

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-LINGUISTIC STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS: PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

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Summary

Critical thinking is an essential issue and one of the main goals of higher education, forcing modern domestic and foreign educators to use its strategies in English classes to form students' general and professional competencies. The "Business English" for non-linguistic graduate students is no exception. A step-by-step presentation on the topic "Recruitment and Selection" is an example of one practical session to utilise new vocabulary in speaking, reading, listening and reviewing grammatical material. Three parts introduce the topic: "Recruitment", "Applying for a Job" and "Selection Procedures". This article discusses integrating new information and strategies for developing critical thinking skills at each stage of the lesson. Such strategies as "Forecasting Using Key Words", "Question-Answer", "Thin/Thick Questions", "Keywords", "Listing", "Matching", "Mind Map", "Clustering", "Crossword", "Ordering and Sorting", "Replacing" are demonstrated in their practical application. It has been stated that among the skills and abilities related to critical thinking are flexibility in adapting to life situations, independence in decision-making, skills to generalise and systematise knowledge, professional thinking, the ability to use information resources, and the capacity to seek and acquire new knowledge, etc. Practically every lesson stage is supported by graphical images and tables, particularly self-assessment tables. The research results will help educators improve the use of critical thinking strategies in English lessons at higher educational institutions. Furthermore, the article may serve as a valuable resource for students aiming to critically reflect on fundamental theories, principles, methods, and concepts in their academic pursuits and professional practices.

Key words: Business English, graduate students, recruitment, selection procedures, applying for a job, strategies, phonetic and reading skills, listening and speaking skills.

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1. Introduction

Modern education pays increasing attention to the development of critical thinking and analysis, active learning strategies and creativity, originality, initiative, design and programming technology, comprehensive problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and evaluation. These are general trends in educational development, regardless of the student's future speciality. Considerable attention is paid to developing critical thinking when mastering the humanities and social sciences. One of the major topics to be investigated in this field is in what way to develop non-linguistic students' critical thinking, how to apply the up-to-date teaching methods when teaching "Business English", and how to revamp the current lesson in "best practice". "Studies show that active classes, so long as they are purposeful and well organized, are often the ones in which students learn the material most fully and usefully" (Crawford, 2005). H. A. Baluta maintains that the product of critical thinking is knowledge and the individual itself – their

future; thus, the concepts of critical thinking are organically integrated into educational theories (Baluta, 2019: 72).

Our pedagogical practice in activating and structuring knowledge on the conversational topic “Recruitment and Selection” for graduate students is focused on developing skills and abilities related to critical thinking, such as flexibility in adapting to life situations, independence in decision-making, the development of skills to generalise and systematise knowledge, professional thinking, improving the ability to use information resources, and the capacity to seek and acquire new knowledge; fostering cognitive interest, independence, and the ability to overcome challenges.

The chosen research topic is closely related to the curricula of Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, to the syllabus of the course “Business English” in particular. The successful study of “Business English”, emphasizing developing critical thinking skills, contributes to forming the students’ general and professional competencies. Moreover, critical thinking plays a significant role not only in the students’ academic life but also in their real life.

2. Literature Review

Many Ukrainian and foreign authors have discussed the issue of critical thinking in the literature. A recent review of the literature on this matter found that attempts are being made to substantively define critical thinking, its criteria, practical strategies for its formation, and the typology of approaches to understanding its form and content.

The subject of integrating tasks and learning outcomes related to the development of critical thinking into the educational process of general secondary education in Ukraine, considering the complex structure of this phenomenon, is being addressed by such contemporary educators: O. Pometun (Pometun, 2012; Pometun, 2018), O. Nikitchenko, O. Tarasova (Nikitchenko, Tarasova, 2017), N. Kharchenko (Kharchenko, 2018), S. Lutsiv (Lutsiv, 2016), etc. It is worth noting that the issue of developing critical thinking skills among higher education students is the focus of attention of K. Sovach (Sovach, 2024), M. Pochynkova (Pochynkova, 2020), O. Sadovnikov, V. Vasylenko (Sadovnikov, Vasylenko, 2023), and other scholars.

Much work on the potential of critical thinking has been carried out on its connection with mastering language skills. Quite a lot of academic papers have an experimental nature. Scholars pay attention to various strategies they use in their pedagogical activities (Borouhaki, 2015; Iman, 2017; Sharafi-Nejad, 2016; Wibowo, 2017): vocabulary strategies (Sharafi-Nejad, 2016); speaking (Iman, 2017) and writing strategies (Tamara, 2021).

