

Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills Through Literature in EFL Contexts

Yangibaeva Barno Eshbaevna

Nukus State Technical University, Assistant Teacher English Language, Uzbekistan

Sadikova Khurliman Polatovna

Nukus State Technical University, Assistant Teacher English Language, Uzbekistan

Received: 17 March 2026; **Accepted:** 05 April 2026; **Published:** 30 April 2026

Abstract: The development of critical thinking skills has become a central objective in modern education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Literature plays a significant role in fostering these skills by exposing learners to complex language, diverse perspectives, and interpretive challenges. This paper explores how literary texts can be effectively used to enhance critical thinking among EFL learners. It examines various pedagogical approaches, including reader-response theory, discussion-based learning, and task-based instruction. The study highlights how literature encourages analysis, evaluation, and interpretation, which are essential components of critical thinking. Furthermore, the paper discusses practical classroom strategies that promote active engagement and independent thinking. The findings suggest that integrating literature into EFL instruction not only improves language proficiency but also cultivates higher-order thinking skills necessary for academic and real-world success.

Keywords: Critical thinking, EFL, literature teaching, higher-order thinking skills, language learning, reader-response.

Introduction: In recent years, the importance of critical thinking in education has gained significant attention, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. As globalization continues to shape communication and knowledge exchange, learners are expected not only to acquire language skills but also to develop the ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate information. Critical thinking is therefore considered an essential component of effective language learning. Literature offers a powerful medium for fostering critical thinking skills in EFL classrooms. Unlike conventional language materials, literary texts present complex narratives, ambiguous meanings, and diverse cultural perspectives that require learners to engage deeply with the content. Through reading literature, students are encouraged to question assumptions, explore multiple interpretations, and develop independent opinions. However, traditional approaches to teaching literature often focus on

memorization and teacher-centered explanations, which limit opportunities for critical engagement. Students may become passive learners, relying on the teacher's interpretation rather than forming their own ideas. This highlights the need for innovative and student-centered approaches that promote active participation and analytical thinking.

Research suggests that literature-based instruction can significantly enhance critical thinking skills when combined with appropriate pedagogical strategies. Techniques such as open-ended questioning, group discussions, and reflective writing encourage students to think beyond the surface level of the text. These methods help learners connect literary themes to real-life experiences, making learning more meaningful and relevant. Moreover, literature exposes students to different cultural and social contexts, which broadens their perspectives and enhances their ability to evaluate diverse viewpoints. This is particularly

important in EFL settings, where learners may have limited exposure to authentic language use. This paper aims to explore the role of literature in enhancing critical thinking skills in EFL contexts. It examines theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and the overall impact of literature-based instruction on learners' cognitive development.

METHOD

The integration of literature into EFL classrooms provides a valuable opportunity to develop students' critical thinking skills. Critical thinking involves the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and form reasoned judgments. Literature, with its rich language and complex themes, serves as an effective tool for achieving these objectives. One of the key theoretical foundations supporting the use of literature in developing critical thinking is reader-response theory. This approach emphasizes the role of the reader in interpreting texts, suggesting that meaning is not fixed but constructed through interaction between the reader and the text. In EFL contexts, this encourages students to actively engage with literary works and develop their own interpretations. Instead of focusing solely on the "correct" meaning, students are invited to explore multiple perspectives, which enhances their analytical and evaluative skills.[1]

Another important approach is discussion-based learning. Classroom discussions allow students to share ideas, question assumptions, and consider alternative viewpoints. When students engage in discussions about literary texts, they practice articulating their thoughts and supporting their arguments with evidence.[2] This process strengthens their reasoning abilities and promotes deeper understanding. For example, discussing a character's motivations or the moral implications of a story encourages students to think critically and justify their opinions. Task-based instruction also plays a significant role in enhancing critical thinking through literature. Tasks such as comparing characters, analyzing themes, and rewriting endings require students to engage in higher-order thinking processes. These activities move beyond simple comprehension and encourage students to apply, analyze, and evaluate information. For instance, asking students to rewrite a story from a different perspective challenges them to consider alternative viewpoints and think creatively.

