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INTEGRATING THE ANCIENT SOCRATIC METHOD INTO MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' CRITICAL THINKING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23470281

Abstract

The 21st-century educational landscape demands that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction move beyond mere linguistic acquisition to encompass higher-order cognitive skills. This paper explores the integration of the ancient Socratic method into modern EFL classrooms as a pedagogical strategy to simultaneously enhance learners' critical thinking and speaking competencies. Despite communicative language teaching advancements, many EFL learners still struggle with spontaneous expression and analytical reasoning due to traditional rote-learning environments. By analyzing recent studies, including meta-analyses and qualitative assessments, this article demonstrates how Socratic questioning stimulates active learning, deepens cognitive processing, and fosters oral proficiency. In addition to this , this article provides practical solutions for implementing dialogic inquiry in modern classrooms, concluding that continuous, probing questioning strategies are essential for developing autonomous, intellectually engaged language learners.

Keywords: Socratic method, critical thinking, EFL learners, speaking skills, active learning, Socratic questioning, pedagogy.

Annotatsiya

XXI asr ta'lim tizimi Ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida (EFL) o'qitishda faqatgina lingvistik bilimlarni emas, balki yuqori darajadagi kognitiv ko'nikmalarni rivojlantirishni talab etadi. Ushbu maqola EFL o'rganuvchilarining tanqidiy fikrlash va gapirish qobiliyatlarini bir vaqtning o'zida rivojlantirishning pedagogik strategiyasi sifatida qadimgi Sokratik metodni zamonaviy ingliz tili darslariga integratsiya qilishni o'rganadi. Kommunikativ til o'qitishdagi yutuqlarga qaramay, ko'plab EFL o'rganuvchilari an'anaviy yodlashga asoslangan ta'lim muhiti sababli o'z-o'zidan fikr bildirish va tahliliy mushohada yuritishda qiyinchiliklarga duch kelishmoqda. So'nggi tadqiqotlar, jumladan, meta-tahlillar va sifat baholashlarini tahlil qilish orqali, ushbu maqola Sokratik savol-javoblar faol o'rganishni qanday rag'batlantirishi, kognitiv jarayonlarni chuqurlashtirishi va og'zaki nutq malakasini qanday oshirishini ko'rsatib beradi. Qolaversa, ushbu maqola zamonaviy sinfxonalarda dialogik izlanishni joriy etish bo'yicha amaliy yechimlarni taqdim etadi va mustaqil, intellektual jihatdan faol til o'rganuvchilarni shakllantirishda uzluksiz, chuqur o'ylashga undovchi savollar strategiyasi muhim ahamiyatga ega ekanligini xulosa qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Sokratik metod, tanqidiy fikrlash, EFL o'rganuvchilari, gapirish ko'nikmasi, faol o'rganish, Sokratik savollar, pedagogika.

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Аннотация

Образовательная среда 21-го века требует, чтобы преподавание английского языка как иностранного (EFL) выходило за рамки простого усвоения языка и включало когнитивные навыки высшего порядка. В данной статье исследуется интеграция древнего сократовского метода в современные классы EFL в качестве педагогической стратегии для одновременного развития критического мышления и разговорных навыков учащихся. Несмотря на достижения в коммуникативном обучении языку, многие изучающие EFL по-прежнему испытывают трудности со спонтанным выражением мыслей и аналитическим рассуждением из-за традиционной среды обучения, основанной на механическом запоминании. Анализируя недавние исследования, включая метаанализы и качественные оценки, эта статья демонстрирует, как сократовский метод постановки вопросов стимулирует активное обучение, углубляет когнитивную обработку и способствует развитию навыков устной речи. В обсуждении предлагаются практические решения для внедрения диалогического исследования в современных классах, и делается вывод о том, что стратегии непрерывного, глубокого опроса имеют важное значение для развития самостоятельных, интеллектуально вовлеченных изучающих язык.

Ключевые слова: Сократовский метод, критическое мышление, изучающие EFL, навыки говорения, активное обучение, сократовские вопросы, педагогика.

Introduction

In the contemporary globalized era, the objectives of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have transcended the mere mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and phonetic accuracy. Modern education emphasizes the cultivation of 21st-century skills, prominently featuring critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication. However, a significant problem persists in modern EFL contexts: many classrooms are still dominated by teacher-centered instruction and rote memorization. Consequently, learners frequently fail to express their original thoughts spontaneously or analyze complex issues critically in the target language. As the renowned educational philosopher John Dewey once posited, "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." This reflection is often absent in standard language drills. To address this gap, educators are increasingly looking back to antiquity—specifically, to the Socratic method. Socrates famously stated, "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think." This ancient philosophy is deeply relevant to the current educational crisis. The Socratic method, characterized by a continuous loop of open-ended, probing questions, shifts the cognitive load from the teacher to the student. In today's rapidly evolving information age, where AI and automated translation tools can handle basic linguistic tasks, the true value of human language learners lies in their ability to engage in critical discourse. This paper explores the actuality of integrating Socratic questioning into modern EFL instruction, examining its profound impact on both critical thinking and speaking competence. By drawing upon recent empirical studies and meta-analyses, this article will delineate practical frameworks and pedagogical solutions for effectively implementing this ancient method in modern language teaching environments.

