

Developing Critical Thinking through English Language Activities: A Classroom-Based Study

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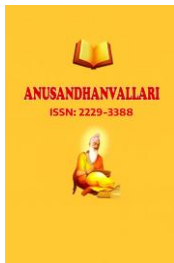
Abstract

This paper explores the potential of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a strategic platform for cultivating critical thinking skills among diploma-level students in polytechnic institutions. In today's fast-evolving professional and academic landscapes, 21st-century employability demands not only proficiency in English but also the ability to think analytically, solve problems creatively, and make reasoned decisions. Recognizing this, the study investigates how carefully structured ELT activities can serve a dual function: improving language competence while simultaneously enhancing cognitive skills. Drawing on principles of constructivist pedagogy and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the study employs a classroom-based action research model to implement and evaluate a series of interactive, student-centered tasks. These include structured debates on social and technical issues, group-based problem-solving activities, and case study discussions derived from workplace scenarios and real-life challenges. Each task is designed to engage learners in higher-order thinking processes such as analysis, evaluation, inference, synthesis, and argumentation—all while using English as the medium of communication. The study was conducted in three government polytechnic colleges, involving 90 second-year diploma students. Data was collected through a combination of pre- and post-task assessments, teacher observation checklists, and student feedback questionnaires. Quantitative analysis revealed measurable improvements in both students' spoken and written expression, particularly in areas like coherence, justification of opinions, and interactive dialogue. Qualitative findings indicate increased learner engagement, improved confidence in articulating complex ideas, and a noticeable shift from passive to active participation in language classrooms. The results strongly suggest that task-based ELT frameworks—when aligned with critical thinking objectives—can significantly enrich the language learning experience by promoting both communicative competence and intellectual autonomy. The paper concludes by recommending a set of adaptable classroom strategies and assessment tools to help English teachers in polytechnic and vocational settings integrate critical thinking outcomes into their daily practice. This research contributes to the growing discourse on the integration of language education and 21st-century skills, advocating for a holistic, learner-centered approach to ELT in technical education.

Keywords: Critical thinking, English language activities, EFL/ESL learners, language skills, higher-order thinking, task-based learning, pedagogical strategies.

1. Introduction: Critical Thinking in ELT

In the evolving landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT), the objectives of language instruction have expanded significantly. No longer confined to the traditional goals of grammar mastery and vocabulary acquisition, ELT today is increasingly positioned as a platform for nurturing a range of essential 21st-century competencies. Among these, critical thinking occupies a central place. Commonly defined as the ability to analyze and evaluate information, question assumptions, solve problems logically, and make evidence-based decisions,



critical thinking is now recognized as a foundational life skill—particularly in academic and professional settings characterized by complexity, ambiguity, and rapid change.

For students pursuing technical diploma courses in polytechnic institutions, the importance of critical thinking is amplified. These learners are preparing for careers in engineering, manufacturing, information technology, and various service industries where problem-solving, innovation, and collaborative decision-making are crucial to job performance. As such, their education must equip them not only with subject knowledge and technical expertise but also with the cognitive agility to think independently, assess alternatives, and respond constructively to new challenges.

Despite this urgent need, many English classrooms in Indian polytechnics continue to rely heavily on rote learning, grammar-translation methods, and decontextualized reading comprehension tasks. This conventional pedagogy, often shaped by exam-centric curricula and institutional inertia, tends to emphasize passive recall over active engagement. As a result, students may develop basic literacy skills in English but often lack the confidence, clarity, and cognitive depth required for real-world communication and reasoning.

This paper argues for a pedagogical shift—one that integrates the development of critical thinking into the ELT curriculum through interactive, task-based learning. Grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and constructivist educational theory, this study explores how specific ELT activities—namely, debates, case study discussions, and collaborative problem-solving tasks—can be employed to enhance both language proficiency and higher-order thinking. These activities are designed not merely as speaking or writing exercises but as cognitively demanding tasks that require learners to construct arguments, evaluate evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and articulate reasoned judgments in English.

