# INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR DEVELOPING CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN FRENCH AND UZBEK LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT**

*The rapid expansion of accessible information has shifted the purpose of language education from the transmission of ready-made knowledge towards the cultivation of independent judgement and inventive problem solving. This article examines how critical thinking, creative thinking, and the design approach can be integrated into the comparative teaching of French and Uzbek. Working from a conceptual and analytical review of pedagogical and applied-linguistic sources, the study argues that the three constructs are complementary rather than competing: critical thinking enables learners to analyse, compare, and evaluate linguistic and cultural evidence; creative thinking generates original formulations and non-standard solutions; and the design approach converts those solutions into testable products. A six-stage integrated model is proposed in which each stage is associated with a dominant mode of thinking, and a typology of six classroom task formats is developed and illustrated with contrastive French–Uzbek material, including address forms, word-order differences arising from the agglutinative structure of Uzbek, and proverb equivalence. The analysis indicates that such tasks develop linguistic, intercultural, and problem-solving competence simultaneously, and that they require a redefinition of the teacher's role from provider of information to organiser of inquiry.*

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***Keywords:*** *critical thinking, creative thinking, design thinking, French as a foreign language, Uzbek, contrastive analysis, project-based learning, competence.*

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## Introduction

The accelerated development of science and technology has placed new demands on education systems. A student today may have access to an unprecedented volume of information, yet volume alone confers no advantage. What matters is the ability to analyse that information correctly, to separate reliable from unreliable material, to apply it in practical situations, and to generate new ideas from it. Developing critical and creative thinking has therefore become one of the central tasks of contemporary education. Learners are expected not merely to memorise knowledge but to understand its content, to ask questions, to compare competing views, to defend their positions with evidence, and to propose new solutions to existing problems (Morin, 1999).

A second shift is the entry of the design approach into the educational process, which orients learners towards work on real problems. Through design thinking a learner identifies a problem, investigates its causes, generates a range of ideas, produces an initial model of a solution, and subjects that model to testing (Razzouk & Shute, 2012).

These shifts have particular force in foreign language education. Memorising grammatical rules is not sufficient. Learners must be able to use the language they have studied in genuine communicative

situations, to justify their opinions, to compare cultures, and to draw independent conclusions. The comparative study of French and Uzbek widens these opportunities considerably, because the two languages belong to different families and encode social relations in visibly different ways (Beacco, 2000).

In Uzbekistan, where French is taught mainly as a second or third foreign language and where the reform of higher language education is ongoing, the question is a practical one: what concrete classroom procedures make critical thinking, creativity, and design work possible in a French language classroom whose learners share Uzbek as a first language? The present article addresses that question. It has three aims: to clarify the relationship between critical thinking, creative thinking, and the design approach as they apply to language teaching; to propose an integrated model that links them to the stages of a design cycle; and to develop a typology of classroom tasks, illustrated with contrastive French–Uzbek material, that puts the model into operation.

**Theoretical Background**

**Critical Thinking in Language Learning**

The most widely cited definition of critical thinking is the consensus statement produced by the Delphi panel convened under the auspices of the American Philosophical Association, which describes it as purposeful, self-regulatory judgement resulting in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, together with an account of the evidential and conceptual considerations on which that judgement rests (Facione, 1990). Paul and Elder (2006) add the dispositional dimension, arguing that intellectual humility, perseverance, and fair-mindedness matter as much as procedural skill.

Applied to language learning, the significance of critical thinking is that information is not simply received but analysed, compared, evaluated, and used as the basis for a reasoned conclusion. In the language classroom this means replacing ready-made answers with questions and problem situations that oblige the learner to think. Meirieu (1987) had already argued that instruction organised around the learner's own cognitive activity produces more durable learning than instruction organised around the delivery of content. Where traditional teaching required students to recall and reproduce information, contemporary teaching prompts them with questions such as "Why?", "How?", and "What is the evidence for this?"

