THE BENEFITS OF USING AN ECLECTIC APPROACH TO ENHANCE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

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Abstract. In the modern world, where information is becoming increasingly accessible and diverse, developing students' critical thinking is one of the priority tasks of higher education. Critical thinking allows students not only to analyze and evaluate information but also to make informed decisions, which is especially important in professional and academic activities. In the context of teaching foreign languages, particularly English, the development of critical thinking is of particular importance, as it contributes to the formation of communicative competence and intercultural awareness. Traditional teaching methods based on mechanical memorization and reproduction of information are often not effective enough for the development of critical thinking. In this regard, there is a need to use interactive methods that involve active involvement of students in the educational process and the creation of conditions for independent search and analysis of information. This article discusses the features of the use of one of those interactive methods, an eclectic approach, for the development of students' critical thinking skills in English classes at universities.

Keywords: eclectic approach, critical thinking, foreign language, globalization, communication, teaching methods, digital technologies

Foreign language proficiency is remarkably essential for people nowadays because of globalization and digitalization. Nevertheless, modern education is aimed not only at teaching language but also at instilling the ability of students to think critically. The alliance and intersection of foreign language proficiency and critical thinking translates into combining modern methods with traditional techniques of teaching and integrating them into curriculum. An eclectic approach is the most effective tool to combine the best elements of various techniques and accomplish these goals.

Conceptual principles of the eclectic method

The eclectic method of teaching foreign languages combines all the methods, techniques and strategies of different methodological systems. It does not confine itself to one methodology but gives a leeway for the teacher to flexibly tailor the process of instruction to the needs of the learners. The primary references of the eclectic method consist of:

• **Communicative method** that prioritizes language use within authentic communication contexts.

• **Grammar-translation method** which enhances learners' comprehension of linguistic structure.

• **Audio-lingual method** that develops automatic speech responses.

• **Problem-based learning** which engages students actively through interactive problem-solving tasks.

The advantage of the eclectic approach is its versatility and ability to take into account the individual characteristics of students. However, its successful application requires the teacher to have a deep understanding of various methods and their competent combination.

The importance of critical thinking in foreign language acquisition

Analyzing, assessing, synthesizing, and interpreting information are all parts of the cognitive process known as critical thinking. Critical thinking aids students in:

• Understanding and interpreting real materials (texts, audio, and video recordings) when they are learning foreign languages.

• Creating their viewpoints and arguments.

• Assessing the accuracy and applicability of the data.

• Analyzing data to solve issues and make decisions.

Critical thinking development becomes vital during listening because it demands both information perception and active engagement with that information. Students who listen must comprehend the content while simultaneously analyzing intonation patterns along with context and underlying meanings.

Applying an eclectic approach to listening

Students must be able to analyze the content of the spoken speech in addition to comprehending it when participating in listening exercises. Teachers can combine various strategies and tactics to improve learners' listening abilities with the eclectic approach:

1. Making use of authentic materials: Students can become accustomed to the natural speech of native speakers through lectures, TV shows, movies, podcasts, and interviews.

2. A preliminary discussion of the subject: Students are better able to comprehend the material when prior knowledge is activated before listening.

3. Analyzing what you've heard: assignments that help you pinpoint the main idea, assess the speaker's points of view, or create your viewpoint foster critical thinking.

4. Using Technology: Interactive listening training opportunities are offered by language learning platforms like TED Talks, Quizlet, and Duolingo.

The use of real audio content (such as a podcast) followed by discussion and analysis is an illustration of how the eclectic approach can be applied successfully. Students develop their ability to critically assess information in addition to improving their listening comprehension.

The benefits and drawbacks of an eclectic approach

The eclectic approach's primary benefit is its adaptability and flexibility. It enables you to consider each student's unique traits, level of language ability, and learning goals. But putting it into practice comes with a lot of difficulties:

1. Absence of structure: an eclectic approach may be less methodical, necessitating extra work to guarantee learning consistency.

2. High expectations for the teacher: an eclectic approach necessitates a thorough comprehension of different approaches and their skillful fusion.

3. Materials must be carefully chosen and modified by the instructor to meet the needs of the class.

The eclectic approach's use of contemporary trends and technologies

The eclectic approach gains new implementation opportunities as digital technologies advance. Current fashions consist of:

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use: There are two AI applications that help students improve their speaking and writing skills: ChatGPT and Grammarly.

2. Gamification: Engagement and motivation are increased among students when game elements are incorporated into instruction.

3. Mobile apps: Language learning apps like Babbel or Memrise provide interactive space to practice a range of speaking skills.

4. Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR): They allow you to create realistic language practice environments.

The eclectic approach is a productive way of developing critical thinking in the process of learning a foreign language. It is adaptive and versatile, and therefore conditions are established that stimulate active engagement with the language content and consideration of individual students' needs. However, its realization should be preceded by thorough preparation, the pedagogical abilities of the teacher, and the application of innovative technologies. In the context of online education, an eclectic approach opens up new possibilities for the development of listening skills, thus enhancing the dynamic and effectiveness of the learning process.

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