By conducting a classroom-based action research study in three government polytechnic colleges, this paper aims to provide empirical insights into the dual benefits of such integrated pedagogy. The objective is twofold: to demonstrate how ELT can serve as a medium for fostering critical thinking, and to offer practical strategies that English teachers in technical education can adopt to create more reflective, communicative, and intellectually engaging classrooms.

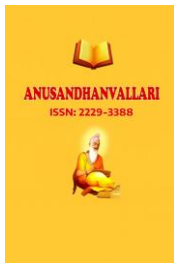
In doing so, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and 21st-century skill development, advocating for a more holistic and transformative approach to language education in vocational and technical institutions.

2. Literature Review: ELT and 21st-Century Skills

Language learning, particularly in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), is increasingly understood not as a discrete linguistic endeavor but as an inherently cognitive and socio-cultural process. As the demands of globalized education and employment continue to evolve, educators and researchers have begun to emphasize the integration of 21st-century skills—such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—within the ELT curriculum. This paradigm shift reflects a recognition that language proficiency alone is insufficient; learners must also be equipped with the intellectual tools to navigate complex, real-world problems and participate meaningfully in diverse communicative contexts.

The foundation for this integration lies in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, which distinguishes between lower-order cognitive skills (remembering, understanding) and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These higher-order competencies are essential for critical engagement with texts, arguments, and ideas—skills that can be systematically developed within the language classroom through communicative and task-based learning (TBL) strategies. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest, communicative tasks such as debates, simulations, and role-plays do more than improve linguistic fluency; they stimulate cognitive engagement, thereby fostering intellectual growth alongside language acquisition.

From a theoretical perspective, the inextricable link between language and thought has been a central tenet of cognitive and educational psychology. Paul and Elder (2012) emphasize that thinking critically involves applying



intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, depth, relevance, and logic—criteria that are equally central to effective spoken and written communication. When learners are encouraged to question assumptions, articulate arguments, and support opinions using evidence, they not only develop critical faculties but also gain confidence in their ability to express complex ideas in English.

In support of this argument, Harmer (2007) highlights the importance of learner autonomy and critical inquiry in modern ELT. He proposes that teachers move away from traditional, teacher-led instruction and instead adopt dialogic learning environments where learners engage in authentic, meaningful conversations. Such interactions, especially when based on real-world problem-solving scenarios, allow students to grapple with ambiguity, consider multiple perspectives, and construct knowledge collaboratively—all of which are hallmarks of critical thinking.

The Indian ELT context adds another layer of complexity and relevance to this discussion. Scholars like Kumaravadivelu (2006) advocate for context-sensitive pedagogy, emphasizing that ELT methodologies must be grounded in the socio-economic and cultural realities of learners. In polytechnic institutions, where students are being trained for technical professions in engineering, manufacturing, IT, and service sectors, English is not only a subject of study but a functional medium for career readiness. Therefore, embedding cognitive and communicative tasks into the ELT curriculum is not simply a pedagogical choice but a strategic necessity for holistic student development.

Several empirical studies conducted in Indian vocational education contexts support this integrated approach. For instance, integrating case-based learning, debates, and group problem-solving activities into English classes has been shown to enhance both linguistic confidence and decision-making ability (Rao, 2014; Pathak, 2017). Moreover, students who engage in such activities demonstrate greater motivation and deeper engagement with the learning material, particularly when tasks are contextually relevant and practically oriented.

In summary, the literature strongly supports the argument that ELT is a powerful medium for developing 21st-century cognitive skills, especially critical thinking. The combination of communicative language practice with task-based, student-centered instruction provides an ideal environment for learners to practice reasoning, analysis, evaluation, and reflection. For polytechnic learners, this approach not only enhances their linguistic proficiency but also prepares them for the intellectual demands of the modern workplace, where the ability to think critically is as important as technical expertise.