**Creative Thinking**

Creative thinking is the capacity to draw on existing knowledge and experience in order to produce new and original ideas. In the contemporary labour market, the ability to innovate and to find solutions in non-standard situations is highly valued. In the classroom, creative thinking can be developed through open questions, creative assignments, projects, debates, role plays, and practical tasks. An instruction such as "Solve the given problem in at least three different ways" prevents the learner from searching for a single ready answer and requires the development of several new solutions. Learners who think creatively look for unusual solutions, are not afraid to experiment, express their views freely, and treat mistakes as a source of experience (Azizxo'jayeva, 2006). Dehaene (2018) offers a complementary account from cognitive neuroscience, identifying active engagement, error signals, and consolidation among the conditions under which the brain learns efficiently, which supports pedagogies that treat error as informative rather than as failure.

**The Design Approach**

In education, the design approach does not mean producing an attractive image or graphic layout. Brown (2008) characterises design thinking as a human-centred method of meeting people's needs in a way that is technically feasible and strategically viable. Reviewing the empirical literature, Razzouk and Shute (2012) define it as an analytic and creative process that engages a person in opportunities to experiment, to create and prototype models, to gather feedback, and to redesign.

The approach proceeds through identifiable stages: establishing what the problem is; investigating the problem and its causes; generating a range of possible solutions; producing an initial model of the


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chosen idea; testing that solution; and improving it on the basis of the results obtained. The sequence teaches learners not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but to apply that knowledge in practical activity.

**An Integrated Model**

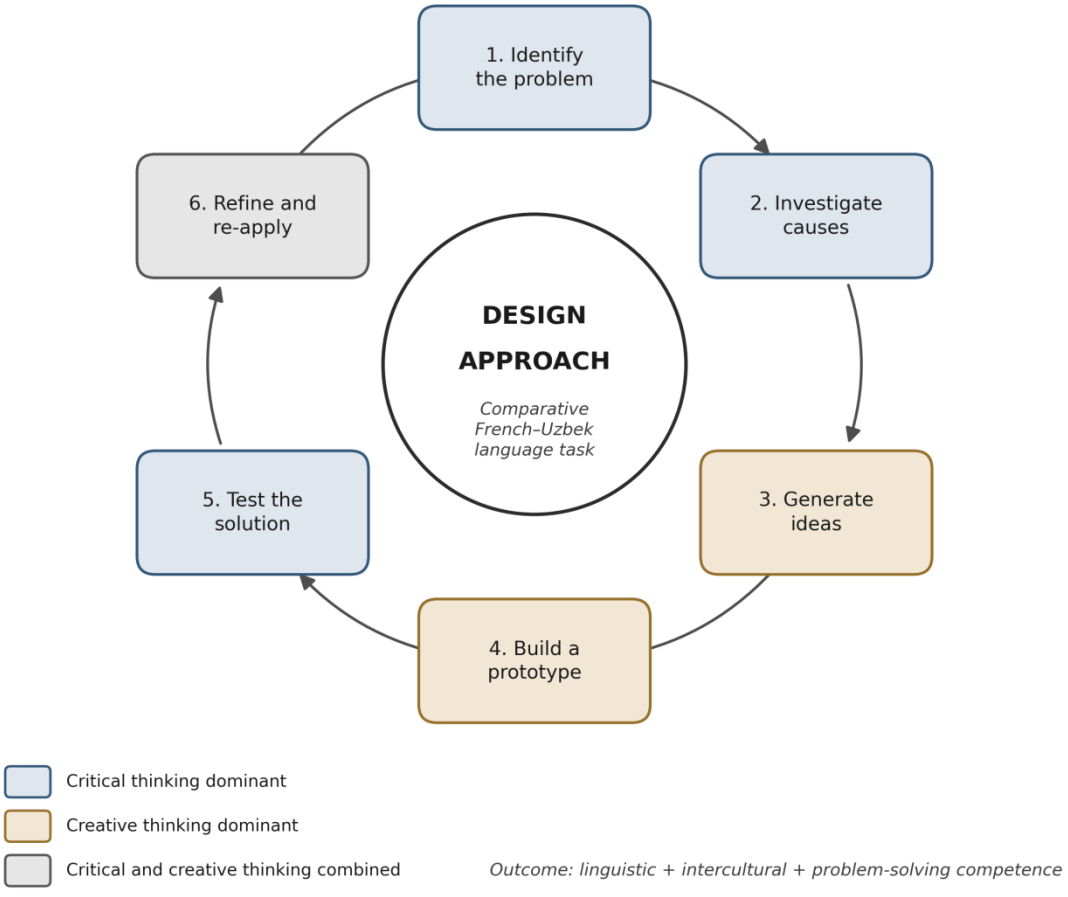
Critical thinking, creative thinking, and design complement one another. Critical thinking supports a deep understanding of the problem and an evaluation of existing solutions; creative thinking serves the generation of new ideas; and design makes it possible to turn those ideas into practical outcomes (Perrenoud, 1997).

