BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg
BG PULSE JOURNAL

CRITICAL THINKING IS THE KEY COMPETENCE FOR THE DIGITAL GENERATION "Z"

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Abstract. As contemporary learners, particularly Generation Z, leverage the unprecedented expanse of the internet, their cognitive activities and educational expectations differ fundamentally from previous generations. Consequently, modern higher education systems face the imperative challenge of integrating these psychological and technological shifts into their frameworks. This article emphasizes that preserving academic excellence depends on a vital transformation of existing instructional paradigms. It concludes that educational institutions must systematically overhaul their teaching methodologies, curricula, and core objectives to deliver relevant, engaging, and high-quality education tailored to the distinct values of today's digital natives.

Keywords: Educational transformation, Generation Z, cognitive learning styles, academic excellence, curriculum redesign, digital era.

INTRODUCTION

"Youth today are not what they used to be" – such complaints can be found already in the most ancient monuments of human culture. But in our time, it is definitely different: these natives of the digital world, as soon as they are born, grab onto gadgets, they have clip thinking, an inability to focus attention for a long time, emotional instability...

Indeed, new generations of students are not like previous generations – never before have students used such an extensive database as the Internet. The influence of the global network is noticeable in all aspects of human life, and, of course, it is impossible for the university education system to ignore this fact. Training must take the psychological laws of the student's cognitive activity into account [1]. Research from the University of Hawaii, with its mission to provide high-quality education for students, shows that the way we teach now needs to change to accommodate the values and learning styles of these new students, particularly Gen Z. Teaching methods, course, content and goals must be relevant and attractive to this new generation of learners if the institution is to prioritize high-quality student education.

The concept of "Generation Z" appeared within the framework of the generation theory of N. Howe and W. Strauss in 1991 [2]. The main idea of the theory of generations is that the value systems of people who grew up in different historical periods differ under the influence of the same historical events and characteristics of upbringing. According to N. Howe and V. Strauss, the dominant influence on the formation of the values of a generation, in addition to the model of family education, is exerted by political, economic, social factors and technological events that accompanied children under 11–12 years of age. This influence is reflected in the similarity of the civil position of representatives of the generation, their social and value attitudes towards the world, society and oneself [3].

As is known, the Z generation, born in the period from 1995 to 2010, succeeding the Millennials, is currently within the educational process or has just started to enter the world of work. The Zers or Zoomers are people characterized by multiple reality and mobility, entrepreneurship, and they are always connected but also flooded by an unprecedented amount of information. They are comfortable with the use of social media and the Internet, but this does not mean they are necessarily digitally literate.

In the rapidly developing generation Z in Uzbekistan, in our opinion, the dates of birth not mentioned above, and in all civilized countries this is the second half of the 1990s to 2009 inclusive. We can find an explanation for this in the book of the Australian scientist McCrindle, "The ABC of XYZ," who proposes dividing generations differently [4]. He takes as a basis not a biological, but a sociological division, which is not 20, but 15 years, since each generation grows up in certain social conditions that have their own events and trends common to this generation and forms a picture of the world that is typical only for it.

Generational cycles are 15-20 years and are broadly classified as follows:

"Baby Boomers" (1943-1961), who are characterized by a rethinking of traditional values, cultural changes, moderate conservatism, optimism, team spirit, ambition, activity, and frugality.

"Generation X" (1962-1981) demonstrates high independence and individualism, distrust of power due to the drastic changes experienced and, as a result, apoliticality and skepticism.

"Generation Y" (1982-1995) ("millennials") highly values freedom, is passionate about new experiences and self-development, matures later, lives longer with their parents, and does not consider private property an important value.

"Generation Z" (1995-2010) ("digital natives") are connected to a large number of devices, trust information published by friends, as well as recommendations from bloggers and opinion leaders. The concept of "Word of Mouth" has become an integral part of the generation's communication model. Characterized by thoughtfulness, the ability to multitask, straightforwardness, economy, and isolation.

"Generation Alpha" (2010-2025) (typology by Australian scientist Mark McCrindle) [5].