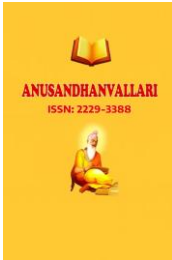
3. Research Design and Activity Framework

This study adopted a qualitative action research methodology, rooted in the constructivist paradigm, to explore how English language teaching (ELT) can be purposefully aligned with the development of critical thinking skills among technical diploma students. Action research was selected due to its cyclical nature of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, which is well-suited for classroom-based innovation and pedagogical experimentation. The study was conducted over one academic semester in three government polytechnic institutions located in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Participants and Context

The participants consisted of 90 second-year diploma students, aged between 17 and 20, enrolled in mandatory English communication courses across branches such as mechanical engineering, electronics, and computer science. These students primarily came from Telugu-medium educational backgrounds, with varying levels of English proficiency. The English classes were facilitated by three English lecturers (one from each institution), who had prior experience in communicative language teaching and agreed to collaborate as teacher-researchers in the study.

The institutional context of polytechnic colleges—where English is taught with an emphasis on functional usage for workplace communication—provided an ideal setting to integrate cognitive skill development with linguistic



goals. Furthermore, the study was designed with the long-term goal of developing replicable and contextually adaptable activity models that could be adopted by other technical education institutions.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To enhance students' analytical and reasoning skills through the incorporation of critical thinking tasks within English language lessons.
2. To observe and document the impact of these tasks on students' use of language—specifically in terms of fluency, argumentation, and clarity of expression.
3. To create pedagogically sound, scalable models of ELT activities that blend linguistic goals with critical thinking outcomes in technical classroom settings.

Activity Design and Implementation

The core of the research intervention involved the systematic integration of three key activity types, each designed to promote both language proficiency and cognitive engagement:

1. Debates on Contemporary Issues

Students participated in structured debates on relevant and relatable topics such as:

- “Online Education vs. Traditional Classroom Learning”
- “Technology: A Boon or a Bane?”
- “Social Media is More Harmful than Beneficial”

These debates encouraged students to construct arguments, defend positions, listen actively, and engage in rebuttals, all of which mirror real-world communication demands. Students were assigned roles (proposition, opposition, moderator) and were provided with structured expressions for agreeing, disagreeing, and summarizing viewpoints.

2. Case Study Discussions

Short, contextually grounded case studies were used to stimulate ethical reasoning and problem-solving. Examples included:

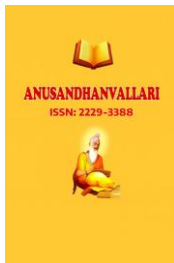
- A workplace dilemma involving employee misconduct.
- A customer complaint scenario requiring empathetic resolution.
- A team conflict in a project setting.

Students were grouped into panels to analyze the problem, weigh alternatives, and recommend actions. These discussions emphasized collaborative decision-making, perspective-taking, and justification of choices, with the instructor facilitating reflection and vocabulary extension.

3. Group Problem-Solving Tasks

Real-life inspired, project-based challenges were used to encourage collective thinking and planning:

- Organizing a campus awareness campaign on cybersecurity.
 - Planning a technical fest with limited resources.
 - Designing a solution for reducing plastic use on campus.
- These tasks required students to brainstorm ideas, assign roles, sequence actions, and present their proposals to the class, thereby integrating English use with teamwork and critical reasoning.



Each of these activities was scaffolded to ensure accessibility for all learners. The scaffolding included:

- Pre-task vocabulary sessions to introduce relevant lexical items and technical terms.
- Functional language templates (e.g., “I would suggest...”, “One possible solution is...”, “I disagree because...”) to support linguistic accuracy and confidence.
- Post-task guided reflection where students analyzed their own and peers’ performance in terms of both content and language.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and document observable outcomes, multiple data sources were used in line with qualitative triangulation principles:

- **Observation Checklists for Teachers:** Instructors used structured checklists during classroom activities to assess indicators such as logical structuring of ideas, use of evidence, clarity of expression, and participation dynamics. This provided real-time feedback on students’ critical engagement and language use.
- **Pre- and Post-Tests on Critical Thinking Indicators:** Students completed two short writing and oral reasoning tasks—one before the intervention and one after. These tasks were evaluated on parameters such as logical reasoning, argument construction, use of evidence, and language fluency, allowing for a comparative assessment of growth.
- **Student Feedback Forms:** Anonymous surveys and reflection sheets were administered to gather learners’ perceptions about their confidence, skill development, and comfort level with the activities. This data was used to adjust the activities iteratively and assess student motivation and engagement.