The relationship is easiest to see in a concrete case. Suppose learners are given the problem "How can reading be increased at school?" Using critical thinking, they identify the causes of the problem. Using creative thinking, they develop a range of ideas. Using the design approach, they turn the most viable idea into a project or prototype, and on the basis of the test results they refine it. A learner may propose five ideas for solving a problem, which is the result of creative thinking; at the next stage the same learner compares those ideas in terms of feasibility, cost, time, and usefulness, which is a critical-thinking process. Creative thinking generates the idea, critical thinking evaluates it, and design converts it into a practical solution.

Figure 1 presents this relationship as a six-stage cycle in which each stage is associated with a dominant mode of thinking.

**Figure 1**

*An Integrated Critical–Creative–Design Cycle for Comparative French–Uzbek Language Instruction*




*Note.* The cycle is closed: refinement at stage 6 returns the learner to a redefinition of the problem at stage 1. Stage labels follow the design sequence described by Razzouk and Shute (2012); the assignment of a dominant mode of thinking to each stage is the author's own.

As Figure 1 indicates, the cycle is closed rather than linear: refinement returns the learner to a redefinition of the problem. This is consistent with a competence-based orientation, in which what has been learned is demonstrated through action across a family of situations rather than through recall alone (Perrenoud, 1997).

**Method**

This study is conceptual and analytical rather than experimental. It draws on three bodies of material. The first is the theoretical literature on critical thinking, creative thinking, and design thinking. The second consists of policy and reference documents for language education, in particular the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference, which extends the framework with descriptors for mediation and for plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Council of Europe, 2020). The third is contrastive French–Uzbek linguistic material drawn from teaching practice in the Department of French Philology at Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, the three constructs were characterised on the basis of the source literature and their points of contact were identified. Second, the six-stage design cycle reported in that literature was mapped onto the modes of thinking that dominate at each stage, which produced the model shown in Figure 1. Third, six task formats already familiar in Uzbek language pedagogy were re-described in terms of that model and illustrated with contrastive examples, which produced the typology shown in Table 1. The proposals that follow are therefore offered as a framework for instructional design and for subsequent empirical testing, not as findings from a controlled intervention.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Critical Thinking Through Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive work between French and Uzbek supplies ready material for critical analysis, because the two languages encode social relations differently. Address forms are the clearest example. French uses *vous* in formal communication and *tu* in informal situations, while Uzbek uses *siz* to express respect and formality and *sen* to express closeness.

The pedagogical value lies in the question that follows: why do different languages have different address forms, and how do these forms reflect relationships within a society? The question moves the learner beyond memorising a grammatical rule and towards an analysis of the connection between language and society. It corresponds closely to what Byram (1997) termed critical cultural awareness, the ability to evaluate perspectives and practices in one's own culture and in others on the basis of explicit criteria.

Word order provides a second site for analysis:

Uzbek: *Men kitob o'qidim.* (literally, 'I book read')

French: *J'ai lu un livre.* (literally, 'I have read a book')

Learners compare the two sentences and identify differences in the position of the verb, in grammatical marking, and in overall sentence structure. They then look for an answer to the question of why sentence structure is not the same across languages. Uzbek belongs to the Turkic family and is agglutinative, so grammatical relations are carried by suffixes attached to the stem; French belongs to the Romance group and relies more heavily on auxiliaries, articles, and fixed constituent order. The process teaches learners to observe, compare, supply evidence, and draw conclusions. Rather than presenting the contrast as a difficulty to be corrected, the teacher presents it as data to be explained.

