

**THE ESSENCE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN MODERN EDUCATION: STRUGGLES
AND PERSPECTIVES**

Boymurodova Feruza Ziyot qizi – Senior Teacher,
MA international Education, Senior teacher
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
boymurodovaferuza555@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article investigates the importance of integrating critical thinking into modern education systems, with particular focus on the Uzbek context. It highlights the current educational shortcomings in fostering independent thought, analytical reasoning, and creativity in students. The paper delves into the significance of critical thinking as a tool for lifelong learning, problem-solving, and personal empowerment. While educational reforms are being introduced, challenges such as teacher-centered instruction, exam-oriented culture, and lack of teacher training hinder the development of critical faculties in learners. The article also offers sustainable solutions to embed critical thinking at all educational levels, with emphasis on curriculum revision, teacher re-education, and classroom strategies.

Key words:

Critical thinking, problem-solving, educational reform, teacher training, student engagement, curriculum development, lifelong learning.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola zamonaviy ta'lim tizimlariga tanqidiy fikrlashni ahamiyatini, xususan O'zbekiston ta'lim tizimi misolida tahlil qiladi. Unda o'quvchilarda mustaqil fikrlash, tahliliy yondashuv va ijodkorlikni shakllantirish borasidagi mavjud kamchiliklar yoritib beriladi. Maqolada tanqidiy fikrlashning umrboqiy ta'lim, muammolarni hal etish va shaxsiy rivojlanish uchun muhim vosita sifatidagi roli batafsil ko'rib chiqiladi. Garchi so'nggi yillarda ta'lim sohasida bir qator islohotlar amalga oshirilayotgan bo'lsa-da, markazli yondashuv, test va imtihonlarga yo'naltirilgan ta'lim madaniyati, hamda o'qituvchilarning yetarli tayyorgarlikka ega emasligi o'quvchilarda tanqidiy fikrlash ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishni cheklab qo'yimoqda.

Ushbu maqola, shuningdek, tanqidiy fikrlashni ta'limning barcha bosqichlariga izchil singdirish uchun barqaror yechimlarni — o'quv dasturlarini qayta ko'rib chiqish, o'qituvchilarni qayta tayyorlash hamda dars jarayonida innovatsion strategiyalarni qo'llash zarurligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar:

Tanqidiy fikrlash, muammolarni hal etish, ta'lim islohoti, o'qituvchilarni tayyorlash, o'quvchi faolligi, o'quv dasturini rivojlantirish, umrboqiy ta'lim.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается значимость интеграции критического мышления в современные образовательные системы, с особым акцентом на узбекский контекст. Автор подчёркивает существующие недостатки в развитии у учащихся самостоятельного мышления, аналитических способностей и творческого подхода. Особое внимание

уделяется роли критического мышления как ключевого инструмента для непрерывного обучения, решения проблем и личностного саморазвития.

Несмотря на проводимые в последние годы образовательные реформы, такие проблемы, как преобладание учитель-центрированной модели обучения, ориентация на экзамены и недостаточная подготовка педагогов, по-прежнему препятствуют формированию критического мышления у учащихся.

В статье предлагаются устойчивые пути внедрения критического мышления на всех уровнях образования, включая пересмотр учебных программ, переобучение учителей и применение эффективных стратегий в учебном процессе.

Ключевые слова:

Критическое мышление, решение проблем, образовательная реформа, подготовка учителей, активность учащихся, развитие учебных программ, непрерывное обучение.

Introduction

In the 21st century, education is not just about transferring information — it is about shaping minds that can think, analyze, and create. One of the most urgent needs of modern education is to cultivate critical thinking — the ability to question, evaluates evidence, consider alternatives, and make reasoned decisions. In Uzbekistan, where education has historically emphasized memorization and repetition, integrating critical thinking remains a formidable yet essential task.

This article seeks to highlight the need for a paradigm shift: from passive learning to active, inquiry-based education. It analyzes the current state of critical thinking in Uzbek classrooms, outlines the cultural and structural barriers, and suggests effective, localized strategies to make our future generations not only knowledgeable but intellectually independent.