Our field of scientific interest also encompasses non-linguistic students’ developing critical thinking (Hlavatska, 2024). We continue to study this issue’s theoretical and methodological foundation, and we are trying to implement its technologies in the educational process.

3. Subject, object, aim and tasks of the paper

The object of the paper is critical thinking and its various strategies.

The subject of the paper is ways for students’ developing critical thinking skills aimed at developing key language competencies in listening, speaking, and reading.

The case study is the topic “Recruitment and Selection”.

This paper aims to describe the strategies for developing non-linguistic students’ critical thinking skills in conjunction with the enhancement of monologic speaking skills, listening comprehension, and adequate understanding and reproduction of what has been heard;

activating and systematising knowledge on the conversational topic “Recruitment and Selection” based on knowledge of basic lexical units, and deepening the acquired understanding of grammar – Present and Past Simple Tenses.

To achieve the aim, the following tasks have been set:

- to describe the step-by-step mechanism for introducing new vocabulary related to the lesson topic, focusing on the three main blocks: RECRUITMENT, APPLYING FOR A JOB, SELECTION PROCEDURES;
- to show how contact with new information occurs and how it is processed using critical thinking development strategies at each stage of the lesson;
- to demonstrate integrating critical thinking strategies with developing key listening, speaking, and reading language competencies.

4. A step-by-step presentation on the topic “Recruitment and Selection”

A step-by-step presentation on the topic “Recruitment and Selection” is an example of one practical session to utilise new vocabulary in speaking, reading, listening and reviewing grammatical material. The introductory textbook is “Business Vocabulary in Use” (Mascul, 2012).

Step 1. Introducing the topic. Strategy “Forecasting Using Key Words”

The teacher announces the new topic of the lesson, noting that the main question that needs to be addressed today is: *What is recruitment and selection?* (this question is written on the board in case of an offline class or presented in an online format for an online class). About 70% of graduate students are currently employed, have had such experience, or intend to find a suitable job; the teacher asks them to anticipate, using keywords, what will be the subject of discussion in the lesson. That is, the teacher is modelling a situation to activate the students’ knowledge, and the students, in turn, formulate their initial hypotheses.

Teacher: *We will deal with the topic “Recruitment and Selection”. It corresponds to the syllabus of our course “Business English”. We’ll focus our attention on new lexical units related to the topic, pay attention to the phonetic peculiarities of these words, and try our best in listening and reading. Moreover, we should try to develop our critical thinking skills. I guess the topic is very relevant as most of you have already found the job, but someone is looking for it now. Express your opinion on what we are going to deal with today.*

Student 1: *We will know what recruitment is and if it differs from selection.*

Student 2: *We will be dealing with some selection procedures.*

Student 3: *Probably, some instructions will be given for applying for a job.*

The teacher guides the students on three main parts of the lesson: **A. RECRUITMENT, B. APPLYING FOR A JOB, C. SELECTION PROCEDURES.**

Step 2. A. RECRUITMENT. Contact with new information. Integration of “Question-Answer” strategy with monologic statements and improvement of the ability to utilise informational resources

The teacher asks three questions: *What is meant under recruitment? How do you understand the meaning of the term “selection”? Is there any difference between recruitment and selection?* The teacher recommends the students use phrases expressing their opinion (*I think, I guess, To my mind*, etc). The students are offered to search the internet and find the answers.

Student 1: *I think recruitment is the process of actively seeking out and attracting candidates for a job (What is Recruitment, 2025).*

Student 2: *Selection, to my mind, is the process of choosing the best candidate from a pool of candidates who have applied or been recruited (Recruitment, 2025).*

Student 3: *As far as I know the difference is that recruitment is the first step towards the hiring process. Selection is the second step towards the hiring process after recruitment (Recruitment and Selection Process, 2025).*

The teacher explains the difference between recruitment and selection, paying the students' attention to their meaning, objective, nature and sequence (Fig. 1).

Difference between recruitment and selection		
Basis	Recruitment	Selection
Meaning	It is the process of stimulating people to apply for a vacant job position in the organisation.	It is the process of selecting the best candidate from those who have applied for the job.
Objective	The objective of recruitment is create a pool of eligible candidates for the purpose of selection.	The objective of selection is to get the best candidate selected for the job.
Nature	It is a positive process as it attracts people towards the organisation.	It is a negative process as it involves rejection of candidates at every stage of it.
Sequence	It takes place before selection.	It takes place after recruitment.

