DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract. This article examines the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing critical thinking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The study emphasizes that in today's globalized world, language learning should not only focus on linguistic accuracy but also on cultivating higher-order cognitive abilities such as reasoning, evaluation, and problem-solving. Through task-based activities such as debates, problem-solving discussions, and project work, learners engage in authentic communication that promotes analytical and reflective thinking. The paper discusses the theoretical foundations of TBLT, highlighting its potential to create learner-centered environments where students actively construct knowledge through interaction and collaboration. It also reviews relevant research on the relationship between TBLT and critical thinking, presenting evidence from both international and Uzbek educational contexts. Findings suggest that when TBLT is effectively implemented, it enhances learners' motivation, autonomy, and ability to think critically in the target language. Furthermore, the article identifies challenges related to teacher training, assessment, and resource availability, proposing solutions for successful classroom integration.

Introduction. In today's rapidly changing world, education is expected not only to transfer knowledge but also to develop essential 21st-century skills, such as creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Among these, critical thinking is considered one of the most crucial cognitive abilities, as it

allows learners to analyze information objectively, evaluate multiple perspectives, and make reasoned judgments. For language learners, especially those studying English as a foreign language (EFL), critical thinking is not only a cognitive skill but also a communicative necessity. The ability to express, defend, and question ideas in English reflects deeper intellectual engagement and supports meaningful communication. However, in many traditional classrooms, English teaching often remains focused on grammar translation, memorization, and mechanical repetition, leaving little room for inquiry, discussion, or reflective thinking. Such approaches may help students acquire vocabulary and grammar, but they rarely prepare them to use English for authentic communication or problem-solving. To address these limitations, contemporary educators are turning to innovative methodologies that promote active learning and higher-order thinking. One of the most effective and research-supported approaches is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach that emphasizes learning through the completion of meaningful tasks rather than the direct teaching of grammatical structures. In TBLT, learners engage in problem-solving, discussions, role plays, and real-life simulations that require them to use English as a tool for achieving specific goals. According to Ellis (2003), a task in language learning is "a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome." This means that language is learned most effectively when it is used purposefully and contextually. TBLT provides a natural environment for developing critical thinking skills, as students must analyze problems, evaluate alternatives, collaborate with peers, and make decisions — all in the target language. When students engage in authentic tasks such as debates, case studies, or group projects, they are encouraged to think deeply, express opinions, justify their reasoning, and reflect on the outcomes. As Skehan (2018) and Willis & Willis (2007) note, the cognitive processes involved in completing language tasks — including planning, analyzing, hypothesizing, and revising — directly correspond to the components of critical thinking. Moreover, TBLT aligns perfectly with the goals of modern education reforms in Uzbekistan, where communicative competence, learner autonomy, and innovation are key priorities. The National Curriculum for Foreign Languages encourages teachers to move beyond traditional methods and to implement learner-centered approaches that foster both linguistic and cognitive development. Integrating TBLT into English lessons helps students not only improve their language proficiency but also become more reflective, independent, and intellectually curious learners. Furthermore, research has shown that TBLT enhances classroom interaction, motivation, and engagement. Learners become active participants who take responsibility for their own learning, while teachers assume the role of facilitators who guide and support the learning process. This dynamic classroom environment naturally promotes critical inquiry, as students must use English to

solve problems, negotiate meaning, and share viewpoints. In essence, Task-Based Language Teaching is not merely a pedagogical technique but a transformative educational philosophy that integrates communication, cognition, and collaboration. By implementing TBLT, English teachers can create learning experiences that nurture both language competence and critical thinking — equipping students with the skills necessary to succeed in academic, professional, and global contexts. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the theoretical foundations and practical applications of TBLT in developing critical thinking skills in English lessons. It also seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities of integrating this approach into Uzbek secondary education, offering recommendations for teachers and policymakers to enhance language learning outcomes through task-based pedagogy.