J. Tapscott and E. Williams say that representatives of generation Z are not just consumers of mass culture. They "spend time searching, reading, researching, identifying, collaborating, and organizing. The Internet turns life into constant mass collaboration, which this generation absolutely loves. They cannot even imagine a life in which citizens do not have the tools to think critically, share points of view, clarify, identify or expose deception. Where their parents were passive recipients of information, young people are active creators of media content and have a passion for interaction" [6].

Teachers willingly (or not) have to adjust to these rapidly changing and new challenging generations. We have to keep up with the changes in the teaching process not only in the ICT aspect but also in the way our primary role of teaching has changed. Our role is no longer just being the information source and information presenter, but it has also shifted to that of a consultant, guide, and instructor. What needs to be highlighted in our role is teaching the four C's skills, namely, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, and Critical thinking [7].

CLIP THINKING

The term "clip thinking" (or clip culture) was used by the American culturologist E. Toffler back in 1980, defining it as "a fundamentally new phenomenon that is considered as a component of the general information culture of the future, based on the endless flickering of information segments and comfortable for people of the corresponding mentality [8]. A number of researchers

believe that clip thinking is a natural phenomenon and is not something unnatural. We also adhere to this approach. The word "clip" comes from the English clip – cutting, slicing, that is, pieces of something whole, possibly connected or disparate, but at the same time carrying a certain meaning and information. The concept of "clip thinking" appeared in the 1990s of the last century; it characterizes a person's ability to perceive the surrounding reality in the form of short and vivid images, combining them into one video clip. In other words, to see the world fragmentarily or mosaically.

In 2010, culturologist K. Frumkin identified the following prerequisites for the formation of fragmented thinking among the younger generation [9]:

– massive amount of information coming from outside;
– the need to update information arriving at enormous speed;
– diversity of data;
– the need to perform many actions simultaneously;
– increased opportunities for communication in society.

All this together leads to a person's lack of a holistic perception of the information received and absorbed.

The overwhelming majority of researchers agree that clip thinking is a completely new form of consciousness of Homo sapiens. Its appearance is due to the rapid pace of development of science and technology.

From this we can conclude that the main advantages of clip thinking are the ability to quickly switch, multitasking, and adaptability to rapid changes in the information and communication space. Disadvantages – lack of depth of knowledge, easy fatigue, superficiality, low analytical and critical skills when working with information, problems with concentration.

Thus, in the teaching process, it is important to take the characteristics of students into account, be able to use the positive aspects of clip thinking and correctly use its disadvantages, turning them into advantages. You should not try to remake students or fight against "clinginess", as well as work according to the old methodology in the educational process. Modern students need to be given interesting and important cases and technologies on efficiency of thinking, multitasking, requiring active action.

Taking into account the above, modern teachers should take into account the predominantly clip-based thinking of students. And starting from this fact, build the educational process, use a large amount of visual information with memorable images, gamification elements, and clear, concise formulations [10].

METHODOLOGY

Today, a new generation is being formed, for which it is necessary to use both classical and modern forms of education in higher education. Experience in teaching a foreign language shows that students, once at a university, demonstrate certain language competencies, but experience difficulties in "forming and formulating thoughts," which indicates a lack of development of communicative competencies. For the active development of speech and communication competencies, it is necessary to form the critical thinking of Generation Z students, develop the ability to prove their point of view, find arguments and facts in argumentation, participate in the discussion, make decisions independently [11].

In order to promote critical thinking in students such activities as problematic projects, debates, discussions, brainstorming, design, organization of forums, student conferences, round tables, facts or opinions, case study activities to discuss topical issues in educational courses are useful. It is

important to teach students to express their thoughts in writing and orally, structure information, and write scientific articles and essays [12].

RESULTS

How to develop critical thinking within English lessons

Similar to language acquisition, critical thinking is not an innate ability, and therefore, needs to be intentionally developed through the educational process.

The common method of language teaching**,** the so-called **"Three P" approach (Presentation, Practice, Production),** does no longer suffice [13].

Traditionally, the aim of the Presentation stage is to introduce new content, which students practice in the second stage and finally use it in a new context in the last stage. This kind of teacher-student knowledge transfer does not necessarily involve active learning. If we want to achieve our students to develop into critical thinkers, we need to engage them in interactive activities focused on the topics they are interested in.

I encourage critical thinking as I would like my students to be able to organize their thoughts coherently, to express themselves accurately and concisely. I would like to deter them from judging without sufficient evidence and to approach problem-solving from different angles.

