

УДК 811.111(07)

**M. V. Teplova**

**M. B. Теплова**

**M. B. Теплова**

*Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University  
Дніпропетровський національний університет імені Олеса Гончара  
Днепропетровский национальный университет имени Олеса Гончара*

**CRITICAL THINKING APPROACH TO FORMING  
PRODUCTIVE SKILLS FOR IELTS  
КРИТИЧНЕ МИСЛЕННЯ У ФОРМУВАННІ  
ПРОДУКТИВНИХ НАВИЧОК ДЛЯ ЕКЗАМЕНУ  
КРИТИЧЕСКОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ  
ПРОДУКТИВНЫХ НАВЫКОВ ДЛЯ ЭКЗАМЕНА**

Розглянуто стратегії критичного мислення, зокрема, ті, які засновані на таксономії Блума, які мають вирішальне значення для розвитку продуктивних мовних навичок, таких, як усне та письмове мовлення, для іспиту IELTS. Що стосується теоретичних джерел, окреслено основні категорії когнітивної області з відповідними навичками, зазначеними в таксономії Блума, а також її переробленому варіанті. Також розглянуто типи екзаменаційних завдань в IELTS, зроблено акцент на навички критичного мислення, необхідні для кожного з письмових завдань. Крім того, зазначено способи розвитку навичок критичного мислення вищого порядку в підготовці до екзамену IELTS, зокрема, правильні питання, організація роботи з лексикою навколо таксономії Блума, а також за допомогою презентацій TED з подальшими завданнями.

*Ключові слова:* критичне мислення, IELTS, продуктивні навички, таксономія Блума, навички більш високого порядку, когнітивна область, дискурсивне есе.

Рассмотрены стратегии критического мышления, в частности, основанные на таксономии Блума, которые имеют решающее значение для развития продуктивных языковых навыков, таких как письмо и говорение, для экзамена IELTS. Что касается теоретических источников, выделены основные категории когнитивной области с соответствующими навыками, указанными в таксономии Блума, а также ее пересмотренный вариант. Также рассмотрены типы экзаменационных заданий в IELTS, в которых особое внимание уделено навыкам критического мышления, требуемым для каждого письменного задания. Кроме того, указано, как продвигать навыки критического мышления высшего порядка в процессе подготовки к экзамену IELTS, в частности, задавая правильные вопросы, организуя работу с лексикой в соответствии с таксономией Блума, а также используя презентации TED с последующими заданиями.

*Ключевые слова:* критическое мышление, IELTS, продуктивные навыки, таксономия Блума, навыки более высокого порядка, когнитивная область, дискурсивное эссе.

The article examines Critical Thinking strategies, in particular, those based on Bloom's taxonomy, which are crucial for the development of productive language skills, such as writing and speaking, for the IELTS examination. As far as the theoretical sources

are concerned, the author outlines the main categories of the cognitive domain with the corresponding skills as specified in Bloom's taxonomy, as well as its revised variant. The article also deals with the types of the examination tasks in the IELTS, making emphasis on the Critical Thinking skills required for each of the written assignments. Furthermore, the author points out the ways to promote higher order Critical Thinking skills in learners training for the IELTS, in particular, asking the right questions, organizing vocabulary acquisition around Bloom's taxonomy, as well as using TED talks with the follow-up assignments.

*Keywords:* Critical Thinking, IELTS, productive skills, Bloom's taxonomy, higher order skills, cognitive domain, discursive essay.

In this day and age, critical thinking (CT) skills are becoming the key priority for many educators and researchers in various disciplines, and it is not surprising that English Language Teaching lends itself well to diversified techniques incorporating CT. In particular, authors of "Critical Thinking" textbook note that since language is an essential element of our thinking, we need "to understand language so that we can think better" [5, c. 76].

The main focus of this article is on development and application of CT skills in preparation for the IELTS, an examination that is rapidly becoming the top choice not only for a large number of English language learners but also professionals in the ELT sphere. This phenomenon is caused by a variety of factors, mostly social and economic, reflecting the realities of the current market, where universities and employers in private and state sector, both in Ukraine and worldwide, increasingly rely on Cambridge University qualifications rather than, or in addition to a conventional diploma in a particular field. Given such immense popularity and significance, it is obvious that preparation for the IELTS should become part and parcel of most ELT programs aiming at higher levels of language mastery, particularly, upper-intermediate to advanced and proficiency, or B2–C2 (CEFR) [8].