Fig. 1. Difference between recruitment and selection
(What is meant by recruitment, 2025)

Step 3. A. RECRUITMENT. Contact with new information. Integration of “Key Words” strategy with the development of phonetic and lexical skills (quizlet)

The formation of phonetic skills enables students to carry out linguistic operations within the context of communication on the lesson's subject. To this end, the teacher selects “key” lexemes according to Part A (*Mascul, 2012: 14*), along with their phonetic transcription. This can be done in two ways: traditional presentation – word-transcription-translation or using an educational tool for memorization via flashcards – Quizlet (*Quilet, 2025*).

It should be noted that the Quizlet on the topic “Recruitment and Selection” is designed for 39 words and covers the lexical items of all three parts of the lesson – A, B, and C. Accordingly if the teacher uses the first method, the students write down the lexemes (phrases) and pronounce them. In the case of the second one, they pronounce the proposed lexical items (the teacher chooses the memorization mode by himself/herself: “Teacher – Student”, “Student – Student”, “Teacher – Students”). The students are provided with a link to Quizlet (*Quilet, 2025*). Thus, the students' preparation for engaging in foreign language communication occurs at the stage of presentation and practising the phonetic pronunciation of basic lexemes.

Step 4. A. RECRUITMENT. Contact with new information. Integration of “Thin/Thick Questions” strategy with the development of reading skills

We consider it necessary to note that “Thick and Thin Questions” is a method of organising a survey (mutual inquiry) on the topic, whereby a “thin” question requires a straightforward, reproductive answer (usually “yes” or “no”). In contrast, a “thick” (problematic) question demands deep reflection on the task, rational consideration, the search for additional knowledge, and the analysis of information. The students are invited to read Part A (*Mascul, 2012: 14*) and provide answers to the following questions: *Is recruitment a process? A process of what?*

Is “hiring” an American English variant for recruitment? Who is a recruit? Who employs recruits? Are recruitment and employment agencies outside recruiters? Headhunters, what are they? What is their function in recruitment?

Step 5. A. RECRUITMENT. Control of understanding of the grammar topic. Integration of the strategy “Discussion” with the development of grammar skills

It should be stated that the students are already familiar with the rules for forming and using the tense forms of the Simple verb group (Present and Past). To analyse the acquired experience, the teacher suggests finding sentences in Part A in which the Present Simple is used. The students not only search for such sentences, but also analyse them (*Why this particular sentence?*), provide assessments (*What markers highlight the use of the Present Simple?*), express their own opinions (using communicative phrases such as *I think, In my opinion*, etc.), and formulate conclusions. The teacher might suggest that the students divide into small groups and engage in discussion in such a manner, addressing the analysis of the acquired “grammar” experience.

Step 6. A. RECRUITMENT. Contact with new information. Integration of “Mind Map” strategy with searching for and learning new knowledge and the development of listening skills

At this stage of the lesson, the students are offered to watch the video “What is recruitment and selection?” (*What is Recruitment and Selection*, 2025). D.R. Tamara and Rusfandi are sure that “videos have some advantages if they are appropriately used for teaching. The first advantage is that videos can be more motivating for students because they can attract students’ attention and curiosity about the materials to be taught. Second, videos can be entertaining and give an enjoyable experience for learners. Third, videos also provide training on students’ listening skills. Lastly, videos provide more detailed information about an object...” (*Tamara*, 2021: 53–54).

The teacher’s assignments for the students are the following: 1. Watch the video. 2. Make your vocabulary for the topic. 3. Do it in a Word document (online class). 4. Then share your screens in Zoom (online class). In the offline class, the students perform the task in their copybooks. To develop critical thinking skills such as independence in decision-making, the ability to seek out and assimilate new knowledge, and to foster cognitive interest and autonomy, the teacher purposefully suggests making one’s own choice regarding the completion of point 3 from the tasks mentioned above. That is, the students can create their glossary on the topic of the lesson in two ways: either by straightforwardly creating a Mind Map using Word tools or by simply writing down two keywords (“Recruitment” and “Selection”) and listing words, phrases, and terms that closely correlate with them in a column. Here, the teacher will see which students are taking the path of least resistance.

After the task has been completed, the teacher presents the students with the Mind Map, developed personally using the resource *spiderscribe.net* (Fig. 2). The teacher requests the students to register on this resource and create their mind maps (this type of assignment is set for independent study). Figure 3 shows a mind map created by one of the students. The students share their glossaries.

