

Tilavoldiyev, O. H. (2025). Designing Argumentative Tasks and Their Role in Fostering Students' Critical Thinking Skills. *The Delhi University Magazine. Series: The Humanities and the Social Sciences* 4: 83-90.

Designing Argumentative Tasks and Their Role in Fostering Students' Critical Thinking Skills

OTABEK H. TILAVOLDIYEV¹

Gulistan State University

ABSTRACT

The ability to think critically has become a vital component of modern education, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, where learners are expected to engage in analysis, evaluation, and logical reasoning. This study explores the design and implementation of argumentative tasks as a pedagogical strategy to foster students' critical thinking skills. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from task-based learning and argumentation theory, the research outlines principles for constructing effective argumentative exercises that promote cognitive engagement and reflective thinking. The study was conducted with undergraduate EFL learners over a six-week period, during which the experimental group was exposed to a series of structured argumentative tasks, while the control group followed a traditional communicative syllabus. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, written assignments, reflective journals, and teacher interviews. The results indicate that students who engaged in argument-based tasks demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to reason, justify opinions, and consider multiple perspectives. The findings highlight the importance of integrating argumentation into language teaching as a means of enhancing learners' higher-order thinking and academic communication competencies.

Keywords: argumentative tasks, critical thinking, task-based learning, EFL, higher-order thinking, language education, debate, reasoning skills.

¹ Senior Lecturer, Researcher, Gulistan State University, Gulistan, Republic of Uzbekistan. Email: otabektkh@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

The necessity for equipping students with critical thinking skills has never been more pronounced in the 21st-century educational landscape. Global challenges, rapid information flows, and complex societal issues demand that learners go beyond rote learning and engage in reflective, analytical thought. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, this need is particularly acute, as language instruction increasingly incorporates cognitive, communicative, and intercultural dimensions.

Argumentative tasks — those requiring learners to formulate a claim, support it with evidence, and respond to counterarguments — offer a promising methodology for cultivating such skills. These tasks not only foster linguistic competence but also develop learners' ability to analyze, reason, and evaluate information critically. However, designing these tasks effectively requires a balance of pedagogical insight, cognitive scaffolding, and learner engagement strategies. This article investigates how the structure and integration of argumentative exercises influence the development of critical thinking in language learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of argumentation and critical thinking has been explored in multiple fields, including education, linguistics, and cognitive psychology. Paul and Elder (2006) define critical thinking as "the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it." In the context of language learning, critical thinking is linked to skills such as evaluating evidence, distinguishing fact from opinion, and drawing reasoned conclusions (Halpern, 2014).

Argumentation in education has been shown to strengthen metacognitive processes (Kuhn, 1991), foster dialogic learning (Mercer, 2000), and support cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). In EFL classrooms, argument-based instruction has demonstrated positive effects on writing proficiency (Nussbaum & Schraw, 2007), reading comprehension (van Eemeren et al., 2014), and oral fluency (Zohar & Dori, 2003).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), as articulated by Ellis (2003), emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to promote language acquisition. Integrating argumentative tasks into this framework allows learners to engage in authentic communication while practicing analytical thought. Studies by Swain (2006) and Bygate (2016) suggest that such integration enhances both language and cognitive outcomes.

Despite the growing recognition of the value of argumentation in language learning, many educational curricula continue to fall short in offering structured and intentional approaches to argumentative pedagogy. In numerous EFL contexts, instruction often emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and basic communication skills, leaving little room for the integration of cognitively demanding tasks that require learners to reason critically. This gap reflects not only curricular limitations but also a broader hesitation among educators who may lack training in implementing argument-based instruction effectively. Additionally, while theoretical support for using argumentative tasks to develop critical thinking is well-established, empirical studies examining the design, sequencing, and implementation of such tasks remain scarce. Specifically, there is a lack of data-driven insights into how task complexity, scaffolding, and real-world relevance influence learners' reasoning processes. As a result, educators often rely on intuition rather than research-based models when designing argumentative activities, which may limit the tasks' effectiveness in promoting higher-order thinking skills.

III. METHODS

To investigate the practical impact of argumentative tasks on the development of students' critical thinking skills, a structured empirical study was conducted. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks discussed above, the methodology aimed to bridge pedagogical theory with classroom application by observing how specific task designs influence learners' reasoning abilities. The following section outlines the participants, instructional procedures, data collection tools, and analytical methods employed to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in a real-world educational context.

Participants. The study involved 72 undergraduate EFL students from X university in Uzbekistan. The participants, aged between 18 and 22, had intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency in English (B1–B2 CEFR level).