To begin with, it is worth examining the scope of the examination tasks in the key skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking, with a view to identifying the areas where the use of CT skills would be highly advantageous for the general outcome. Regarding non-productive skills, namely, listening and reading, the IELTS examination challenges test-takers with a number of tasks ranging from multiple choice and gap filling to labeling maps and diagrams. When it comes to productive skills, or writing and speaking, the complexity of assignments grows dramatically. In writing, for instance, the candidates have to produce two essays in one hour and demonstrate the examiners a wide range of lexical and grammatical structures, as well as the mastery of academic vocabulary coupled with the knowledge of the essays' layout and means to provide cohesion and consistency of ideas. As far as speaking is concerned, it consists of 3 parts: the first includes the general questions related to the candidate and their life, family, hobbies, etc.; the second part is, mostly, the monologue of the test-taker based on a cue card outlining the major topic and points that have to be covered during 1 or 2 minutes; the last part involves a two-way discussion of controversial issues between the candidate and the examiner.

Obviously, educators training candidates for the IELTS should identify the key CT skills and competencies and assess how they are involved in various examination tasks. A good source to start with is Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy, which was developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. The original taxonomy identified 6 main categories of the cognitive domain:

– **Knowledge** “involves the recall of specifics and universals, the recall of methods and processes, or the recall of a pattern, structure, or setting.”

– **Comprehension** “refers to a type of understanding or apprehension such that the individual knows what is being communicated and can make use of the material or idea being communicated without necessarily relating it to other material or seeing its fullest implications.”

– **Application** refers to the “use of abstractions in particular and concrete situations.”

– **Analysis** represents the “breakdown of a communication into its constituent elements or parts such that the relative hierarchy of ideas is made clear and/or the relations between ideas expressed are made explicit.”

– **Synthesis** involves the “putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole.”

– **Evaluation** engenders “judgments about the value of material and methods for given purposes.” [2, с. 201–207].

In 2001, Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl revisited the cognitive domain in the mid-nineties and made some changes, rearranging the last two categories and putting ‘synthesis’ rather than ‘evaluation’ on top of the pyramid. The renewed version of the Bloom’s Taxonomy is more dynamic as it uses verbs and gerunds to name categories and subcategories:

- Remembering: recall or retrieve previously learned information;
- Understanding: comprehending the meaning, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems;
- Applying: use a concept or unprompted use of an abstraction;
- Analyzing: separate material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood; distinguish between facts and inferences;
- Evaluating: make judgments about the value of ideas or materials;
- Creating: build a structure or pattern from diverse elements; put parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure [10].

In terms of productive skills, the writing part of the IELTS challenges test-takers with 2 tasks:

– 150-word essay based on a map, a bar chart, a pie chart or a diagram, where the candidate should “summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant”;

– 250-word discursive essay (for-and-against, opinion or problem-solving), in which the candidate should agree or disagree with the opinion expressed in the theme, “give reasons for their answer and include any relevant examples from their own knowledge or experience”. The main theme, for instance, might be as follows: “A person’s worth nowadays seems to be judged according to social status and material possessions. Old-fashioned values, such as honour, kindness and trust, no longer seem important” [6].

Evidently, both essays require test-takers to summarize, select, report, compare, contrast, evaluate, and substantiate, all of which are higher order skills from Bloom’s Taxonomy, namely: analyzing, evaluating, creating. Yet, these tasks inevitably challenge educators with the question: how can we promote critical thinking skills, in particular, higher order ones, in language learners?

