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USING BLOOM'S TAXONOMY TO ENHANCE CRITICAL THINKING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN SECONDARY EFL CLASSROOMS: A QUALITATIVE CLASSROOM-BASED STUDY

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: Developing students' critical thinking and speaking skills remains an important goal in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly in contexts where learners may hesitate to express complex ideas orally. This qualitative classroom-based study explores the use of Bloom's Taxonomy as a pedagogical framework to scaffold students' thinking and improve oral participation in secondary English lessons. The intervention was implemented with 48 students across Grade 6 and Grade 8 classes in an EFL context over four instructional sessions. Students engaged in structured speaking activities that progressed through Bloom's cognitive levels, beginning with lower-order thinking tasks such as recalling and understanding information and moving toward higher-order tasks involving analysis, evaluation, and creative response. Pair discussion and peer feedback were integrated into the activities to encourage collaborative learning and reflective listening. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher reflective notes, and observations of student interaction patterns. Findings suggest that Bloom's Taxonomy provided effective cognitive scaffolding that supported students in developing more elaborate spoken responses, participating more actively, and engaging more

thoughtfully with peers' ideas. The inclusion of peer feedback also appeared to promote attentive listening and deeper engagement. This study highlights the practical value of structured questioning frameworks in promoting critical thinking and communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Introduction. The development of critical thinking has become a central objective in contemporary education, particularly in language-learning environments, where students are expected not only to acquire linguistic competence but also to communicate ideas thoughtfully and independently. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, speaking activities often require learners to express opinions, justify viewpoints, and respond spontaneously. However, many students struggle to generate complex spoken responses without sufficient cognitive support.

Critical thinking is commonly understood as purposeful and reflective thinking that involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference (Facione, 1990). In language education, critical thinking supports meaningful communication because learners must process information, form judgments, and articulate ideas clearly. Nevertheless, younger learners and students with developing language proficiency may struggle to move immediately into higher-level discussion tasks, particularly when they lack structured guidance.

Bloom's Taxonomy offers a useful framework for addressing this challenge. Originally developed by Bloom et al. (1956) and later revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), the taxonomy categorizes cognitive processes into progressive levels, moving from basic knowledge recall to increasingly complex thinking processes such as analysing, evaluating, and creating. This hierarchical structure has been widely applied in educational settings to scaffold learning and encourage deeper intellectual engagement.

Within language teaching, Bloom's Taxonomy can support speaking instruction by helping learners gradually construct responses rather than expecting immediate high-level production. This structured progression may reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and promote more meaningful oral interaction. Furthermore, when paired with collaborative discussion and peer feedback, such activities may strengthen both cognitive and communicative development.

Collaborative learning theory also supports this pedagogical approach. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in learning, suggesting that students develop higher cognitive abilities through guided interaction with peers and teachers. Peer discussion allows learners to refine ideas, negotiate meaning, and gain confidence before presenting responses publicly. Similarly, peer feedback can encourage active listening and reflective

thinking, as students evaluate what they found interesting, memorable, or surprising in their classmates' contributions.

Although Bloom's Taxonomy has been extensively discussed in curriculum design, fewer small-scale classroom studies have explored its practical use as a structured speaking tool in EFL secondary classrooms, particularly in qualitative teacher-led contexts. This study aims to address that gap by examining how Bloom's Taxonomy-based speaking activities influenced students' participation, interaction, and observable critical thinking behaviours in Grade 6 and Grade 8 English lessons.

The research was guided by the following question:

How does the use of Bloom's Taxonomy-based speaking activities influence students' critical thinking and speaking engagement in secondary EFL classrooms?

Methodology. This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design to explore the impact of Bloom's Taxonomy-based speaking activities on students' critical thinking and oral participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to examine observable classroom behaviours, interaction patterns, and student engagement rather than to measure numerical improvement through formal testing (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was practitioner-led, with the classroom teacher implementing and observing the intervention during regular English lessons. This approach allowed the investigation of authentic classroom practice in a natural educational setting.