4. Observation and Assessment

The success of any pedagogical intervention lies in the systematic evaluation of its outcomes. In this study, assessment was conducted with a dual purpose: to measure improvements in English language proficiency and to evaluate the development of critical thinking skills among diploma-level students. Given the qualitative, classroom-based nature of the research, the assessment approach combined both formative (ongoing, process-based) and summative (outcome-based) strategies, enabling teachers to gather a holistic understanding of student progress.

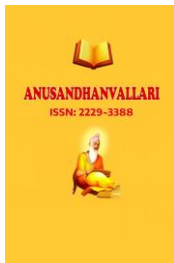
Assessment Dimensions

The assessment framework was structured around two core dimensions, each comprising specific observable indicators:

A. Linguistic Proficiency

This dimension focused on how effectively students used the English language during the activities. Key aspects included:

- **Appropriate Vocabulary Use:** Students were observed for their ability to employ topic-relevant and context-specific terminology, especially during technical discussions and debates. Teachers noted whether students used precise words or relied on vague generalizations.
- **Clarity and Fluency in Speaking:** The smoothness of speech, appropriate pace, and minimal reliance on fillers (e.g., “uh,” “like,” “you know”) were evaluated. Students who could express complete thoughts with ease and without excessive hesitation were rated higher.
- **Coherence and Logical Flow of Ideas:** This involved examining the structural organization of students’ responses. Teachers looked for the use of discourse markers (e.g., *firstly*, *however*, *in contrast*) and the logical progression from one idea to another.



B. Critical Thinking Indicators

The second dimension examined the cognitive depth of student responses, focusing on the following indicators:

- **Problem Identification and Diagnosis:** The student's ability to clearly articulate the main issue in a scenario, recognize hidden causes, or differentiate symptoms from root problems.
- **Perspective-Taking:** Students were assessed on their ability to acknowledge multiple viewpoints, especially in case discussions and debates. For instance, did they consider how others might view the situation, or did they argue from a single lens?
- **Justification of Opinions:** This involved the use of examples, data, or logical reasoning to support an argument. Strong responses included evidence-based statements or hypothetical illustrations to strengthen claims.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives:** Students were encouraged to examine the pros and cons of multiple solutions before arriving at a conclusion. The rubric checked for balance, fairness, and reflective decision-making.

Observation Tools and Techniques

To ensure consistency and objectivity, a standardized observation rubric was developed and used by the participating teachers during all key activities (debates, case discussions, and problem-solving tasks). The rubric used a 5-point scale for each indicator, with descriptors ranging from *emerging* to *proficient*. For example:

Indicator	1 – Emerging	2 – Developing	3 – Satisfactory	4 – Competent	5 – Proficient
Clarity in speaking	Speech is unclear and hesitant	Occasionally clear but lacks fluency	Generally clear with minor pauses	Clear and fluent in most parts	Exceptionally fluent and articulate
Justification of opinions	No justification given	Minimal or vague justification	Some relevant reasoning	Clear, logical support	Insightful, well-reasoned arguments

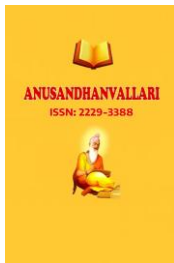
Teachers completed these rubrics during in-class observations and provided individualized written feedback to students after each task, which helped reinforce both language and cognitive growth.

Pre- and Post-Test Design

To gauge measurable progress, pre- and post-tests were administered. The pre-test involved short written and oral tasks based on everyday problem scenarios (e.g., “A classmate often borrows your materials and returns them late. How would you handle this?”). Students responded using their existing language skills and reasoning abilities, which served as a baseline.

The post-test, conducted after the intervention, included similar scenarios but with added complexity. It required students to:

- Analyze a problem,
- Present at least two alternative solutions,
- Choose one, and
- Justify their decision using logical reasoning and examples.