One answer to this dilemma lies in questioning, which is the key to powerful thinking: “Questions define the agenda of our thinking. They determine what information

we seek. They lead us in one direction rather than another. They are, therefore, a crucial part of our thinking“ [9]. Most researchers suggest using the right questions to foster critical thinking and provide gradual but stable transition from lower to higher order skills in Bloom’s Taxonomy. In fact, Alison King in her article “Inquiring Minds Really Do Want to Know: Using Questioning to Teach Critical Thinking” provides various types of questions corresponding to each category of the cognitive domain in the taxonomy. In this way, the ‘applying’ stage involves questions like “What is a new example of..? What is the counterargument for...? How is ... related to ...?”, which can be helpful in developing ideas and illustrating arguments in a discursive essay. For ‘analyzing’ category, we might ask: “What is the difference between ... and ...? How are ... and ... similar? Why is ... important? What evidence is there to support your answer?”, which will result in better understanding and comparison of the trends in the charts and graphs. To develop ‘evaluating’ skill, we should ask: “How does ... affect...? What is the best ... and why? Do you agree or disagree with the statement...? What criteria would you use to assess...?”, all of which will lead to better reasoning in cause-and-effect, opinion and for-and-against essays. Finally, to approach the “synthesis” or “creating” stage, we will ask questions like “What is the solution to the problem of..? What do you think causes...? Why? What is another way to look at ...? What ideas can you add to...?”, which will be indispensable for cause-and-effect and problem-solving essays [4].

Actually, ‘creating’ category can be applied to the process of developing arguments and structuring the essay as a whole, with the wide use of linking words and phrases contributing to cohesion.

Furthermore, vocabulary is one of the challenging, yet essential areas for the aspiring IELTS candidates as it is “the most important level of L2 knowledge for all learners to develop – whether they are aiming primarily at academic or interpersonal competence...” [7, p. 138]. Besides, learners’ ability to acquire new vocabulary items, or “...the degree of their vocabulary knowledge depends on their ability to ‘pick up’ this information from contexts (both oral and written) in which the words are used...” [7, p. 141]. In fact, the scope of vocabulary knowledge required for the IELTS includes both general academic and topic-specific vocabulary. In the discursive essay, the examiners expect a versatile interplay of these two types of lexicon in a variety of grammatical structures, logically organized with the help of linking expressions. Therefore, educators involved in training for IELTS must make conscious use of activities and techniques which lay emphasis on forming a vast supply of academic vocabulary in the working memory of language learners.

It turns out that CT approach and reasonable use of Bloom’s Taxonomy can be of considerable importance in the sphere of vocabulary acquisition as well. Indeed, educators can encourage learners to move from lower levels of vocabulary cognition, like remembering and understanding, to higher order categories, which might involve various activities aimed at further actualization and reinforcement of word knowledge. For instance, at ‘analyzing’ stage, learners explain the difference in the meanings, classify words, find synonyms and antonyms, compare and contrast new words. For the development of ‘evaluating’ skill, learners might be encouraged to group new words according to their connotation into positive and negative ones; finally, at the ‘creative’ stage, learners use new vocabulary to compose and write their texts.

As far as speaking is concerned, our professional, as well as personal experience shows that TED website [11] is one of the best resources that can be used in preparation

for the Speaking part of the IELTS. What makes TED talks so appealing both to the trainer and trainee, and how can we use them effectively?

First and foremost, regular exposure to TED talks becomes absolutely vital since the speeches presented on the website allow learners to actively immerse in the context which abounds in high-level vocabulary, both general and specific. On a more practical note, prospective candidates can watch 15–25-minute TED talks on the topics found in IELTS, for instance, Education, Culture, Work and Career, Environment, Technology, Health, etc. on a regular basis, especially in the 2–3 months preceding the actual exam. Yet, it is the teacher’s responsibility to help learners make this activity worthwhile and enrich it with proper CT techniques. So, in the class, the teacher should give learners the opportunity to report on the talk of their choice, highlighting the academic vocabulary and identifying the key ideas. In this way, learners not only practice using the essential lexis in the format aligned with Part 3 in Speaking, which involves a two-way discussion of controversial issues between the candidate and the examiner; they develop analyzing and evaluating skills as well. Moreover, considering that questions define our thinking, the educator should encourage learners by asking open-ended questions related to the given TED talk in order to foster their higher order critical thinking skills. Such questions may include, for instance: *How could you summarize the content of the talk in one brief statement? What ideas from the talk do you find the most appealing and why? How can you apply the ideas from the talk in your life?*

Furthermore, the teacher can also combine the above-mentioned speaking activities with an engaging follow-up writing task, choosing the essay whose theme is aligned with the topic of the TED talk and, thus, contributing to the development of creative and evaluative skills in learners. As an illustration, Michael Norton’s inspiring speech “How to buy happiness” [12] can be used to develop and support arguments for the topic “*Money is not the most important thing in life. Discuss*” [3, c.58]. In addition, one of the brilliant talks by Al Gore, “The case for optimism on climate change” [13] can be combined with the oral and written exploration of the topic, followed by writing an opinion essay in the Environment field, namely, “*Some people believe that the Earth is being harmed by human activity. Others feel that human activity makes the Earth a better place to live. What is your opinion? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer*” [1, c. 60].

