BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21888475

Abstract: This article analyzes the pedagogical foundations of developing critical thinking skills among primary school students. Particular attention is paid to the importance of transforming students from passive recipients of information into active learners who can ask questions, compare different ideas, identify cause-and-effect relationships, search for alternative solutions, and formulate evidence-based conclusions. The article examines the potential of problem-based learning, open-ended questions, group activities, comparison tasks, discussions, and creative exercises in developing students' critical thinking skills. The author's practical observations are also incorporated to demonstrate the importance of providing young learners with opportunities to express their own opinions and participate actively in the learning process. The study emphasizes that an educational environment based on independent thinking can contribute significantly to students' cognitive activity and overall learning effectiveness.

Keywords: primary education, critical thinking, independent thinking, problem-based learning, open-ended questions, creative tasks, analysis, comparison, pedagogical technology.

Introduction One of the main objectives of modern education is not only to provide students with knowledge but also to develop their ability to use that knowledge independently. This objective is particularly important at the primary education level because children's thinking abilities are actively developing during this period. Therefore, creating a learning environment that encourages students to think independently is an essential pedagogical task.In contemporary education, students' activity cannot be measured only by their ability to provide correct answers. It is also important for learners to explain why they have chosen a particular answer, support their opinions with appropriate arguments, and analyze alternative viewpoints. From this perspective, critical thinking represents an important component of effective primary education.Critical thinking involves more than simply receiving information. It includes understanding, analyzing, questioning, comparing different viewpoints, evaluating information, and reaching reasonable conclusions. At the primary level, these skills should be developed gradually through age-appropriate questions, practical activities, problem-solving situations, educational games, and creative tasks.In my opinion, one of the simplest but most effective ways to develop critical thinking in primary school is to ask children "Why?" more often. While a "What?" question may primarily check whether a child remembers information, a "Why?" question encourages the learner to think more deeply and justify an answer.

Relevance of the topic Developing students' independent thinking has become increasingly important in modern education. The amount of information available to children is constantly increasing, and therefore they need to learn how to understand, evaluate, compare, and appropriately use different types of information.For primary school students, this process should

begin with simple activities. For example, learners can be asked to identify similarities and differences between objects, explain the causes of an event, evaluate a character's behavior, find several solutions to a mathematical problem, or express their own opinion about a particular idea.Therefore, when organizing a lesson, a teacher should consider not only the question "What has the student learned?", but also "How has the student thought about what has been learned?"

Pedagogical nature of critical thinking critical thinking involves the ability to use existing knowledge to reach new conclusions, compare different viewpoints, analyze information, and justify one's own position. In primary education, these abilities should be developed gradually and systematically.At the initial stage, students learn to ask questions and search for answers. Later, they learn to compare information, distinguish important details from secondary ones, and identify cause-and-effect relationships. At the next stage, students gradually develop the ability to express their opinions using arguments and formulate independent conclusions.The teacher plays a particularly important role in this process. Instead of constantly providing ready-made answers, the teacher should encourage students to explore, ask questions, and search for solutions independently. When students are given opportunities to discuss ideas, explain their reasoning, and consider different solutions, they gradually become more independent thinkers.

Methods for developing critical thinking Various pedagogical methods can be used to develop critical thinking among primary school students. One of the most effective approaches is problem-based learning. Instead of presenting students with a ready-made solution, the teacher introduces a problem and encourages learners to find possible solutions independently.For example, in a mathematics lesson, students can be asked not only to solve a problem but also to answer the question: "Can this problem be solved in another way?" Such a task encourages learners to reconsider their existing knowledge and search for alternative approaches.

Open-ended questions are particularly useful in reading and language lessons. For example:

"How would you evaluate the character's behavior?"

"What would you do if you were in the character's place?"

"Why do you think the event developed in this way?"

"How would you imagine the continuation of the story?"

Such questions encourage students to go beyond simply retelling a text and to develop their own interpretations.According to my practical observations, students become considerably more active when they are given the opportunity to express their own opinions freely. This is particularly noticeable when a task allows more than one possible answer. In such situations, students tend to express their ideas more confidently and explain their reasoning.In my view, teachers should not limit the assessment of a student's response to the categories "correct" or "incorrect." When an answer is incorrect, it is important to understand the reasoning behind it. Questions such as "Why do you think so?" and "What evidence supports your opinion?" can help students recognize their own mistakes and develop the ability to evaluate their thinking.

Importance of group activities Group activities are also an effective means of developing critical thinking. When working in groups, students not only express their own opinions but also

listen to the ideas of their classmates. Exposure to different viewpoints encourages learners to compare ideas and reconsider their own positions when necessary.For example, students can be divided into groups and asked to propose different solutions to a particular problem. Each group can then present and explain its decision. Such activities help learners develop the ability to listen, ask questions, provide arguments, and formulate conclusions.

Results and discussion The analysis indicates that tasks aimed at developing critical thinking can increase students' cognitive activity during lessons. In order to answer a question, students recall their previous knowledge, connect it with a new situation, analyze the available information, and eventually formulate an independent conclusion. The level of difficulty of the task should correspond to the students' age and abilities. Tasks that are too simple do not provide sufficient opportunities for thinking, while excessively difficult tasks may reduce students' motivation. Therefore, teachers should gradually increase the complexity of tasks according to learners' developmental levels.Critical thinking should also be viewed as a continuous process rather than as an isolated classroom activity. It can be developed through reading, mathematics, language, science, and other subjects. The systematic integration of critical-thinking tasks into different lessons can help students develop stable habits of analysis and independent reasoning.

Pedagogical recommendations The following recommendations can be proposed for developing critical thinking among primary school students:

Use open-ended and problem-based questions regularly.

Create opportunities for students to express their opinions freely.

Frequently use questions such as "Why?", "How?", and "What if?"

Encourage students to search for several solutions to the same problem.

Teach learners to compare opinions and support their ideas with arguments.

Include pair and group activities in the learning process.

Present mistakes not only as shortcomings but also as opportunities for learning.

Assess not only the final answer but also the student's reasoning process.

CONCLUSION In conclusion, developing critical thinking skills among primary school students is one of the important objectives of modern education. Critical thinking contributes not only to students' academic achievement but also to their ability to think independently and make conscious decisions in everyday situations.Problem-based situations, open-ended questions, group activities, comparison tasks, and creative exercises can be effectively used to develop critical thinking in primary education. In this process, the teacher's main responsibility is not simply to provide a ready-made answer but to guide students toward discovering answers independently.In my opinion, the real result of primary education should not be measured only by how much information a student can memorize, but also by how independently the student can think based on that knowledge. Therefore, it is advisable to provide children with at least one opportunity in every lesson to ask a question, solve a problem, and formulate an independent conclusion.

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