The responses were evaluated using the same observation rubric, with a focus on improvements in depth of thought, fluency, vocabulary use, and structure. Teachers noted that post-test answers showed more elaboration, better organization, and increased confidence in presenting ideas.

Key Observations

- A majority of students moved from single-sentence responses in the pre-test to structured, multi-sentence explanations in the post-test.
- Debate participants demonstrated increased use of transition words and persuasive expressions.
- In case discussions, students became more comfortable weighing consequences and articulating multiple perspectives.
- Vocabulary usage expanded significantly when students were provided with pre-task support, such as word banks and functional expressions.

This phase of the study confirmed that critical thinking and language skills can be simultaneously developed when students are exposed to real-world tasks, structured feedback, and scaffolded learning environments. The assessment framework proved both feasible and informative in the polytechnic context, laying the groundwork for sustained application and further research.

5. Results and Interpretation

The integration of critical thinking-oriented activities into the English language classroom led to significant and multidimensional gains among diploma-level polytechnic students. This section analyzes the outcomes of the intervention using a combination of quantitative data, qualitative classroom observations, and student reflections to offer a holistic view of how communicative English tasks can foster both linguistic proficiency and cognitive skills.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

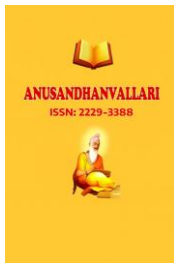
A comparison of pre- and post-intervention assessments, along with data gathered through teacher rubrics, highlights noteworthy progress in student performance:

- **Linguistic Improvement:** 58% of the participants demonstrated marked gains in vocabulary use and verbal fluency. These improvements were evident in spontaneous speech activities, such as group discussions and debates, where students exhibited greater ease in expressing complex ideas using more precise and context-appropriate terminology.
- **Growth in Critical Thinking Competence:** Based on teacher-rated rubrics, 66% of students progressed from basic to intermediate levels in critical thinking indicators. These included the ability to formulate arguments, recognize multiple viewpoints, and justify decisions using logical reasoning.
- **Increased Engagement and Participation:** 83% of the students were observed participating actively during group and pair activities. This is a significant increase from baseline levels of engagement, especially considering that many of the learners initially expressed hesitation or reluctance to speak in English.

5.2 Qualitative Classroom Observations

Teacher observation notes reveal important behavioral and cognitive shifts in students' classroom performance:

- **Enhanced Questioning Behavior:** Students transitioned from providing brief, factual answers to posing "why" and "how" questions. This indicated a move away from rote responses toward more analytical engagement with content.



- **Confidence Gains in Reticent Students:** In debate settings, previously silent or hesitant learners began contributing meaningfully when provided with scaffolds such as speaking frames, vocabulary prompts, and supportive peer feedback. This suggests that structured support played a crucial role in lowering affective filters and encouraging risk-taking in spoken English.

- **Real-World Connection through Case-Based Learning:** In case study discussions involving workplace ethics or customer service dilemmas, students effectively applied classroom vocabulary and reasoning to real-world scenarios. Teachers noted that such activities increased relevance and motivation, especially among students from practical-oriented technical streams.

5.3 Student Reflections and Feedback

Student responses collected through anonymous feedback forms reinforced the positive impact of the intervention, both on their language learning experience and their cognitive approach:

- *“I learned how to think before answering, not just guess.”*
This quote illustrates a shift toward reflective thinking, where learners considered the rationale behind their statements instead of resorting to instinctive or superficial replies.

- *“Debates helped me organize my ideas before speaking.”*
Here, the metacognitive aspect of language use is emphasized, indicating that students internalized the value of planning, sequencing, and structuring their responses.

- *“Problem-solving in English is not easy, but it’s useful for interviews.”*
This insight connects classroom activities to real-life utility, underlining the importance of communicative competence in professional settings like campus placements and industrial interactions.