Participants and Context

The participants consisted of 48 secondary-level students studying English as a Foreign Language. These students were drawn from both lower secondary and upper secondary classes.

The participant groups included:

- 24 Grade 6 students
- 24 Grade 8 students following the Cambridge IGCSE (Core) curriculum

Students represented mixed ability levels appropriate to their grade expectations. All participants engaged in regular English language instruction, with speaking identified as an area requiring further development, particularly in generating extended responses and expressing higher-order ideas.

Students typically worked in pairs during the intervention, enabling collaborative discussion, idea sharing, and peer support before contributing responses to wider classroom discussion.

Instructional Intervention

The intervention was based on Bloom's Taxonomy as a structured questioning framework for speaking development. Bloom's cognitive hierarchy includes progressively demanding thinking processes: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The rationale for using this framework was to scaffold student thinking from simple recall toward more sophisticated reasoning, thereby supporting both critical thinking and spoken language production.

The intervention was implemented over four classroom lessons, conducted approximately once every one to two weeks as part of regular English instruction.

During each session, students participated in topic-based speaking activities structured according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Discussion topics were selected according to lesson objectives and student level.

The classroom procedure generally followed these stages:

1. Introduction of the discussion topic by the teacher
2. Lower-order questioning (remembering and understanding) to activate prior knowledge
3. Progression toward applying knowledge to new contexts
4. Analytical questioning requiring comparison, reasoning, or explanation
5. Evaluative questioning encouraging justification of opinions
6. Creative questioning requiring students to generate original responses or solutions

For example, a topic might begin with factual recall questions, move toward interpretation and comparison, and conclude with tasks requiring students to propose ideas or defend viewpoints.

Students first discussed responses with a partner, allowing collaborative construction of ideas before sharing orally with the wider class.

Peer Feedback Component

A peer feedback element was integrated into the intervention to encourage active listening and reflective engagement.

After listening to classmates' responses, students were invited to provide feedback focusing on aspects such as:

- ideas they found interesting
- responses they found memorable

- surprising viewpoints
- elements they particularly liked

This component encouraged students not only to speak but also to listen critically and respond thoughtfully to peers' contributions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through qualitative classroom observation and teacher reflection.

Sources included:

- observational notes on student participation
- teacher reflections recorded after lessons
- observations of interaction quality during pair discussions
- informal observations of peer feedback engagement

The study focused on identifying recurring behavioural patterns rather than generating numerical performance measures.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic observation analysis.

Teacher observations were reviewed to identify repeated patterns related to:

- speaking confidence
- complexity of student responses
- participation frequency
- evidence of analytical thinking
- peer collaboration
- listening and feedback behaviours

Results. Analysis of classroom observations revealed several notable patterns regarding student engagement, speaking participation, and critical thinking development.

Increased Speaking Participation. One of the most visible outcomes was increased student participation in speaking activities.

Students appeared more willing to contribute orally when questions progressed gradually from simpler to more demanding cognitive tasks. Beginning with familiar, accessible questions appeared to reduce hesitation and helped students build confidence before addressing more complex prompts.

Grade 6 students particularly benefited from this progression, as lower-order questions provided a manageable entry point into discussion.

More Elaborated Oral Responses. Students' spoken responses became more detailed as discussions progressed.

Rather than offering brief or isolated answers, many students began extending their responses by explaining reasoning, providing examples, and building upon earlier ideas.

This was especially noticeable during analytical and evaluative questioning, where students demonstrated greater willingness to justify opinions.

Enhanced Peer Interaction. Pair discussion played a significant role in supporting student engagement.

Students frequently used peer discussion time to clarify understanding, test ideas, and rehearse possible responses before speaking publicly. This collaborative interaction appeared to reduce anxiety and encourage broader participation.

Students who were initially quieter often became more involved after discussing ideas with a partner.

Development of Observable Critical Thinking Behaviours. Although critical thinking was not formally measured through standardized instruments, observable classroom behaviours suggested increased engagement with higher-order thinking.

