

Methods for Fostering Critical Thinking Among Students

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the relevance of developing critical thinking in adolescent students, its methodological approaches, its application in the educational process, and its role in personal development. The article explores psychological changes associated with the development of critical thinking, the socio-moral characteristics of adolescence, and their impact on students' thinking, behavior, morality, and emotional state through a philosophical-pedagogical perspective. Critical thinking is interpreted not merely as an intellectual activity, but as a complex cognitive, social, and ethical process that transforms the individual into an active, responsible, and conscious participant in society.

Keywords: Critical thinking, student identity, problem-based learning, innovative methods, creative thinking, analysis, synthesis, moral education, cognitive skills, personal development.

Introduction: According to the Development Strategy of Uzbekistan's seven priority areas and the Law "On Education," special emphasis is placed on fostering harmony in the relationship between the individual and society, as well as on developing independent and critical thinking skills in youth. In this context, the field of pedagogy is increasingly focused on exploring diverse approaches to organizing the educational process in ways that enable individuals to realize their full potential. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in his work "Critical Analysis, Strict Discipline, and Personal Responsibility Should Become the Daily Rule of Every Leader's Activity," also stresses that every leader or individual must base their activities on deep analysis and a critical approach, as this is a demand of the current era.

Indeed, the role of individuals who think independently and critically is invaluable in creating a diverse intellectual environment within society. Shaping a well-rounded person who views the world from a new perspective—and, as a result, fostering individuals who are independent thinkers, creatively driven, strong-willed, ideologically committed, morally upright, and conscientious—is one of the most vital and responsible tasks facing educators in our republic. Therefore, within the educational process, it is of great importance to form and continuously develop students' critical thinking abilities. By practically implementing a

"subject–subject" relationship model, their creative activity, inquisitiveness, strength of will, industriousness, and sense of conviction can be effectively nurtured.

It is of great importance to further develop the elements of critical thinking formed during early school age as children progress through their school years. Students should be taught not to fear expressing their own opinions and to navigate complex situations with confidence. Teachers must promptly address situations where students are unable to overcome initial obstacles, fear challenges, or fall into discouragement, ensuring that such barriers do not hinder their development.

One of the key elements of critical thinking is developing students' ability to distinguish between positive and negative situations.

Indicators of well-developed critical thinking skills include:

- the ability to analyze expressed opinions;
- generalization;
- making accurate evaluations;
- analogy, comparison, and contrast;
- differentiation;
- classification;

- argumentation;
- drawing conclusions.

In this regard, the weight of responsibility placed on education and upbringing specialists is measured precisely by these factors. As the saying goes, “A tree planted a day late bears fruit a week late,” even a single day’s delay in the sphere of upbringing can lead to significant problems. That is why the head of our state expresses great trust in the leaders of the spiritual-educational field, especially in educators, and repeatedly warns all of us about the potential risks connected to our future.

Each developmental stage has its own unique characteristics in the formation of a person. In particular, the school years differ from other stages due to students’ impulsiveness, variability of thoughts, emotional instability, and frequent crisis conditions. The main reason for this is that both physiological and psychological changes occur during the school period. If proper influence is not exerted on students’ education and, more importantly, on their psychological development during this stage, the character traits they develop may shift from positive to negative over time. This can hinder their integration into society, their ability to find their place in life, and their capacity to assess events and phenomena around them objectively.

In particular, developing critical thinking at school age is of great importance, as this is the period when theoretical thinking begins to gain prominence. Students begin to seek a deeper understanding of the connections in the world around them. During this stage, a noticeable increase in their interest in knowledge occurs. Acquiring scientific and theoretical knowledge leads to the development of thinking. As a result, their ability to reason using evidence and arguments improves. They begin to develop the capacity for deductive reasoning.

For school-age students, it is especially important to intensively develop all their personal qualities — including knowledge, aptitude, mental processing methods, critical thinking, self-regulation mechanisms, emotional and moral traits, and practical activity — through innovative methods and developmental educational technologies.

Introducing strategies and technologies into the educational process that encourage students to think independently and critically, creating a creative pedagogical environment that fosters critical thinking, and establishing a cooperative and interactive atmosphere between teachers and students are essential for the development of critical thinking skills.

The development of critical thinking in students is most effective when innovative methods are applied during classroom activities. There is significant potential to foster critical thinking in the teaching of social and humanitarian subjects within the education system. In particular, subjects that fall under the category of National Independence Ideology, as well as history and literature, offer extensive opportunities in this regard.

Below, we would like to present our views on the ways to develop students’ critical thinking using an example from a literature lesson.

9th Grade Literature Class Topic: “Working on the Novel O’tkan Kunlar”

After giving a brief overview of the previous topic and reinforcing it through a question-and-answer session with the students, the teacher proceeds to develop their critical thinking skills using the innovative “PMI” method (Plus, Minus, Interesting – also known as FSMU in Uzbek).

The teacher asks: “What kind of literary work is Abdulla Qodiriy’s O’tkan Kunlar?”

(Students might respond as follows...)