The use of questioning techniques is another effective strategy. Open-ended questions, in particular, stimulate critical thinking by encouraging students to reflect on the text and express their ideas. Questions such as "Why do you think the author chose this ending?" or "How would you respond to the situation

described in the story?" require students to analyze and evaluate rather than simply recall information.[4] Furthermore, literature promotes cultural awareness, which is closely linked to critical thinking. By exposing students to different cultural contexts, literary texts encourage learners to compare their own beliefs and values with those presented in the text. This process fosters open-mindedness and the ability to evaluate diverse perspectives, which are essential components of critical thinking. However, the successful integration of literature into EFL classrooms depends on the teacher's role. Teachers must create a supportive environment that encourages students to express their ideas without fear of being judged. They should also provide guidance and scaffolding to help students develop their analytical skills. This includes modeling critical thinking processes and providing feedback on students' responses.

Despite its benefits, there are challenges associated with using literature in EFL contexts. Students may struggle with complex language and unfamiliar cultural references, which can hinder comprehension. To address these challenges, teachers should select appropriate texts and provide pre-reading activities to build background knowledge. Overall, literature offers a powerful means of enhancing critical thinking skills in EFL learners. Through interactive and student-centered approaches, it is possible to transform literature lessons into opportunities for intellectual growth and language development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of literature into EFL classrooms represents a highly effective approach to enhancing critical thinking skills. As education continues to evolve in response to global demands, the ability to think critically has become as important as language proficiency itself. Literature provides a unique and powerful medium through which these skills can be developed, as it challenges students to engage with complex ideas, interpret meanings, and evaluate different perspectives. This paper has demonstrated that literature-based instruction, when implemented through appropriate pedagogical strategies, significantly contributes to the development of higher-order thinking skills. Approaches such as reader-response theory, discussion-based learning, and task-based instruction create opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process. These methods shift the focus from passive reception of knowledge to active construction of meaning, which is essential for critical thinking. Moreover, literature encourages students to connect textual content with their own experiences and the wider world. This not only enhances comprehension but also promotes

deeper reflection and analysis. By engaging with diverse cultural and social contexts, learners develop the ability to evaluate different viewpoints and become more open-minded individuals.

However, the successful use of literature in EFL contexts requires careful planning and effective teaching practices. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating discussions, guiding interpretation, and creating a supportive learning environment. They must also address potential challenges, such as language difficulty and cultural unfamiliarity, by selecting appropriate texts and providing necessary support. The findings of this paper suggest that literature should be an integral part of EFL curricula, not only for its linguistic benefits but also for its role in developing critical thinking skills. Educational institutions should encourage the use of innovative and student-centered approaches to maximize the potential of literature in language learning. Future research should explore the long-term impact of literature-based instruction on critical thinking and investigate how digital tools and modern technologies can further enhance this process. Additionally, studies focusing on different educational contexts and proficiency levels would provide valuable insights into the adaptability of these approaches. Ultimately, fostering critical thinking through literature equips students with essential skills for academic success and lifelong learning. It empowers them to become independent thinkers, effective communicators, and informed global citizens.

REFERENCES

1. Lazar, G. (1993). Literature and Language Teaching. <https://archive.org/details/literaturelangua0000la/za>
2. Carter, R. & Long, M. (1991). Teaching Literature. <https://books.google.com>
3. Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and Culture in Language Teaching. <https://books.google.com>
4. Khatib, M., Rezaei, S., & Derakhshan, A. (2011). Literature in EFL Classrooms. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1080713.pdf>
5. Paran, A. (2008). The Role of Literature in Language Teaching. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>
6. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky>
7. Zimnyaya, I. A. (2004). Pedagogical Psychology. <https://cyberleninka.ru>
8. Leontiev, A. A. (1981). Psychology of Communication. <https://cyberleninka.ru>
9. Passov, E. I. (2000). Communicative Methodology. <https://elibrary.ru>
10. Verbitsky, A. A. (1991). Contextual Learning Theory. <https://cyberleninka.ru>