Step 7. A. RECRUITMENT. Contact with new information. Integration of “Thin/Thick Questions” strategy and the development of speaking skills (monologic speech)

After watching the video, with an active vocabulary on the topic in their arsenal, the students must use it in a monologic statement. To this end, the teacher poses a series of questions: *What is the definition of recruitment? Why is recruitment important? What are the benefits of employers using recruitment agencies? What are the benefits of recruitment agencies*

for candidates? How do recruitment agencies work? What is the recruitment process? Consequently, the students are already clearly aware of recruitment and personnel selection. We now move on to processing Part B.

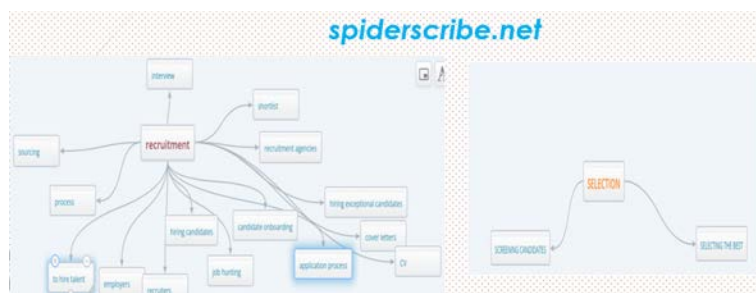


Fig. 2. Mind Map “Recruitment and Selection” (created by the teacher)

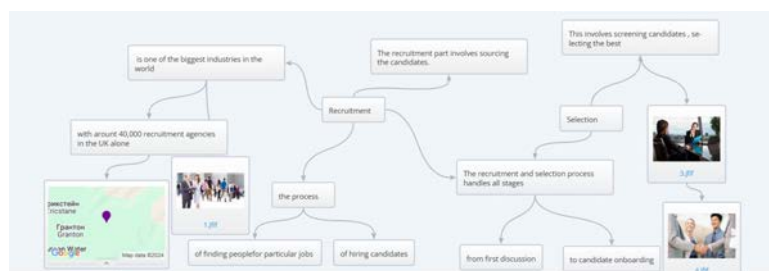


Fig. 3. Mind Map “Recruitment and Selection” (created by the student)

Step 8. B. APPLYING FOR A JOB. Contact with new information. Integration of “Question – Answer” and “Listing” strategies with vocabulary extension – making a list of words

The vocabulary block is presented on several slides. It should be noted that it is also included in Quizlet (Quizlet, 2025), allowing the students to visualise new lexical units, pronounce them, and add them to their list of new words. This type of activity can be conducted in the modes of “Teacher – Student”, “Student – Student”, or “Teacher – Students”. Alongside introducing new words and phrases, such questions are provided: *Did you address the media for vacant situations? When did you do it? Did you apply for a job? When did you do it? Have you ever filled out an application form? When did you do it? Have you ever written the curriculum vitae? Have you ever written a covering letter? Was it difficult for you? What position are you holding now?*

Step 9. B. APPLYING FOR A JOB. Monitoring the understanding of the grammar topic. Integration of “Discussion” strategy with the development of reading and grammar skills

The students are advised to read Part B (Mascul, 2012: 14). To analyse the acquired experience, the teacher encourages them to find sentences used in the Past Simple tense. The students not only engage in searching for such sentences but also analyse (*Why this particular sentence?*), evaluate (*What markers highlight the use of the Past Simple?*), express their own opinions (using communicative phrases such as *I guess*, *To my mind*, etc.), and formulate

conclusions. The teacher may suggest that students divide into small groups and discuss specifically in this mode, resorting to analysing the acquired “grammar” experience.

Step 10. B. APPLYING FOR A JOB. Contact with new information. Integration of “Key words” and “Listing” strategies with searching for and learning new knowledge and the development of listening skills. While-listening stage

The teacher offers to watch the video “Learn English Job Vocabulary and Job Phrases” (*Learn English Job*, 2025) and tick words and phrases from the video coinciding with the vocabulary for the topic. The following instructions are given: 1. Watch the video. 2. Look attentively at your new vocabulary for the topic and tick the words or phrases from the video which coincide with our list. 3. Do it in your copybooks. 4. Then, be ready to name these words/phrases. The teacher mentions that there is a requirement for six coincidences. We should state that detailed information is obtained better using audio-visual media. Moreover, the advantage of such a usage is that it helps “the students develop ideas and improve their vocabulary usage” (*Tamara*, 2021: 58). The instruction to listen for and record six matches encourages the students to extract linguistic material from the text subject to study.