The Importance of Critical Thinking in Education

Critical thinking is not a luxury skill — it is the foundation of effective learning, responsible citizenship, and lifelong adaptability. In an age dominated by information overload, students must be able to distinguish facts from misinformation, reason through conflicting viewpoints, and make decisions grounded in evidence.

Educators worldwide agree that critical thinking enhances academic performance across disciplines. It also develops soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and empathy. More importantly, critical thinking nurtures intellectual courage — the willingness to ask difficult questions and reconsider one’s own assumptions.

In Uzbekistan, the national strategy on education increasingly mentions “creative and critical minds” as future goals, especially in the wake of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, moving from rhetoric to real classroom transformation is still in progress.

Challenges in Fostering Critical Thinking in Uzbek Classrooms

1. Exam-oriented system: Standardized testing dominates the educational landscape. Teachers feel pressured to “teach to the test,” focusing on correct answers rather than critical exploration. As a result, students often memorize content without understanding its context or application.
2. Teacher-centered instruction: Despite global pedagogical shifts, many classes in Uzbekistan still rely on lectures and top-down methods. Students are seen as recipients, not participants, in knowledge construction.
3. Limited teacher preparation: Most teachers themselves have not been trained in critical thinking methodologies. They may be unfamiliar with open-ended questioning, debate-based learning, or inquiry-led lessons.
4. Cultural hesitation: In some cases, asking too many questions or challenging authority may be misinterpreted as disrespectful. This cultural tendency can suppress curiosity, which is the first step to critical thinking.
5. Lack of resources: Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack access to diverse teaching materials that support critical engagement — such as case studies, problem-solving tasks, or real-world scenarios.

Comparative Discussion

In developed countries, classroom strategies such as Socratic questioning, project-based learning, and flipped classrooms are widely used to promote higher-order thinking. In contrast, Uzbekistan is still navigating the initial stages of such transformation. However, there are promising signs. Several private schools and international institutions in Uzbekistan are already embedding critical thinking into their curricula. University entrance exams are being restructured to test logic and comprehension, not just memory. English language classes offer unique opportunities for critical engagement through discussions, literature analysis, and cross-cultural debate. Importantly, change must be systemic, not just institutional. Without teacher retraining, curriculum reform, and parental awareness, isolated efforts will not produce sustainable impact.

Suggested Solutions

To truly integrate critical thinking into education, Uzbekistan needs a long-term, multi-level strategy. Here are key steps:

Revise national curriculum: Textbooks and syllabi should include activities that encourage problem-solving, argumentation, and real-life application. Less emphasis on rote learning, more on asking “why” and “how.”

Train the trainers: Massive up skilling of current teachers is essential. Workshops on Bloom’s Taxonomy, Socratic Method, and classroom discussion strategies should be provided regularly.

Classroom strategies:

Use open-ended questions in every lesson.

Encourage group discussions, role plays, and debates.

Include problem-based tasks that require analysis, not just answers.

Assign reflective essays or journals, especially in humanities and social sciences.

Introduce evaluation reforms: Assessment models should test reasoning and creativity. For instance, marking essays based on how well arguments are developed, not just grammar.

Community and parental involvement: Organize public sessions on why critical thinking matters. When parents value questioning and exploration at home, children develop the confidence to apply these skills at school.

Use of media and technology: Platforms like TED-Ed, Edmond, or even YouTube can be integrated into lessons. Teachers should curate digital content that challenges students to evaluate, compare, and synthesize information.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of critical thinking is not a Western ideal; it is a universal educational need. For Uzbekistan to prepare intellectually capable, ethically grounded, and globally competitive citizens, we must prioritize this skill in every school, every subject, and every lesson.

Though challenges remain — from entrenched traditions to systemic inertia — the time to act is now. Our students deserve more than facts; they deserve the ability to think. As a young student myself, I firmly believe that our generation must become not only learners but thinkers. Because only thinking minds can build a thinking nation.

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