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The Intersection of Socratic Questioning and Critical Thinking in EFL

Critical thinking in language learning is not merely a byproduct of advanced proficiency; it is a catalyst for it. The traditional paradigm of transmitting knowledge limits learners' cognitive engagement. Conversely, Socratic questioning operates as a cognitive scaffold. According to Almaliki (2017), qualitative investigations reveal that Socratic questioning plays a pivotal role in promoting students' critical thinking by forcing them to clarify their ideas, challenge their own assumptions, and explore alternative perspectives within the EFL classroom. Instead of accepting information passively, students are guided to dissect arguments and synthesize new understanding. This perspective is highly relevant in current pedagogical frameworks. Awawda (2026) reinforces this by demonstrating how deliberate questioning strategies act as a transformative mechanism in EFL teaching, directly fostering learners' critical thinking. When a teacher asks, "Why do you think the author used this specific word?" instead of simply defining the word, the learner is pushed into the higher tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy—moving from remembering to analyzing and evaluating. Furthermore, recent insights confirm that fostering critical thinking skills through Socratic questioning significantly enhances students' ability to logically process information in the target language (Gunawan et al., 2024). The dialogue becomes a shared intellectual journey, replacing the static transmission of facts with dynamic, analytical exploration.

Enhancing Speaking Competence Through Dialogic Inquiry

The most immediate and observable benefit of integrating the Socratic method into EFL contexts is the enhancement of learners' speaking skills. Speaking is often considered the most anxiety-inducing skill for language learners, primarily because it requires real-time cognitive processing and linguistic formulation. When Socratic questioning is employed, speaking ceases to be a mere repetition of dialogues and becomes a meaningful communicative act. Kusmaryani (2021) observed the positive effect of the Socratic questioning method in simultaneously improving students' speaking skills and critical thinking. By answering probing questions, students are naturally compelled to produce longer, more complex sentences to articulate their reasoning. This is further supported by Manurung and Siregar (2018), who noted that developing students' critical thinking on speaking tasks through Socratic methods leads to greater fluency and argumentative coherence. Students become less concerned with making grammatical errors and more focused on conveying their analytical thoughts accurately. Moreover, the modernization of this technique has proven highly effective in technical and vocational education contexts. Telaumbanua et al. (2025) detail how the modern Socratic method serves as a crucial strategy to enhance active learning in English speaking courses among polytechnic students. By contextualizing the questions within real-world industry scenarios, teachers stimulate active debate and collaborative problem-solving, which naturally elevates the volume and quality of the students' spoken output. A comprehensive meta-analysis solidifies these findings, concluding that teaching critical thinking has a statistically significant, positive effect on EFL speaking competence across diverse learner demographics (Li & Chan, 2025).

Implementation, Assessment, and Practical Solutions

While the theoretical benefits are well-documented, the practical implementation of the Socratic method requires a deliberate structural shift in lesson planning and

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assessment. Teachers must move away from display questions (questions to which the teacher already knows the answer) and incorporate referential questions (questions that seek new information or opinions). There are several practical solutions for the EFL classroom. First, teachers must establish a safe environment. Socratic questioning can feel intimidating. Educators must foster an atmosphere where intellectual risk-taking is rewarded, and linguistic mistakes are viewed as necessary steps in the learning process. Second, sequential questioning should be utilized. Teachers should structure questions hierarchically, starting with clarification questions, moving to assumption probing, and advancing to implication questions. Finally, teachers must increase their wait time after asking a question. Cognitive processing in a foreign language requires time; silence should be welcomed as a sign of active thinking, not a lack of comprehension. Furthermore, integrating critical thinking into spoken English requires robust assessment frameworks. As Yin et al. (2024) highlight, developing a specific framework for assessing critical thinking in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) speaking is vital. Assessment rubrics must evolve to evaluate not just pronunciation and vocabulary, but the depth of argumentation, the logical flow of ideas, and the learner's ability to respond to counterarguments during spoken discourse. When students know that their analytical depth is being evaluated alongside their grammar, they adapt their learning strategies accordingly.

Conclusion

The integration of the ancient Socratic method into modern English Language Teaching represents a vital paradigm shift in EFL pedagogy. As the 21st century prioritizes analytical reasoning over rote memorization, educators must transition from passive instruction to active intellectual engagement. Continuous, probing Socratic questioning effectively bridges the gap between language acquisition and cognitive development. This pedagogical approach not only deepens critical thinking but also significantly enhances speaking fluency, as students are naturally compelled to articulate complex ideas with logical coherence. Ultimately, by teaching learners how to think rather than merely what to say, EFL educators equip them with the linguistic confidence and intellectual autonomy required to successfully navigate and contribute to global global discourse.

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