**Creative Thinking Through Productive Intercultural Tasks**

Creative work in language teaching can be organised through dialogue construction, story building, role plays, project work, text creation from a picture, and the resolution of problem situations. A representative assignment is the following: introduce the city of Tashkent to a French tourist who has arrived in Uzbekistan from Paris.

Here the learner uses French to create an original text about Uzbek culture, national dishes, historical monuments, and everyday life. Expressing one's own culture in another language develops



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cultural competence alongside linguistic competence, and it exercises precisely the mediating function that the Companion Volume places at the centre of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Council of Europe, 2020).

A second creative assignment asks learners to compare proverbs and idioms across the two languages. For example:

Uzbek: *Yetti o'lchab, bir kes.* ('Measure seven times, cut once.')

French: *Mieux vaut prévenir que guérir.* ('Prevention is better than cure.')

Learners identify similarities and differences in meaning and explain the situations in which each expression is used. The task is creative in that it requires learners to construct equivalence rather than retrieve it, and critical in that the proposed equivalence has to be justified. Beacco (2000) argues that the cultural dimension of language teaching is best approached through discourse rather than through lists of cultural facts, and comparative proverb work is one practical realisation of that principle.

**Design-Based Project Work**

The design approach turns the learner into an active participant. A representative project assignment is to design a mobile application for young Uzbek learners who are beginning to study French. In the course of the project, learners identify the needs of language learners, define the problem, propose the main functions of the application, create a French–Uzbek glossary together with exercises or dialogues, develop an initial interface design, present the project, and analyse the comments of other groups. Such an assignment develops language competence, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and design skills at the same time.

The presentation and peer-review stage is not decorative. It is the testing stage of the cycle shown in Figure 1, and it is the point at which evaluation criteria must be made explicit if the activity is to yield critical thinking rather than politeness. Groups can be asked to assess each proposal against feasibility, cost, time, and usefulness, which are the same four criteria used to compare ideas at the earlier stage of the cycle.

**A Task Typology for the French–Uzbek Classroom**

The six formats collected in Table 1 are already established in Uzbek pedagogical practice, where they are widely used as interactive teaching techniques (Tolipov & Usmonboyeva, 2006); what the present framework adds is an explicit mapping of each format onto a stage of the design cycle and onto the mode of thinking that stage requires. Table 1 sets out the six formats, the classroom procedure each involves, the stage to which it corresponds, and an illustrative example drawn from French–Uzbek material.

**Table 1**

*Task Typology for Developing Critical and Creative Thinking in Comparative French–Uzbek Language Classes*

| Task format | Classroom procedure | Design-cycle stage | Illustrative French–Uzbek example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Compare and conclude (*Taqqosla va xulosa qil*) | Learners set two grammatical or lexical units side by side, describe the differences, and formulate a generalisation. | 1–2 Identify and investigate | Contrast *Men kitob o'qidim* with *J'ai lu un livre* and account for the position of the verb. |
| Problem situation (*Muammoli vaziyat*) | Learners receive a realistic communicative situation and must produce a solution and justify it. | 1–2 Identify and investigate | A guest at a formal reception is addressed with *tu*; decide what has gone wrong and how to repair it. |
| Brainstorming (*Aqliy hujum*) | Learners generate as many ideas as possible without evaluation, then cluster them. | 3 Generate ideas | List every French formula available for a polite request, then group them by degree of formality. |