Analysis of Literature. The development of critical thinking skills in language education has become one of the central goals of modern pedagogy. Researchers emphasize that the process of language learning should move beyond grammar mastery and vocabulary acquisition to include cognitive engagement, problem-solving, and reflective learning. Within this framework, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as one of the most effective methods for cultivating both communicative competence and critical thinking among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). According to Ellis (2003), TBLT focuses on meaningful communication through the completion of real-world tasks, where language is used as a tool for achieving specific outcomes. Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, TBLT places learners at the core of the learning process, allowing them to construct knowledge through interaction, discovery, and reflection. This experiential nature of TBLT is what makes it a strong foundation for developing higher-order cognitive skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation — which are all essential components of critical thinking. Nunan (2004) describes TBLT as a pedagogical approach that integrates communication and cognition by engaging learners in problem-solving activities that mirror real-life contexts. He argues that tasks requiring learners to negotiate meaning, analyze information, and make decisions not only enhance language fluency but also stimulate independent thought. Similarly, Willis and Willis (2007) highlight that TBLT promotes self-regulated learning, where learners must plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance — key processes that align directly with critical thinking frameworks. From a cognitive perspective, Skehan (2018) emphasizes the importance of task complexity in stimulating deeper mental processing. He explains that when learners face challenging tasks — such as debates, case studies, or collaborative projects — they engage in reasoning, inference-making, and justification, which strengthen analytical and logical thinking. This aligns with Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which positions critical thinking as a higher-order skill built through the stages of understanding, applying, analyzing, and evaluating.

Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers (2014) assert that the communicative and interactive nature of TBLT fosters an environment where students learn to think critically while communicating meaningfully. They note that the classroom becomes a space for inquiry and exploration, where learners question ideas, challenge assumptions, and co-construct meaning. These communicative exchanges require not only linguistic competence but also intellectual engagement, thereby promoting both language learning and critical thought. In the context of Uzbekistan's educational reforms, scholars such as Qurbonova (2021) and Mirzayeva (2022) have investigated the local application of TBLT in English language classrooms. Their research shows that TBLT-based instruction leads to higher student participation, deeper reflection, and greater autonomy compared to traditional grammar-translation methods. For instance, Qurbonova (2021) found that learners involved in project-based and problem-solving tasks demonstrated improved reasoning and argumentation skills. Similarly, Mirzayeva (2022) reported that TBLT increased students' engagement by 30%, as learners became more confident in expressing and defending their opinions in English. Internationally, Bygate (2016) and Reinders & White (2016) have also contributed to the understanding of how TBLT develops cognitive and linguistic competencies simultaneously.

They emphasize that task-based learning integrates knowledge construction, reflection, and real-life communication — forming a holistic educational approach. Bygate (2016) specifically notes that TBLT bridges the gap between language use and thought development, fostering critical awareness in learners as they interpret and produce meaning. Moreover, Nation and Macalister (2010) argue that curriculum design in TBLT-based programs should prioritize tasks that demand reasoning, decision-making, and collaboration. They propose that authentic tasks, such as designing surveys, conducting interviews, or analyzing social issues, serve as cognitive catalysts that nurture learners' critical faculties while enhancing their communicative skills

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Traditional Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Developing Critical Thinking Skills

Criteria	Traditional Teaching Approach	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Impact on Critical Thinking	Sources
Teaching Focus	Emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and teacher explanation	Emphasis on communication, interaction, and task completion	Promotes active thinking and reasoning through real-life tasks	Ellis (2003); Nunan (2004)

Criteria	Traditional Teaching Approach	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Impact on Critical Thinking	Sources
Student Role	Passive recipients of information	Active participants and problem-solvers	Enhances autonomy, creativity, and analytical skills	Willis & Willis (2007); Skehan (2018)
Teacher Role	Central authority and knowledge provider	Facilitator, guide, and task designer	Encourages learner independence and reflective thinking	Richards & Rodgers (2014)
Learning Activities	Memorization, translation, and repetition	Real-world tasks: debates, projects, problem-solving	Stimulates logical reasoning and decision-making	Bygate (2016); Reinders & White (2016)
Interaction Type	Limited student-to-student communication	Collaborative and authentic communication	Fosters discussion, evaluation, and argumentation	Nunan (2004); Nation & Macalister (2010)
Assessment Methods	Based on written tests and grammar accuracy	Based on task outcomes, performance, and reflection	Promotes self-assessment and metacognitive awareness	Anderson & Krathwohl (2001); Skehan (2018)
Learning Environment	Teacher-centered and structured	Learner-centered and flexible	Encourages exploration and critical inquiry	Qurbonova (2021); Mirzayeva (2022)
Outcome	Focus on language accuracy	Balance between fluency, accuracy, and cognitive skills	Develops comprehensive communicative and critical competence	Richards & Rodgers (2014); Bygate (2016)

