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**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AS A MEANS OF CRITICAL THINKING  
DEVELOPMENT IN DISTANCE LEARNING WITH UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS**

**РЕФЛЕКТИВНА ПРАКТИКА ЯК ЗАСІБ РОЗВИТКУ  
КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ В УМОВАХ  
ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Distance learning is getting one of the most popular and inevitable methods of learning and teaching nowadays, which insistently changes the vector in instructions. The education policy, nevertheless, is aimed to achieving the highest level in quality of learning and teaching, as the technologies are changing and requiring relevant level of professional competency, particularly, highly developed 21st-century skills from the graduate students. The teachers, practitioners, and university educators should look for efficient technologies in online learning, saving the students' motivation, and developing the important skills necessary for future professional development. The issue of finding the efficient ways in online learning is becoming one of the leading priorities in organization of the teaching and learning process. This study is sought to analyze the modern research sources about the effective methods teaching online not only develop critical thinking competency as an essential skill of professional portrait, but also enhance students' motivation to study. It also investigates the theoretical background related to reflective practice in university training, after that, it investigates the possible ways of applying reflective practice strategies as a tool for critical thinking skills development. The analysis of recent studies revealed the most sought-after ways of reflective practice strategies which can be widely used online. The result of the analysis provided support in favour of wide-spread methods, which proved their application in various experiments and practical implications, for example, e-portfolios, reflective journals, blogging, MOOCs, which significantly increase students' critical thinking. The implication of this study may be seen in practical development of online courses and assignments for students in today's university educational process.*

**Keywords:** *critical thinking; distance learning; reflective practice; university students; critical thinking skills development.*

**Introduction.** The ongoing trend in distance learning has occupied the global informational space. Particularly, the essential idea lies in the correct

organization of educational settings in universities. Educators throughout the globe are trying to find the appropriate ways to teach their students not to lose motivation and to save the quality of the old form of multifaceted education they had practiced before the pandemic. Notably, an important task for English teachers is to find a balanced way of teaching language saving. Developing the reflective strategy practice, which is a type of critical thinking, is incredibly essential for future professionals. Suppose real communication and face-to-face teaching could find appropriate and efficient ways to build critical thinking and get a reflection from the students. In that case, the actual situation in distance learning approaches in organizing the English class is projected to find practical critical thinking development skills.

This study will reveal the importance of reflective practice in teaching languages, mainly English for specific purposes. We're going to analyze the sensibility to integrate reflective practice in the English class. We are also sought to find the appropriate way to incorporate reflective practice as a powerful instrument of critical thinking development into distance learning.

#### **Analysis of the literature on the research problem.**

The impact of reflection strategies on critical thinking development is proved by numerous research about modern technologies in methodologies. Thus, the correlation between reflection and action as the constant interrelation between thinking and doing, which results in further action, is suggested by some research (Schön, 1983; Ash et al., 2005). So, applying the additional efforts in imagining possible situations widens the ability to look step ahead, which adds valuable professional critical thinking at evaluating the conditions and problem-solving.

Critical reflection together and within the specific activity and experience background is the main instrument to attain the target goal in learning and acquiring the professional development, personal growth and civic education, where collaboration is designed as the general category to provide the interaction within a group (Ash & Clayton, 2009). Reflective journals as one of the reflective strategies of critical reflection are stated to promote critical thinking (Varner & Peck, 2003). Besides, it is a useful tool for professional development as it helps students reflect on their attitudes, beliefs, and ideas to promote and adequately assess their personal goals (Uline et al., 2004). Reflecting on critical incidents allows evaluating the event and evaluating its meaning, requiring professional analysis and a deep understanding of the specific details (Bolton, 2001). This example of the correlation between critical thinking and reflection strategies leads to the increase of professional competency.

The influence of reflective strategies, particularly reflective blogging on students' critical thinking, is proved by the research, which suggests that reflective learning practices significantly increase critical thinking skills within the specific area, so the professional field itself (Wetmore et al., 2010). These techniques are proved to be a valuable tool to develop professional competency.