Students demonstrated behaviours such as:

- comparing viewpoints
- explaining reasoning
- questioning assumptions
- evaluating ideas
- proposing creative alternatives

These behaviours became more visible in later stages of the Bloom's Taxonomy sequence.

Improved Listening and Reflective Feedback. The peer feedback component appeared to strengthen listening engagement.

Students listened more attentively when they knew they would later comment on classmates' ideas. Feedback often reflected thoughtful engagement, particularly when students identified surprising or memorable points.

This suggests that speaking tasks also contributed to listening comprehension and reflective communication.

Discussion. The findings of this classroom-based qualitative study suggest that Bloom's Taxonomy can serve as an effective instructional framework for promoting both critical thinking and speaking engagement in secondary EFL classrooms.

One important finding was the increase in student participation during speaking activities. A likely explanation is that the structured progression from lower-order to higher-

order questions reduced the cognitive pressure often associated with speaking tasks. Students were not expected to immediately produce complex opinions or arguments; instead, they were gradually guided through manageable stages of thinking. This aligns with the concept of instructional scaffolding, where structured support enables learners to perform tasks that may initially be beyond their independent ability (Vygotsky, 1978).

The observed increase in elaborated oral responses also supports the pedagogical value of Bloom's Taxonomy in language instruction. Speaking is not solely a linguistic activity; it is also a cognitive process requiring idea generation, organisation, evaluation, and expression. By structuring questions progressively, students appeared to develop ideas more systematically, which contributed to richer spoken output. This finding reflects earlier educational research suggesting that higher-order questioning encourages deeper learner engagement and more meaningful responses (King, 1995).

Collaborative pair discussion emerged as another important factor in student engagement. Peer interaction provided students with an opportunity to rehearse language, refine ideas, and build confidence before public speaking. This is particularly important in EFL contexts, where learners may hesitate due to fear of making mistakes or limited confidence in spontaneous oral communication. Social constructivist perspectives suggest that learning develops through interaction and shared meaning-making, making peer collaboration an effective support mechanism (Vygotsky, 1978).

The peer feedback component also contributed meaningfully to the intervention. Students did not function solely as speakers but also as active listeners and evaluators. Asking students to identify what they found memorable, interesting, or surprising encouraged reflective listening and greater attentiveness. This suggests that the activity supported broader communicative competence rather than speaking alone.

It is important, however, to interpret the findings within the limitations of the study. As a small-scale qualitative classroom inquiry, the study relied on observational evidence rather than formal performance assessment. The findings therefore reflect observed behavioural patterns rather than measurable skill gains. Additionally, the intervention was conducted over only four sessions, which limits conclusions about long-term impact.

Despite these limitations, the study provides practical classroom evidence that Bloom's Taxonomy can be meaningfully adapted for speaking instruction in EFL secondary education.

Conclusion. This qualitative classroom-based study explored the use of Bloom's Taxonomy as a structured framework for enhancing critical thinking and speaking engagement among Grade 6 and Grade 8 EFL students.

The findings suggest that Bloom's Taxonomy provided effective cognitive scaffolding that supported students in participating more actively, producing more developed spoken responses, and engaging more thoughtfully with peers' ideas. The gradual progression from simple recall to higher-order reasoning appeared to reduce learner hesitation and support more confident oral participation.

The integration of pair discussion and peer feedback further strengthened the intervention by encouraging collaborative thinking, reflective listening, and shared idea development.

Although the study was limited in scale and duration, the findings indicate that Bloom's Taxonomy can be a practical and accessible classroom strategy for teachers seeking to promote critical thinking within speaking instruction.

Future classroom-based studies may benefit from extending the intervention over a longer period and incorporating additional qualitative tools such as student reflections or interviews to gain deeper insight into learner experiences.

Overall, this study highlights the value of structured questioning, collaboration, and reflective peer interaction in fostering more thoughtful and engaged language learning environments.

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