Design. A quasi-experimental design was employed. Students were divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group received six weeks of instruction using specially designed argumentative tasks, while the control group followed a traditional communicative syllabus without explicit argumentation.

Instruments:

- Critical Thinking Assessment Rubric (adapted from Facione, 1990)
- Student Reflection Logs
- Semi-structured Interviews with Teachers
- Pre- and Post-task Written Essays

Procedures. Argumentative tasks were implemented weekly and included structured debates, persuasive essay writing, issue-based role plays, and critical discussion prompts. Each task required learners to take a position, support it with evidence, and anticipate counterarguments. Tasks were scaffolded with vocabulary support and guided questioning.

IV. RESULTS

The results revealed a marked improvement in the critical thinking scores of students in the experimental group compared to the control group. Key findings include:

- **Post-intervention rubric scores** (on a 5-point scale):
 - *Experimental group: $M = 4.2$ ($SD = 0.43$)*
 - *Control group: $M = 3.3$ ($SD = 0.59$)*
- **Qualitative insights** from student logs showed increased awareness of bias, evidence evaluation, and clarity in presenting arguments.
- **Teacher interviews** indicated greater student participation, deeper engagement in class discussions, and a shift toward inquiry-based learning attitudes.

- **Essay analysis** revealed more structured reasoning, clearer thesis statements, and more effective integration of evidence among students exposed to argumentative tasks.

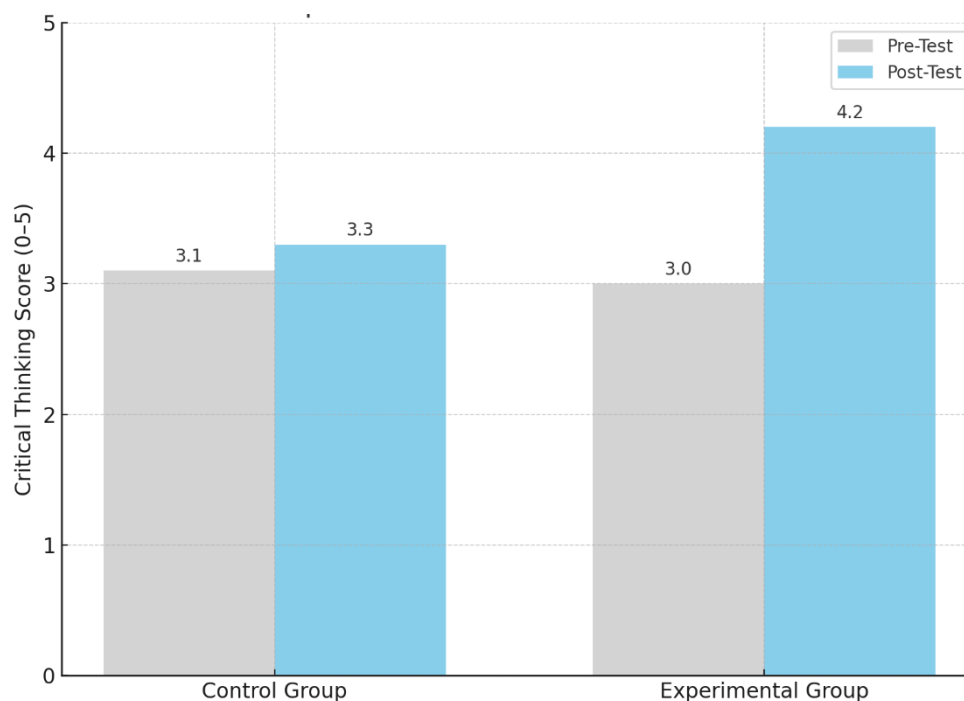


Figure 1. Comparison of pre- and post-test critical thinking scores between the control and experimental groups

V. DISCUSSION

1. Pedagogical Implications of Argumentative Tasks for Critical Thinking Development

The findings of this study highlight the pedagogical value of argumentative tasks as catalysts for fostering students' critical thinking skills in EFL contexts. Unlike conventional language activities that prioritize fluency or accuracy, argumentative tasks demand learners to process information critically, form reasoned positions, and evaluate alternative viewpoints. These cognitive operations align closely with Bloom's higher-order thinking categories such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. The observed gains in students' post-task performance suggest that when tasks are designed with intention—incorporating clear prompts, structured formats, and relevance to learners' interests—they stimulate reflective engagement. Teachers reported increased participation and improved reasoning abilities in classroom discussions, which indicates that argumentative

instruction can shift learner attitudes toward more autonomous and inquiry-driven learning. Therefore, the integration of such tasks should be considered not as an optional enrichment but as a core component of communicative and academic language instruction. In doing so, educators will not only enhance language proficiency but also equip students with critical life skills essential for academic and professional success in a globalized world.