Step 11. B. APPLYING FOR A JOB. Processing new information. Integration of “Matching” strategy with after-listening stage – Use of English

The students are encouraged to listen to the video (*Learn English Job*, 2025) a second time and complete the matching exercise: match phrases 1–10 with their definitions A–J (1–10) (Table 1).

Table 1

The Sample of After-listening Exercise for Matching

1. contract	A be given a job by an organization
2. I got the job!	B submit a cover letter and a résumé to try to obtain a job
3. apply for a job	C not have a job after having worked
4. laid off	D written agreement between a person and an organization
5. résumé	E what a person says with great joy when he is hired
6. be hired	F meeting when you are asked questions
7. hear back	G not have a job
8. unemployed	H list of your education and work experience
9. job posting	I advertisement for a job
10. job interview	J receive a call or email with information (a job offer)

The process of performing such a task involves the engagement of thinking skills from all previous levels, meaning that when carrying out the exercise that entails material analysis, the student necessarily draws on their knowledge, demonstrates an understanding of the material, evaluates it, and applies it in practice.

Step 12. C. SELECTION PROCEDURES. Contact with new information. Integration of “Question – Answer”, “Academic discussion”, “Creating questions” with the development of reading and speaking skills

It should be noted that Part C (*Mascul*, 2012: 14) is the final component of the lesson, related to the new vocabulary specifically concerning the selection process. The students are given the following tasks: to read Part C, to expand their active vocabulary by writing down new words and phrases, and to provide answers to the following questions: *By means of what grammar tense are the selection procedures presented? What does Dagmar Schmidt talk about?*

After advertising in national papers what do they look at? Why don't they ask for handwritten letters of application? What is group discussion? Individual interview? By means of what do they assess the candidates? What does it mean to make a shortlist? Under what condition do they appoint a person? The questions are constructed exclusively from the information in the provided part, so the students not only acquire new lexical items, which are included in Quizlet (Qiuizlet, 2025), but are also engaged in a productive activity – speaking, which facilitates the concise presentation of new information extracted from a new source, but directly related to the topic under discussion. Mental operations (information processing, comparison, analysis, evaluation, and organization) accompany the development of the students' critical thinking, particularly: identifying the main points and revealing cause-and-effect relationships specifically in the recruitment selection procedures.

We concur with the opinion of S. Revutska that the use of “Academic discussion” strategy can also be considered appropriate, as it will facilitate the analysis of personal mistakes made by students or the oral analysis of two responses, for example, by discussion participants to the same question posed by the teacher, followed by the formulation of their responses (Revutska, 2023: 108). Alternatively, the students may ask each other questions (“Creating questions” strategy).

In other words, the students can draw certain conclusions regarding the main selection procedures and enumerate these procedures after reading and responding to the teacher's questions. A series of the above questions leads to two questions at this lesson stage: *What are the main stages of the selection process? How many of these stages can you identify after reading this passage?* The students express their opinions.

Step 13. C. SELECTION PROCEDURES. Processing new information. Integration of “Clustering” strategy with identifying selection procedures stages and the development of listening skills. While-listening stage

The teacher offers to watch the video “The Selection Process – A Practical Guide” (*The Selection Process*, 2025), prompting seven steps of selection procedures. Students should identify these seven steps and put them to certain clusters (“Clustering” strategy). The information presented in the video makes the students analyse and evaluate, while simultaneously encouraging the systematisation and updating of foundational knowledge. According to O. Pometun, “a cluster is a graphic method of systematising material, where our thoughts are no longer jumbled together but arranged like a cluster – in a certain order” (Pometun, 2012: 5).

After the listening session, the teacher demonstrates the seven stages of the selection process and assesses the clusters constructed by the students. In this way, we believe that the new information from Part C is visualized, systematized, and better understood by the students.

Step 14. C. SELECTION PROCEDURES. Processing new information. After-listening stage – Use of English: classifying words and phrases according to selection stages

The teacher asks the students to classify all words and phrases from Part C (Mascul, 2012: 14) according to seven steps of selection procedures. The illustration can be given as a prompt: *Step 7: accept, turn down, appoint*. All lexemes can be presented on the slide.

We are observing the development of the ability to generalise and systematise knowledge, as well as an awareness of its significance. We maintain the view that this type of work enables the students to reflect more deeply on the material studied, assess their own knowledge and skills, and also identify directions for their further development.