In a specific professional field, it is important to think critically to understand the details. Due to the complexity of the set of assignments being faced by modern students, there is a need to apply reflective practice, which is a type of critical thinking. Reflective practice means thinking critically about one's experiences to understand them better and improve one's training in the future (World Learning, 2018).

The reflective practice's effect on critical thinking development has been analyzed in modern research, covering the issues of correlation between the reflective practice and critical thinking with activation of the main four learning processes: assumption analysis, contextual awareness, imaginative speculation and reflective skepticism as to the main components of critical thinking development (Choy & Oo, 2012). The congruency between reflective thinking activities and critical thinking skills was statistically proved in the research with the university students in a cooperative learning environment (Erdogan, 2019).

Another important point of the essential role of reflective practice in teaching English is that it may impact the students' motivation in the educational process (Erdil-Moody, 2016; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2016); which is considered to be one of the most efficient motivation-increasing techniques. The research taken in this field showed a strong positive correlation between motivation increase and applying reflective practice. Moreover, reflective practice in English teaching practice significantly increases the teachers' professional and self-motivation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2016).

Grounding on the increasing necessity of improving the learners' motivation, integrating the reflective practice into the learning environment is becoming one of the efficient ways. The influence of reflective strategies, particularly reflective blogging on students' critical thinking, is proved by the research, which suggests that reflective learning practices significantly increase critical thinking skills within the specific area, so the professional field itself (Wetmore et al., 2010). These techniques are proved to be a valuable tool to develop professional competency.

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Using reflective strategies practice is a unique tool for developing critical thinking and refreshing both learning and teaching practice, making a teacher and students look for possible alternative ways of dealing with problematic questions and creating logical answers and following questions. More than that, it has become one of the most valuable methods in distance learning.

Examples of reflective practice strategies are described below.

The aims of the lesson with such techniques are:

- to be able to find the appropriate solution to the professional problem;

- to be able to view a situation from a new professional perspective;
- to be able to reflect on applying critical thinking skills and reflection strategies/language.

The reflective practice strategies are the rules of critical thinking, which are argued to work deeper as they develop the interaction between self and the interlocutor.

1. Use your full attention to read or listen to an interlocutor.
2. Reflect before responding.
3. Make sure you understood what the other person meant.
4. Recognize the emotional side.
5. Offer alternatives.
6. Share your point of view, knowledge, or experience.
7. Request more information.
8. Ask questions the other person hasn't thought of.
9. Take an objective stance.
10. Offer a different way of seeing things.
11. Get the other person thinking about the future.
12. Be respectful (World Learning, 2018).

According to Bassot (2016), reflective practices are sought to enrich blended learning significantly, develops knowledge and skills, and include such vital aspects:

- becoming more self-aware;
- the role of writing in reflection;
- learning from experience;
- learning from positives and negatives;
- emotions and processing feelings;
- bringing assumptions to the surface;
- learning from feedback;
- reflecting in groups;
- managing change (Bassot, 2016).

**The study aims** to analyze recent research about ways of applying reflective practice in distance learning of university students.

**The layout of the main idea.** As the idea of distance learning lies in using the IT and devices, this fact also plays a developing role in critical thinking. A technology integration methodology is based on sociocultural learning approaches and analyzes its potential for developing active learning opportunities in higher education. Socio-cultural learning theories are considered to be learning-oriented and common, fit learning approaches for students. The method also takes into account the social and cultural aspects of learning. The facilitation of reflection practice puts the students in a thoughtful, active, and personal learning process. For these reasons, digital storytelling as a reflective practice developing method creates credible and empowering opportunities for intercultural collaboration and learning. It is assumed that the digital storytelling process, empowers and changes the students intellectually, creatively, and culturally. In this way, a digital

narrative can be seen as a useful instrumental pedagogy for the new humanities of the 21st century (Bitskinashvili, 2018).