5.4 Interpretation of Results

Collectively, the findings underscore the potential of well-structured, interactive English language tasks to support a dual learning agenda:

1. **Linguistic Development:** Through repeated practice in authentic, meaningful tasks, students acquired and practiced functional English relevant to real-world contexts, moving beyond memorized phrases or grammar drills.

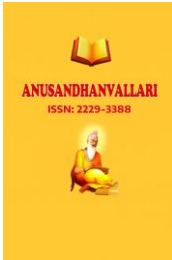
2. **Cognitive Growth:** The emphasis on reasoning, evaluation, and argumentation equipped learners with essential 21st-century skills that are vital for success in both academic and workplace environments.

3. **Affective Engagement:** The collaborative and supportive nature of the activities helped reduce language anxiety, boosted learner confidence, and promoted a positive classroom culture where speaking in English was normalized and valued.

These outcomes validate the central hypothesis of the study: that ELT, when informed by critical thinking pedagogy and task-based learning principles, can simultaneously foster communicative proficiency and cognitive empowerment—particularly among technical diploma students in Indian polytechnic contexts.

6. Teaching Strategies and Practical Applications

Fostering critical thinking through English language teaching requires more than introducing new activities—it demands a shift in classroom culture, teacher mindset, and instructional design. In polytechnic institutions, where students are often trained for practical professions, incorporating critical thinking in ELT not only enhances language skills but also prepares learners for real-world problem-solving and decision-making.



The following strategies offer concrete and adaptable methods for embedding critical thinking within English language activities. These techniques are especially relevant for Indian polytechnic contexts, where classes are often large, time-bound, and diverse in linguistic background.

1. Use Socratic Questioning

Socratic questioning involves prompting students to think deeply by asking open-ended, reflective questions rather than seeking immediate, factual answers. This method encourages learners to examine assumptions, explore cause-effect relationships, and justify their positions.

Classroom Application:

- During reading comprehension discussions, instead of asking “What is the main idea?”, teachers can ask:
 - “Why do you think the author included this detail?”
 - “What assumptions are being made in this paragraph?”
- In a group task, questions like “What could be an alternative solution?” or “What might go wrong with this approach?” push students to think beyond surface-level responses.

Benefits:

- Promotes deeper analysis and critical engagement.
- Reduces reliance on memorized answers and encourages original thought.
- Enhances both speaking and reasoning skills in tandem.

2. Scaffold Reasoning with Language Frames

Many students hesitate to express complex ideas in English due to limited vocabulary or lack of confidence. Providing structured sentence starters or “thinking frames” helps bridge this gap and enables learners to articulate thoughts more clearly and logically.

Examples of Language Templates:

- “One possible reason is...”
- “If we consider the consequences...”
- “I partially agree with that, but I think...”
- “Let’s compare both options based on...”

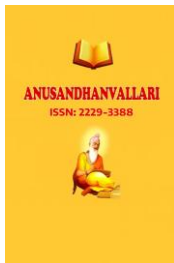
Classroom Application:

- Provide students with handouts or posters listing these frames.
- Encourage their use during debates, presentations, or problem-solving discussions.
- Pair weaker students with stronger peers to model usage in collaborative settings.

Benefits:

- Supports cognitive organization and coherence in speech.
- Builds students’ academic and functional vocabulary.
- Encourages risk-taking and active participation, especially among low-proficiency learners.

3. Integrate Real-World Problems



Engaging students in the discussion of real-life issues adds relevance and urgency to classroom tasks. These problems can be social, ethical, or technical, and should encourage learners to analyze scenarios, identify possible solutions, and defend their choices.

Classroom Application:

- Use newspaper clippings, workplace dilemmas, or community issues (e.g., waste management, online privacy, employee strikes) as the basis for role-plays or case discussions.
- Ask students to take on roles such as a company manager, customer, or technical consultant and solve the issue collaboratively.

Benefits:

- Links classroom learning to the world outside, increasing motivation.
- Develops empathy and perspective-taking—key aspects of critical thinking.
- Prepares students for communication in professional and cross-functional teams.