Step 15. SUMMING UP – PRACTISING SOME EXERCISES. Integration of “Crossword”, “Ordering and Sorting”, “Replacing” strategies with handling new information

The students perform three exercises from the introductory textbook (*Mascul, 2012: 15*). We think the provided exercises are methodologically sound, as crossword puzzles, one form of lexical game, significantly help students enhance their level of motivation and develop attention, critical thinking, creativity, and inventiveness (*Soloviova, 2023*). Moreover, crosswords contribute to the activation of the learning material. In exercise 3.2 (*Mascul, 2012: 15*), the students must classify the lexical items used in the crossword into two groups, which aids in reflecting the material studied. Exercise 3.3 contains ten words/phrases that need to be replaced with the vocabulary being studied. This exercise allows information analysis to formulate subsequent correct judgments and professional thinking.

Step 16. REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

The final stage of the lesson may involve the students' monologic statements. It is the moment for composing an oral/written essay on "Recruitment and Selection". The questions that guide the students towards this type of productive activity are demonstrated in the introductory textbook (*Mascul, 2012: 15*). Written/oral essay aims to draw the student's attention to their thoughts on a specific issue and one's experience in all its contradictions.

Assessment of students can be conducted in several ways. Most educators use questionnaires: "Schmitt's vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire, for example, used to identify the types of vocabulary learning strategies used by learners; California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) to determine learners' critical thinking ability; and the interview to validate learners' choices of strategies as stated in the questionnaire" (*Boroushaki, 2015: 49*). We offer self-assessment tables (Table 2, 3, 4). Table 1 consists of two columns: *learning objective* and *How confident I am*. The students get the instruction: for each learning objective, write 1–5 to assess your ability, where 1 = I don't feel confident, 5 = I feel confident (Table 2).

Table 2

Self-Assessment	
Learning objective	How confident I am
1A I know what recruitment and selection is	
1B I know the difference between recruitment and selection	
1C I can pronounce correctly all the words related to the topic	
1D I know the meanings of all the words related to the topic	
1E I can identify the Present and Past Simple	
1F I can create Mind Map	
1G I can express my viewpoint on the topic	
1H I can listen to the video and list new words	
1I I can listen to the video and sort the information	
1J I can navigate the text and respond to questions quickly	
1K I know what cluster is	

Table 3 is deeply connected with Table 2. It consists of two columns: *Skill I want to improve in* and *How I can improve*.

Table 3

Which of the skills above would you like to improve in? How?	
Skill I want to improve in	How I can improve

Table 4 summarizes the lesson and motivates the students to use the material while completing it. The table contains three columns: *New words I learned and most want to remember*, *Expressions and phrases I liked*, *English I heard or read outside the class*.

Table 4

What can you remember from this lesson?

New words I learned and most want to remember	Expressions and phrases I liked	English I heard or read outside the class
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As for the home assignment, the teacher can ask the students to presuppose what questions can be asked while being interviewed and create a mind map “Interview questions”. This way, the teacher orients the students to the next discussed topic. The students, in their turn, will be ready to deal with new words and phrases related to the perspective topic. Moreover, they can improve their ability to use information resources, the capacity for searching and assimilating new knowledge, the formation of cognitive interest, independence, and the ability to overcome difficulties.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, these results suggest that the use of critical thinking strategies in lessons provides an opportunity to develop the students’ skills and abilities necessary for future life – such as analysing, systematising information, posing questions, providing logical answers, and drawing certain conclusions. Furthermore, developing critical thinking skills is one of the main objectives of contemporary education. The stages of work outlined in the paper describe integration with various strategies (“Forecasting Using Key Words”, “Question-Answer”, “Thin/Thick Questions”, “Keywords”, “Listing”, “Matching”, “Mind Map”, “Clustering”, “Crossword”, “Ordering and Sorting”, “Replacing”, etc) for developing critical thinking skills, help to diversify lessons qualitatively and contribute significantly to the formation and development of students’ critical thinking in English classes of non-linguistic higher education institutions. Methods and technologies for teaching foreign languages are constantly being updated, and the necessity of developing students’ critical thinking skills is imperative and dictated by modern times.

We intend to move forward and utilise strategies for developing critical thinking skills in foreign language classes, followed by the presentation of our professional experience in academic publications. The themes and aspects can vary according to the syllabi for the subjects “English Language”, “English for Professional Purposes”, and “Business Language”. It may be paramount to describe the role of critical thinking in reading comprehension in general and the strategies for developing critical thinking skills in particular.

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