2. The Role of Task Design, Scaffolding, and Learner Engagement

An important insight that emerged from this study is the crucial role of task design and scaffolding in ensuring the effectiveness of argumentative exercises. Tasks that provided learners with guiding questions, vocabulary lists, graphic organizers, and sentence stems yielded more structured arguments and deeper reasoning. This suggests that critical thinking does not emerge from argumentative formats alone—it must be supported by carefully calibrated input that assists learners in organizing and articulating their thoughts. Moreover, task engagement increased significantly when topics were relatable and socially relevant, such as environmental concerns or technology use. This underscores the importance of topic selection in motivating learners to think critically and engage in meaningful dialogue. In contrast, less structured tasks or those lacking scaffolding often led to superficial responses or repetition of memorized content. Thus, task designers and instructors must be deliberate in balancing challenge and support. Effective argumentative instruction requires thoughtful design that considers learners' cognitive load, language level, and interest. Such design principles ensure not only participation but also genuine intellectual engagement.

3. Challenges and Future Considerations in Argument-Based Instruction

Despite the clear benefits, implementing argumentative tasks in EFL classrooms is not without challenges. Some students initially displayed resistance to taking strong positions, particularly in cultures where disagreement may be perceived as confrontational. Others lacked the language resources or confidence to defend their views, which sometimes led to oversimplified responses or avoidance of deeper engagement. Teachers also reported difficulties in managing classroom time, assessing reasoning quality, and providing real-time feedback on argument structure and evidence.

These issues point to the need for ongoing teacher training focused on facilitating argumentative discourse and managing dialogic classroom environments. Additionally, more longitudinal studies are needed to determine the sustained effects of argumentative instruction over time. Future research should also explore the impact of digital platforms, peer assessment, and intercultural components in argument-based learning. Addressing these areas will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how argumentative pedagogy can evolve to meet the needs of diverse learners. For now, it is clear that while promising, the implementation of such tasks requires intentional planning, adaptive pedagogy, and sustained institutional support.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study affirms the significant role that well-designed argumentative tasks can play in developing critical thinking skills among EFL learners. Through structured practice in reasoning, evidence use, and perspective-taking, students demonstrated measurable improvement in their ability to think logically, analyze information, and express complex ideas in English. The results support the inclusion of argumentative instruction as an essential component of modern language education, particularly within higher education where cognitive and academic demands are increasing.

Beyond theoretical affirmation, this research points to practical implementation strategies for educators. Teachers can begin by incorporating short opinion-based writing prompts, structured debates, or issue-based role-plays into existing syllabi. Tasks should be scaffolded with visual organizers, sentence frames, and model responses to support learner confidence and performance. Additionally, selecting culturally relevant or personally engaging topics can enhance motivation and depth of engagement. Collaborative tasks, such as pair-based rebuttal exchanges or small-group panel discussions, can further promote peer interaction and reflection. To institutionalize such approaches, curriculum designers and teacher training programs should provide frameworks and materials that support task creation and assessment. With consistent integration, argumentative tasks can help transform EFL classrooms into spaces of inquiry, dialogue, and intellectual growth.

Future research could expand on the longitudinal impact of such tasks, explore their application in online or hybrid formats, and investigate intercultural dimensions of argumentation. Teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers are encouraged to prioritize critical thinking through structured argumentation as a core component of language education.

REFERENCES

- Bygate, M. (2016). *Sources, developments and directions of task-based language teaching*. *Language Teaching*, 49(1), 1–33.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction*. American Philosophical Association.
- Halpern, D. F. (2014). *Thought and knowledge: An introduction to critical thinking*. Psychology Press.
- Kuhn, D. (1991). *The skills of argument*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mercer, N. (2000). *Words and minds: How we use language to think together*. Routledge.
- Nussbaum, E. M., & Schraw, G. (2007). *Promoting argument-counterargument integration in students' writing*. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 76(1), 59–92.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Swain, M. (2006). *Language, agency and collaboration in advanced second language proficiency*. In Byrnes, H. (Ed.), *Advanced Language Learning* (pp. 95–108). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- van Eemeren, F. H., Garssen, B., & Meuffels, B. (2014). *Argumentation theory and the philosophy of language*. Springer.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Zohar, A., & Dori, Y. J. (2003). *Higher order thinking skills and low-achieving students: Are they mutually exclusive?* *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 12(2), 145–181.