On the whole, as thorough preparation for the IELTS should encompass a diverse array of activities that create the basis for the productive stage, being aware of and aligning our teaching repertoire with CT approach helps create this tangible foundation, and fosters natural integration of all key skills. Therefore, activities based on Bloom’s Taxonomy should become an inherent part of training for the productive skills in the IELTS.

### References

1. **Саливон А. Б.** Готовимся к сдаче экзамена IELTS: Writing Essays : учебно-методическое пособие / А. Б. Саливон, Н. И. Рева. – Владивосток, 2008. – 70 с.
2. **Bloom B.** Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals / Benjamin Bloom., 1956. – 111 с.
3. **Evans V.** Successful Writing Proficiency / V. Evans. – Express Publishing, 2000. – 160 p.
4. **King A.** Inquiring Minds Really Do Want to Know: Using Questioning to Teach Critical Thinking / A. King // Teaching of Psychology. – 1995. – № 22. – С. 14.
5. **Kirby G.** Critical Thinking / G. Kirby, J. Goodpaster. Prentice-Hall, Inc., an imprint of Pearson Education, Inc., 1999. – 394 с.
6. **Road to IELTS.** Web.: [www.takeIELTS.britishcouncil.org](http://www.takeIELTS.britishcouncil.org).

7. **Saville-Troike M.** *Introducing second language acquisition* / M. Saville-Troike. – Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006. – 206 p.
8. **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cefr>.
9. **The Critical Mind is a Questioning Mind** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-critical-mind-is-a-questioning-mind/481>.
10. **Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>.
11. **TED: Ideas Worth Spreading** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : <http://www.ted.com>.
12. **TED: Michael Norton. How To Buy Happiness** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : [https://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_norton\\_how\\_to\\_buy\\_happiness/](https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_norton_how_to_buy_happiness/).
13. **TED: Al Gore. The Case for Optimism On Climate Change** [Electronic resource]. – Available at : [https://www.ted.com/talks/al\\_gore\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_optimism\\_on\\_climate\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_the_case_for_optimism_on_climate_change)

### References

1. Саливон А.Б., Н.И. Рева. *Готовимся к сдаче экзамена IELTS: Writing Essays: учебно-методическое пособие*. Владивосток: Изд-во ВГУЭС, 2008. Друк.
2. Bloom, Benjamin, ed. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. Susan Fauer Company, Inc. 1956. Print.
3. Evans, V. *Successful Writing Proficiency*. Express Publishing, 1998. Print.
4. King, A. "Inquiring Minds Really Do Want to Know: Using Questioning to Teach Critical Thinking," *Teaching of Psychology* 22 (1995): 14. Print.
5. Kirby Gary R., Goodpaster Jeffery R. *Critical Thinking* / Gary R. Kirby, Jeffery R. Goodpaster. Prentice-Hall, Inc., an imprint of Pearson Education, Inc., 1999, 394 pp., p. 76. Print.
6. Road to IELTS [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: [www.takeIELTS.british-council.org](http://www.takeIELTS.british-council.org).
7. Saville-Troike, M. *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006. Print.
8. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cefr>.
9. The Critical Mind is a Questioning Mind [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-critical-mind-is-a-questioning-mind/481>.
10. Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>.
11. TED: Ideas Worth Spreading [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.ted.com>.
12. TED: Michael Norton. How To Buy Happiness [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: [https://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_norton\\_how\\_to\\_buy\\_happiness/](https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_norton_how_to_buy_happiness/).
13. TED: Al Gore. The Case for Optimism On Climate Change [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: [https://www.ted.com/talks/al\\_gore\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_optimism\\_on\\_climate\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_the_case_for_optimism_on_climate_change).

Надійшла до редколегії 05.11.2016