Reflection is essential for lifelong learning and professional development, and discussion forums have been identified as a potential platform to further strengthening reflection through mutual engagement and feedback from teachers. Such forms, as forums offer medical students the opportunity to participate in collaborative reflective learning despite their geographical isolation and different schedules. The case report research investigated the reflective learning practice of family doctors along with the online discussion forums, which were added to the curriculum for last year's medical students. Online message boards have been implemented for several reasons, including to encourage reflective learning. The results showed that the forums were mostly run by students, with relatively few comments from general teacher moderators. The ideas, knowledge, and understanding of the meetings presented were shared and based on positive and supportive interactions that broadened learners' perspectives and sometimes led to decisions, which may state the fact, that even in online settings the students interact positively with their peers and teachers and share their academic and professional ideas. However, the level of this reflection was not very high, which means that the moderators and teachers should modify discussion forums to encourage more significant interaction with peers and to overcome obstacles that limit the simplification of lessons and can contribute to deeper and more emotional reflection (Gillingham et al., 2020).

Another research argues that MOOC as a component of blended learning gives the students the possibility to collaborate with peers and discuss the topics that significantly help develop reflective practice skills, thus, critical thinking. The multicultural setting also challenges the perception of the other cultural world, evoking deep techniques in reflective practice (Orsini-Jones et al., 2017).

Another idea of reflective practice in distance learning is e-portfolio (First Year Portfolio), making writing meaningful and reflective, overweighing the existing traditional paper portfolio. Using an e-portfolio could positively influence students' metacognitive skills and significantly develops critical thinking (Bowman et al, 2016).

**Conclusions.** The above-laid discussion found a variety of possible methods in applying the reflective practice strategies in distance learning for developing critical thinking with the university students. The appropriate ways of incorporating reflective practice strategies are reflective and blogging journals, e-portfolios, forums, MOOCs, which erase communication through IT and demand deeper understanding and expressing, reflecting on the peers' ideas. There are some limitations to this study. We did not manage to cover all research on this topic since the big trend of this theme, and numerous research appears in the scientific literature. There are also a lot of specific requirements for the reflective practice, which may be applied according to the specialism, level, educational aim, individual characteristics, etc.

The prospects of further research lie in the specific outlining the demands, as mentioned above in the limitations.

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### **АНОТАЦІЯ**

Дистанційне навчання є одним із найпопулярніших і неминучих методів навчання та викладання сьогодні, який наполегливо змінює вектор в освіті. Проте, освітня політика спрямована на досягнення найвищого рівня якості навчання та викладання, оскільки зі змінами технологій зростають вимоги до відповідного рівня професійної компетентності, зокрема, високо розвинених навичок 21-го століття у випускників. Викладачі університетів змушені підбирати ефективні технології для онлайн-навчання, щоб зберегти мотивацію студентів та розвинути важливі навички, необхідні для майбутнього професійного розвитку. Питання пошуку ефективних шляхів онлайн-навчання стає одним із провідних пріоритетів в організації процесу навчання. Це дослідження має на меті проаналізувати сучасні літературні джерела про ефективні методи дистанційного навчання не лише для розвитку компетентності критичного мислення як найважливіших навичок професійного портрету, але й для підвищення мотивації студентів до навчання. Робота також досліджує теоретичні передумови, пов'язані з рефлексивною практикою в університетському навчанні, досліджує можливі способи застосування рефлексивних практичних стратегій як інструменту розвитку навичок критичного мислення. Аналіз останніх досліджень виявив найбільш затребувані способи рефлексивних практичних стратегій, які можна широко використовувати у дистанційному навчанні. Результат аналізу джерел виявив ряд розповсюджених методів, які довели практичну цінність застосування їх в різних експериментах та практичних наслідках, наприклад, електронних портфелях, рефлексивних журналах, блогах, МООС, що значно підвищує критичне мислення студентів. Практичне застосування цього дослідження можна побачити у практичній розробці онлайн-курсів та завдань для студентів у навчальному процесі сучасного університету.

**Ключові слова:** критичне мислення; дистанційне навчання; рефлексивна практика; студенти університету, розвиток навичок критичного мислення.