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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING BRAINSTORMING STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING OF B2 LEVEL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the effectiveness of brainstorming as a classroom strategy for developing critical thinking among B2 level EFL students. The study is designed as a qualitative narrative mini-review that synthesizes literature on brainstorming, higher-order thinking, cognitive scaffolding, and communicative language teaching. The analysis shows that brainstorming becomes pedagogically effective when it is structured through clear rules, deferred judgment, idea categorization, and post-brainstorming evaluation. Techniques such as reverse brainstorming, affinity mapping, and stop-and-think tasks help learners move from simple idea generation to analysis, evaluation, and creation. The article argues that, in the Uzbek EFL context, brainstorming can support student-centered learning and help upper-intermediate learners express more reasoned, evidence-based opinions in speaking and writing tasks.

Keywords: brainstorming, critical thinking, B2 learners, EFL, cognitive scaffolding, Bloom’s taxonomy, student-centered learning

1. Introduction

In contemporary English Language Teaching, B2 proficiency is associated not only with grammatical control and vocabulary range but also with the ability to express complex ideas, justify opinions, and participate in extended discussions. CEFR descriptors for independent users emphasize clear, detailed communication on a wide range of topics, which requires both linguistic and cognitive competence.[1]

However, many B2 students can form grammatically correct sentences but still struggle to generate deep arguments, compare viewpoints, and support their opinions with logical reasons. This problem is especially visible in open-ended speaking, debate, essay writing, and project tasks. When students are asked to comment on global or social issues, their answers may remain repetitive and superficial because their thinking process has not been sufficiently scaffolded.

Brainstorming is one of the most flexible strategies for solving this problem. Originally developed as a creative problem-solving technique, brainstorming allows learners to generate ideas without immediate criticism, activate prior knowledge, share diverse perspectives, and prepare for more analytical production. The purpose of this article is to analyze how structured brainstorming can develop critical thinking in B2 level EFL students and how it can be implemented in Uzbekistan’s language classrooms.[2]

2. Methods

The article uses a qualitative narrative mini-review design. Academic sources on brainstorming, critical thinking, Bloom’s taxonomy, sociocultural learning theory, cognitive scaffolding, and

[1] Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume. Council of Europe Publishing.
[2] Osborn, A. F. (1953). Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative problem-solving. Charles Scribner’s Sons.

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communicative language teaching were selected and analyzed. The review also considered local educational reforms in Uzbekistan that promote active, student-centered language learning.

Sources were included if they discussed brainstorming, creativity, critical thinking, higher-order thinking skills, or active learning in language education. Materials that treated brainstorming only as a short ice-breaker without pedagogical analysis were excluded. The selected sources were grouped into three thematic categories: theoretical foundations, classroom techniques, and pedagogical implications for B2 learners.

Because the article is a mini-review rather than an experimental study, it does not report pre-test and post-test statistics. Instead, it synthesizes established theoretical and methodological findings and translates them into practical recommendations for student researchers and EFL teachers.

3. Results

The review shows that brainstorming supports critical thinking in three major ways. First, it activates prior knowledge and helps students retrieve relevant vocabulary, examples, and personal experiences before speaking or writing. This reduces cognitive overload because students do not need to generate ideas, organize them, and produce language at the same time.

Second, brainstorming encourages divergent thinking. When criticism is delayed, students feel safer to propose unusual or incomplete ideas. This psychological safety is important for B2 learners who often worry about grammatical accuracy and peer judgment. As a result, students become more willing to explore alternative perspectives and take intellectual risks.

Third, structured brainstorming develops higher-order thinking when students are required to sort, compare, evaluate, and prioritize ideas after the generation stage. Anderson and Krathwohl's revision of Bloom's taxonomy places analyzing, evaluating, and creating at higher cognitive levels; these levels can be directly practiced through post-brainstorming tasks.[3]

Technique	Procedure	Critical thinking outcome
Reverse brainstorming	Students first identify how to worsen a problem, then transform negative ideas into solutions.	Cause-effect analysis and problem reframing
Affinity mapping	Students write ideas individually and group them into logical categories.	Classification, synthesis, and collaborative justification
Stop-and-think	The teacher pauses the task and introduces a new constraint or conflicting viewpoint.	Re-evaluation, prioritization, and flexible reasoning

[3] Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Longman.

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Question storming	Students generate questions before answers.	Problem identification and analytical curiosity

The most important finding is that brainstorming is effective only when it includes both free idea generation and analytical follow-up. Unstructured brainstorming may become noisy and dominated by more confident students, while structured brainstorming gives every learner a role and guides the class toward deeper reasoning.

4. Discussion

Brainstorming is theoretically connected with Vygotsky's sociocultural view of learning because ideas are first developed through social interaction and then internalized by the learner. In small-group brainstorming, students hear alternative viewpoints, negotiate meaning, and build shared understanding before producing individual answers. This process supports both language development and cognitive growth.[4]

From the perspective of critical thinking, brainstorming becomes valuable when students do not merely list ideas but also question assumptions, identify evidence, compare possible explanations, and justify decisions. Paul and Elder describe critical thinking as disciplined thinking that evaluates reasoning according to clarity, accuracy, relevance, logic, and fairness. These standards can be introduced during the analytical phase of brainstorming.[5]

In Uzbekistan's EFL context, structured brainstorming is particularly useful because it supports the transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. The national emphasis on improving foreign language learning requires classrooms where students actively discuss, evaluate, and create rather than simply reproduce memorized answers. Presidential Resolution PQ-5117 also highlights the need to raise the quality of foreign language learning in the country.[6]

A practical classroom model may include three stages. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces a problem and explains that no idea will be criticized during initial generation. In the during-task stage, students use reverse brainstorming, affinity mapping, or question storming in pairs or groups. In the post-task stage, students classify ideas, choose the strongest ones, and present a reasoned argument. This final stage is essential because it transforms brainstorming from vocabulary activation into critical thinking practice.

5. Conclusion

The review confirms that brainstorming can be an effective strategy for developing critical thinking in B2 level EFL students when it is used systematically. Its value lies not in the number of ideas produced, but in the cognitive processes that follow: categorization, comparison, evaluation, problem reframing, and justification.

For EFL teachers in Uzbekistan, brainstorming offers a practical and low-cost method for making lessons more interactive and analytical. Future research should test the effect of structured brainstorming on students' speaking performance, argument quality, and writing coherence through classroom-based experimental or action-research designs.

[4] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.
[5] Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). The miniature guide to critical thinking concepts and tools. Foundation for Critical Thinking.

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