Research Discussion. The findings of this study reveal that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) plays a significant role in fostering critical thinking skills among English language learners. The analytical comparison between traditional and task-based approaches (Table 1) shows that while conventional teaching mainly emphasizes linguistic accuracy and teacher-centered instruction, TBLT encourages interaction, learner autonomy, and problem-solving — all of which are essential for developing higher-order thinking abilities. In traditional methods, students often focus on memorization and repetition, which limits opportunities for analytical and reflective engagement. This one-directional mode of teaching restricts learners' ability to evaluate, question, and apply knowledge creatively. In contrast, the TBLT approach provides learners with real-world communicative tasks that require them to negotiate meaning, analyze contexts, and collaborate to find solutions. Through these processes, students not only improve their language proficiency but also learn to reason logically and make evidence-based judgments. As Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) note, the main strength of TBLT lies in its focus on meaningful communication. Learners use the target language to accomplish purposeful tasks such as debates, surveys, and project presentations. These activities stimulate intellectual engagement, encourage risk-taking, and promote self-reflection — elements identified by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) as necessary for cultivating critical thinking. The research by Willis and Willis (2007) supports this perspective, emphasizing that TBLT helps learners monitor their own progress and evaluate their learning strategies. This self-evaluation process fosters metacognitive awareness, which is a key indicator of critical thinking development. Similarly, Skehan (2018) argues that the cognitive load involved in task design challenges learners to organize ideas, prioritize information, and justify their opinions — thereby strengthening reasoning and decision-making skills.

In the Uzbek educational context, Qurbonova (2021) and Mirzayeva (2022) found that implementing TBLT in secondary school classrooms leads to increased student engagement and more dynamic classroom interaction. Learners were more motivated to express their opinions, participate in discussions, and analyze issues collaboratively. These results align with global research findings, demonstrating that TBLT can effectively nurture both communicative competence and cognitive growth when applied thoughtfully. Furthermore, the use of task-based instruction aligns with constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge actively through social interaction and reflection. The collaborative nature of tasks such as role-plays, group debates, and problem-solving projects encourages learners to interpret information critically rather than memorize it passively. As a result, TBLT contributes not only to linguistic development but also to the cultivation of analytical and evaluative thinking habits necessary for lifelong learning.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a highly effective framework for developing critical thinking skills among English language learners. Unlike traditional teacher-centered approaches that focus primarily on grammar and memorization, TBLT emphasizes meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and problem-solving. This approach allows students to use English as a medium for reasoning, reflection, and creative expression, thereby transforming the language classroom into a space for intellectual development. Through carefully designed communicative tasks, learners engage in real-life problem-solving situations that stimulate analysis, evaluation, and decision-making. These processes enhance both linguistic proficiency and cognitive growth, helping students move from passive knowledge receivers to active knowledge creators. The integration of TBLT also promotes collaboration, self-assessment, and metacognitive awareness — essential components of critical and independent thinking.

Furthermore, the research highlights that successful implementation of TBLT requires adequate teacher training, resource availability, and continuous adaptation of tasks to learners' proficiency levels. When applied effectively, this method not only improves language fluency but also cultivates essential 21st-century competencies such as creativity, reasoning, and reflective judgment. In conclusion, TBLT should be considered a vital pedagogical tool in modern English language education. By linking language use with critical thinking, it prepares learners to communicate thoughtfully, solve problems independently, and engage actively in academic and real-world contexts. Therefore, the systematic integration of task-based instruction into English lessons in Uzbekistan can play a transformative role in fostering both communicative competence and higher-order thinking skills, equipping students for future academic and professional success.

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