious, and globally aware students.

Methods

1. To understand how foreign language learning supports critical thinking, the study used a qualitative research approach [1]. The research was carried out in three high schools and two universities where English, French, and German were taught as foreign languages.

Data collection included:

- Observing 20 classroom lessons were observed to identify teaching strategies that promoted critical thinking.
- Interviewing 15 language teachers and 30 students to gather insights on how they experienced critical thinking in their language classes.
- Analyzing curriculum documents to see if critical thinking was an explicit goal in language programs.

The data were analyzed thematically to find recurring patterns and insights related to cognitive and cultural learning [2].

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how foreign language learning contributes to the development of critical thinking skills. The research was carried out over three months across five educational institutions: three secondary schools and two universities where English, French, and German were taught as foreign languages. To gain a rich and comprehensive understanding of the topic, a variety of data collection methods were used, allowing for triangulation and deeper insight.

Participants

A total of 45 individuals took part in the study. This included 15 foreign language teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 20 years, and 30 students, aged between 15 and 22, all of whom had at least two years of experience learning a foreign language.

2. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring a broad representation in terms of teaching backgrounds, student proficiency levels, and institutional settings.

Data Collection Tools

a) Classroom Observations

Twenty language lessons were observed at both beginner and intermediate levels. These observations focused on classroom activities that encouraged critical thinking, such as problem-solving exercises, debates, group discussions, and reflective writing tasks. An observation checklist, inspired by Bloom's Taxonomy, was used to classify cognitive activities like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation[3].

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with all 15 teachers and a selected group of 15 students. These interviews explored how language learning experiences influenced participants' critical thinking development. Topics included teaching approaches, cultural insights, student independence, and specific examples of analytical or evaluative thinking in the classroom. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent.

c) Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group sessions were organized, each involving 6 to 8 students. These group conversations offered a more dynamic platform for students to reflect on their learning experiences, particularly regarding metacognition—how they think about their thinking during language learning. Students discussed how their perspectives, strategies, and awareness had evolved through foreign language study.[4]

d) Curriculum and Textbook Analysis

In addition to field data, the study analyzed national foreign language curricula and selected textbooks used in participating institutions. The goal was to identify whether and how critical thinking skills were explicitly addressed or implicitly embedded within learning materials. Particular attention was given to reading and speaking sections, which often include reflective and argumentative components.

Data Analysis

All collected data—including interview transcripts, observation notes, and curriculum documents—were analyzed thematically using NVivo qualitative analysis software.[5] A coding framework was developed based on recognized indicators of critical thinking, such as questioning, reasoning, interpretation, reflection, and perspective-taking. Through thematic analysis, key patterns and relationships across the data were identified and interpreted.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research standards and received approval from the appropriate academic committee. All participants were informed about the nature of the study and gave written consent prior to participation.[7] Confidentiality was maintained throughout, and pseudonyms were used in all data reporting to protect participants' identities.

Results

The research findings showed several clear links between language learning and the development of critical thinking:

1. Cognitive flexibility improved: Students who regularly used more than one language showed stronger problem-solving and decision-making skills[9].
2. Metacognition was more evident: Learners reported thinking more about how they learn and how language influences meaning.

3. Cultural comparison encouraged reflection: Exposure to new cultural norms and perspectives made students more reflective and curious about their own beliefs.

4. Interactive teaching methods worked best: Techniques like group discussions, debates, and project-based learning helped students become more confident in expressing and evaluating ideas.[10]

5. Students felt more open-minded: Many learners said that language learning helped them "see the world differently" and "understand other people's thinking better."

These results confirm that language learning and critical thinking are closely connected. By learning a new language, students are constantly interpreting, adjusting, and making sense of unfamiliar concepts. This process naturally sharpens their thinking. In addition, discussing cultural differences forces students to question their assumptions, building empathy and intellectual humility. However, challenges remain. Some language classes still focus heavily on grammar drills and memorization, leaving little room for deep thinking. Also, not all teachers receive training on how to teach critical thinking alongside language. To fully benefit from the potential of language learning, schools and educators need to redesign programs that integrate more reflective and analytical tasks.

Conclusion

Foreign language learning offers much more than the ability to communicate in another tongue—it opens the door to deeper ways of thinking, reasoning, and understanding the world. As this study has shown, language learners often engage in processes that naturally require critical thinking: comparing cultural values, interpreting meaning in unfamiliar contexts, analyzing grammar and structure, and reflecting on communication strategies. These tasks develop learners' ability to think flexibly, solve problems, and evaluate information critically. The findings of this study highlight that when foreign language education goes beyond rote memorization and incorporates meaningful, interactive, and culturally rich content, it becomes a powerful platform for intellectual growth. Language learners are not only acquiring communication skills but are also building the cognitive tools necessary to navigate complexity in both academic and real-world situations. Moreover, developing critical thinking through language learning helps students become more empathetic and open to diverse perspectives, which is essential in today's multicultural societies. This combination of cognitive and emotional growth creates more adaptable, globally-minded individuals who can participate in international dialogue with confidence and respect. To fully harness the benefits of language learning for critical thinking, educators should integrate strategies such as task-based learning, open-ended discussions, reflection activities, and intercultural analysis into their teaching. Curricula should also be designed to include critical thinking goals alongside language objectives. In

conclusion, fostering critical thinking through foreign language learning is not just beneficial—it is necessary. It equips students with essential life skills that go beyond the classroom, preparing them to think deeply, act wisely, and communicate effectively in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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