THINK – State your opinion clearly	The first realistic work that expresses the national character
REASON – provide a reason for your opinion	Uzbek traditional values are broadly interpreted, reflecting the relationships between parents and children.
EXAMPLE – Support your opinion with examples.	In the image of Yusufbek Khoja, the character is portrayed as a farsighted and wise statesman, a truth-seeker and devoted public servant, as well as a caring and kind-hearted father devoted to his family.
GENERALIZATION – Summarize your opinion.	Abdulla Qodiriy’s novel “ <i>O’tkan kunlar</i> ” portrays the difficult life of the Uzbek people in the recent past, the presence of inequality in husband-and-wife

	relationships, and the tragic downfall of morally upright and well-mannered young individuals.
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One of the innovative methods that encourages students to think critically is the “Double-Entry Journal” strategy. This method, first, helps students deeply understand the content of the topic, and second, encourages them to objectively evaluate events and situations. One of the essential elements of critical thinking is the ability of students to assess events and phenomena impartially.

Once the assignment based on the Double-Entry

Journal is given, students divide a notebook page into two parts. On the left side labeled “Excerpt,” students are required to write a passage from the text, something that deeply affected them, or a symbol that genuinely surprised them. The essence of the Double-Entry Journal method can be seen in the following example:

Passage	Commentary
<p>Yusufbek Hoji: “I have spent much of my life striving for the peace of this land and the well-being of its people, yet I have gained nothing but suffering. My mind cannot comprehend how we can become true people while selfish, power-hungry, materialistic scoundrels—who know nothing of unity or what it means to be a nation, and who devour one another for personal gain—still remain on the soil of Turkestan. If we continue in this manner, sabotaging one another, then the day is near when Russian tyranny will defile our Turkestan with its filthy foot. And we, with our own hands, will place the Russian yoke upon the necks of our future generations.”</p>	<p>Yusufbek Hoji, unjustly blamed by his own son’s criticisms, harbors deep disgust toward the power-hungry and materialistic people of his time. He considered the struggle for the independence and unity of the homeland as the meaning of his life. He urged those who were entangled in kinship favoritism, regionalism, and nepotism—engaged in petty disputes—to rise to greater causes. As a visionary figure of his era, he foresaw that if the situation continued as it was, the nation would fall into ruin and the land would be humiliated under the feet of invaders.</p> <p>A nation that raised such sincere and noble-hearted individuals was indeed worthy of living in freedom and independence. Although we once lost our liberty due to internal strife, conflicts, and conspiracies, we have reclaimed it by standing united. Praise be to the Creator, it has now been more than a quarter of a century since our country has been recognized by the whole world. When our national anthem echoes from the world’s highest tribunes, even the most respected figures place their hands over their hearts in reverence. Today, we are living in the bright days that Qodiriy once envisioned.</p>

Another method that promotes the development of students' critical thinking is the "Problem-Based Learning" approach. This method is also based on studying real-life situations, identifying problems,

analyzing and synthesizing them to make well-founded decisions. In the novel O'tkan kunlar, students can identify the problems that led to the tragic end of the main character Kumushbibi's life and express their own views on possible solutions in the following way:

Main problems	Solution	Result
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uzbek Oyim arranging a second marriage for Otabek based on her own desires, without considering his opinion. 2. Kumushbibi not living in Otabek's house in Tashkent after the wedding. 3. Otabek's indifference toward Zaynab. 4. Zaynab's lack of willpower. 5. Both families not taking the in-law relationship seriously. ... 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uzbek Oyim should have considered her son Otabek's feelings and taken his opinions into account. 2. Kumushbibi's parents should have sent their daughter to Tashkent after the wedding instead of keeping her at home in Margilan. 3. Otabek should have treated both of his legally wedded wives equally. 4. Zaynab should not have gone as far as committing murder under any circumstances. 5. Both families failed to act according to Uzbek traditions and customs, which led to the problems. 	<p>Kumush's life would not have ended in tragedy.</p>

The use of the above-mentioned innovative methods by the teacher is most effective when applied within group work settings. This is because critical thinking fosters an environment of diverse perspectives and creates the opportunity to select the most appropriate idea from among various viewpoints.

Thus, since critical thinking is a thought process that begins with the reception of information and ends with decision-making, during this process, students learn the culture of listening and engaging in dialogue while solving controversial issues. They compare different perspectives and arrive at optimal conclusions.

Critical thinking represents the highest level of

students' intellectual activity, where ideas and possibilities are creatively integrated, concentrated, re-evaluated, and reconstructed. In critical thinking, ideas and their significance are viewed from the perspective of multiplicity of opinions and compared with other concepts. It emphasizes analysis, comparison, explanation, application, debate, innovation, problem-solving, and evaluation of the thinking process itself.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, critical thinking is a highly relevant topic in today's educational landscape, and its development necessitates the use of innovative methods. Because in the teaching-learning process, students must

participate actively and understand their responsibility in this process consciously. They should acquire the skills to analyze presented information at different levels. As a result, it becomes possible to nurture critically thinking citizens who can consciously contribute to solving the most important issues in society and assist in addressing various problems at local, regional, national, and international levels. Ultimately, our youth will be equipped with the competence to distinguish constructive ideas from destructive ones.

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