This way of teaching demands an active role from students. It does not allow us to accept information passively or even as unquestionable dogmas. By means of interpersonal communication, students learn better, compare their ideas, their attitudes and beliefs, they estimate the relevance of (their) arguments when confronted by others.

There is a variety of activities we can use in classes that develop both language skills and those of critical thinking. Let us closely look at two of them.

Fact or opinion?

The basic linguistic goal of the activity is topic-related vocabulary acquisition, which serves as a basis for the primary goal of getting to know different nations, cultures and critically telling facts apart from untruths as well as accepting the different others. It is intended for breaking stereotypes we have acquired through the process of primary and secondary socialization and become aware of the prejudice we might have.

The activity starts by putting on board some typical stereotypes (Ex: racial, national, religious, gender) together with facts;

– "The Italians only eat pasta. "
– "The French are world-famous chefs."
– "The Slovenes are heavy drinkers."
– "Women are more intelligent than men."
– "All Muslim women wear burkas."

Each statement is read out loud, and the students are asked to decide, based on arguments or personal experience, if they are true or false. Some statements can provoke loud reactions from students, or they even emphasize the stereotypes. In this case, I intervene by making them think where their belief comes from and if it is evidence-based. I underline tolerance and speech culture. What I want to achieve is that students do not automatically equal being different from being bad. We need to point out discrimination and develop tolerance to those different from us since it is they who will live in an ever more multi-cultural society.

Standpoint

The linguistic goal of this activity is to express one's argument-based opinion. Besides this, the activity includes a common goal of teaching critical thinking – to become aware of the importance of one's standpoint. The activity itself is a simple role-play, which allows the students to understand how a person's view influences their behaviour and judgment. They realize how one's point of view regarding a certain issue decisively impacts the way they think about it, talk about it, and present it to others. We highlight the fact that seeing the issue from other people's point of view, which is not our own, may present it in a new perspective and help us understand one another better. Therefore, it is essential to listen and try to understand others first and not to dismiss their belief in advance.

Group work represents an ideal way of encouraging students to think in this manner. When they are within the circle of others, they are exposed to the way their peers think. They learn to understand that their manner of thinking is not the only path to problem-solving.

I got the idea for this task from John Hughes [14].

The students are divided into groups of four and given their roles.

Student A: You are employed by the City Council of Venice, which depends on local taxes and helps to finance the projects for saving Venice.

Student B: You are a family-run-hotel owner in the centre of Venice. You cannot imagine Venice without tourists.

Student C: You are a local historian trying to preserve ancient buildings and wants to lower the number of tourists.

Student D: You are a local tourist guide organising city tours for more than 1,000 people a day.

The group is explained that student A is organising a meeting to discuss the problems of the city and to find suitable solutions. At the end of the meeting, students have to guess the roles of the others. Together we summarise their standpoints, establish the differences, and realise why they differ.

If we can teach our students to become critical thinkers, we empower them with a life-long strategy. They will not accept everything unconditionally, but critically evaluate what they have been presented. They will become neutral, truthful, and well-intentioned and will not fall into the traps of media and environmental manipulations.

CONCLUSION

To successfully interact with Generation Z, you need to not only take their characteristics into account, but you need to change the very principles of relationships. The Internet has made young Z-ers almost independent of adults in obtaining information and knowledge that interests them. The educational environment should become not just internet-active, but it should be attractive to users. In the book "Physics of the Future" M. Kaku, making an assumption about the education of the future, speaks of global changes in the very principles of education. According to the scientist, learning will no longer be based on memorization, and students will engage in self-education, because they will clearly understand what knowledge they need. Training will be tailored to the individual, regardless. How old is he - six or sixty? There are already a lot of such developments, and they are being successfully implemented [15].

The methodological recommendations proposed in this article and various tasks for teaching generation Z based on a specific text allow students to develop universal human values and enrich their inner peace, contribute to self-determination as a full member of the team. The introduction of such interactive forms of learning as discussion and situational analysis develop students'

communicative competencies. Modeling problem situations activates the ability to solve them, improves the intellectual potential and critical thinking skills of generation Z, which ultimately leads to the creation of professional competence.

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