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| Task format | Classroom procedure | Design-cycle stage | Illustrative French–Uzbek example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Role entry (*Rolga kirish*) | Learners stage communicative situations in both languages and then exchange roles. | 3–4 Generate and prototype | Enact the same complaint in a Tashkent shop and in a Paris shop; compare the strategies used. |
| Create a project (*Loyiha yaratish*) | Groups produce a poster, mobile application, glossary, or video script that supports language learning. | 4–5 Prototype and test | Design a French-learning application for Uzbek beginners, present it, and collect peer feedback. |
| Provide evidence (*Dalil keltir*) | Learners are required to support an opinion with examples and explicit evidence. | 5–6 Test and refine | Argue, with textual examples, whether *Yetti o'lchab, bir kes* and *Mieux vaut prévenir que guérir* are true equivalents. |

*Note.* Uzbek task names are given in italics in the first column. Stage numbers refer to the six stages of the cycle shown in Figure 1.

The six formats can be used separately, but the model in Figure 1 suggests that they gain force when they are sequenced. A teaching unit might open with "compare and conclude", move through "brainstorming" and "role entry", and close with "create a project" and "provide evidence", so that learners pass through the entire cycle within a single topic. The typology also makes the distribution of cognitive demand visible to the teacher, which is useful when a syllabus has to balance productive work against grammatical coverage.

**The Changing Role of the Teacher**

In teaching based on critical and creative thinking, the role of the teacher also changes. The teacher is no longer only a provider of knowledge but a person who organises and directs the learner's independent inquiry. In concrete terms, the teacher asks open and problem-based questions, respects divergent opinions, creates an environment in which mistakes are not feared, organises group and project work, encourages learners to justify their views, rewards creative ideas, and attends to the process as well as to the result when assessing learners' activity. Such an environment increases learners' self-confidence and strengthens their engagement in the educational process. Perrenoud (1999) describes this shift in terms of new professional competences for teaching, among them the capacity to organise situations that make learning possible and to involve learners in their own assessment.

**Assessment Implications**

If the process matters as much as the product, then assessment must record the process. Three instruments follow from the model. Process portfolios collect the successive versions of a prototype together with the learner's written justification for each revision, which makes the refinement stage visible. Analytic rubrics separate linguistic accuracy from the quality of reasoning, so that a well-argued text containing grammatical errors is not confused with a fluent text that argues nothing. Peer assessment, guided by explicit criteria of the kind described above, makes the testing stage of the cycle assessable and gives the criteria a genuine function rather than a ceremonial one.

**Limitations and Further Research**

The framework proposed here has not been tested experimentally, and its claims about learning outcomes are derived from the literature and from classroom observation rather than from measured gains. A further constraint is time: design cycles are slower than exercise-based teaching, and in curricula with heavy grammatical coverage requirements the full six-stage cycle may be feasible for only one or two units per semester. Comparative work also presupposes teachers who are confident in both languages, which is not uniformly the case. The obvious next step is empirical: a study comparing classes taught with and without the task typology, using a standardised critical-thinking measure alongside conventional proficiency measures, would establish whether the gains claimed here can be observed.


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**Conclusion**

Critical thinking, creative thinking, and design are integral components of contemporary education. Education today requires learners not only to acquire a certain quantity of knowledge but to use that knowledge to make independent decisions, analyse problems, generate new ideas, and develop practical solutions. Critical thinking teaches learners to analyse and evaluate information, creative thinking teaches them to generate new ideas, and the design approach teaches them to convert those ideas into a real product or solution.

Combining the three in the teaching of French and Uzbek serves to increase the effectiveness of instruction. In such an approach the learner is not a passive recipient of ready-made knowledge but an active subject who seeks knowledge independently, analyses it, and creates something new. Through the comparison of French and Uzbek, learners come to understand not only the grammatical and lexical features of the two languages but also the cultural values and communicative traditions of the two peoples.

The contribution of this article is twofold: a six-stage model that assigns a dominant mode of thinking to each phase of the design cycle, and a typology of six task formats that puts the model into operation with contrastive French–Uzbek material. The wide use of problem situations, project work, debate, brainstorming, role play, research assignments, and design projects in contemporary language lessons is accordingly one of the important means of raising the quality of education. As a result of these approaches, learners are formed as independent thinkers who are prepared for future professional and social activity and who are capable of producing innovative solutions.

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