4. Use Reflective Writing and Speaking

Reflection consolidates learning by encouraging students to think about what they have learned, how they performed, and how they can improve. Reflection can be conducted through short written responses, class discussions, or audio journals.

Prompts for Reflective Practice:

- “What did you learn from this activity?”
- “What challenges did you face and how did you handle them?”
- “Would you do anything differently next time?”
- “What would have been a better argument or example?”

Classroom Application:

- After a speaking task, have students write a 3-sentence reflection on their performance.
- Conduct “exit ticket” activities where each student shares one insight before leaving class.

Benefits:

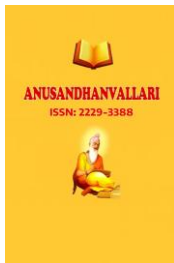
- Encourages metacognitive awareness.
- Helps students internalize critical thinking as a habit, not just a task.
- Offers opportunities for formative feedback and self-improvement.

5. Encourage Collaborative Thinking

Group work is a powerful medium for promoting critical thinking, especially when tasks involve negotiation, justification, and compromise. Working with peers exposes students to different viewpoints, challenging their assumptions and encouraging constructive disagreement.

Classroom Application:

- Assign roles in group tasks (e.g., facilitator, summarizer, challenger) to ensure active participation.
- Set up structured discussions (e.g., think-pair-share, jigsaw activities) that require collective decision-making.



- Include consensus-building exercises where the group must agree on one solution and present it.

Benefits:

- Builds interpersonal and communication skills.
- Fosters teamwork and collaborative problem-solving.
- Reduces speaking anxiety through peer support.

Conclusion to the Section

These teaching strategies illustrate that critical thinking and language learning need not be separate goals. With the right scaffolding, task design, and classroom culture, English language activities can become rich opportunities for students to think critically while expressing themselves more effectively. For polytechnic students, who must navigate both academic and industrial communication challenges, this integrated approach can foster lifelong learning skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

7. Conclusion

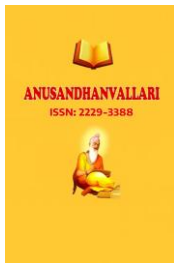
In the context of technical and vocational education, English Language Teaching (ELT) must evolve to meet the dual demands of linguistic competence and cognitive readiness. Traditional methods that emphasize grammar drills, rote learning, and exam-oriented tasks often fail to equip students with the analytical, reflective, and problem-solving skills needed in today's dynamic, workplace-driven environments. This study underscores the transformative potential of embedding critical thinking into ELT through carefully designed, communicative classroom activities.

The findings of this classroom-based research illustrate that English language tasks such as debates, case discussions, and collaborative problem-solving are not only effective tools for language acquisition but also serve as platforms for nurturing essential 21st-century skills. When students are encouraged to express opinions, justify choices, evaluate alternatives, and engage in reflective dialogue, they are simultaneously strengthening their language fluency and cognitive flexibility. These skills are especially critical for polytechnic students, who must bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in industrial, service, or entrepreneurial careers.

Moreover, the integration of critical thinking into ELT has a profound effect on classroom dynamics. Students become more engaged, more articulate, and more confident in both English usage and intellectual participation. Rather than passive recipients of information, they evolve into active learners capable of reasoning, questioning, and contributing meaningfully to discussions—a shift that mirrors the collaborative and problem-solving nature of real-world professional settings.

For educators, this shift demands a rethinking of classroom practices. It calls for task-based learning, scaffolded support, formative assessments, and a willingness to tolerate ambiguity and encourage diverse perspectives. Teachers must transition from being knowledge transmitters to facilitators of inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. Institutional support—through curriculum flexibility, training programs, and resource allocation—is equally crucial in sustaining such pedagogical innovations.

Ultimately, the goal of ELT in polytechnic settings should not be limited to preparing students to pass exams, but to empower them to navigate complex communication demands in a globalized, information-rich world. By linking language development with critical thinking, educators can help learners become not just competent speakers of English, but also thoughtful, responsible, and adaptive professionals. This dual focus is not only desirable—it is essential for building a future-ready workforce equipped to meet both local and global challenges.



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