CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AS THE COGNITIVE FOUNDATION OF STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING COMPETENCIES.

Allamuratova Khurliman
PhD student of National University of Uzbekistan
named after Mirzo Ulugbek .
Email: khurlimana@gmail.com

Abstract: In the context of the modern socio-economic environment, the ability to effectively perform professional tasks requires an individual to possess a wide range of competencies, including professional, general cultural, and cognitive skills. These competencies enable the individual to acquire knowledge independently, make informed decisions, and work with information As such, developing critical thinking skills has become essential in modern education. This article examines the growing need for cultivating critical thinking abilities among students within the context of the Uzbekistan education system, which has traditionally emphasized the transmission of knowledge rather than fostering independent learning and problem-solving skills. The shift towards teaching students how to discover principles and solve problems autonomously is crucial for preparing them to meet the demands of contemporary professional life.

Keywords: Critical thinking, professional competencies, independent learning, problem-solving, interdisciplinary skills, cognitive skills, decision-making, socio-economic conditions.

To successfully carry out professional activities in the socio-economic conditions of the modern world, an individual must possess knowledge, professional and general cultural competencies, as well as the ability to acquire knowledge independently, make well-considered decisions, and work effectively with information. Since many professional challenges often lie at the intersection of various subject areas, it is essential for a specialist to be able to process information not only within the framework of their specific field, but also in related disciplines. The ability to make decisions and solve problems in professional contexts implies that the individual can analyze available information, distinguish facts from opinions, and evaluate them in accordance with the goals of the individual, society, and industry, as well as moral and ethical values. These conditions necessitate the development of critical thinking skills in professionals. This issue is particularly relevant to the modern education system, as the traditional educational paradigm, which prevailed until recently, was primarily focused on transmitting ready-made scientific conclusions to students by presenting facts, patterns, principles, and rules. However, there is now an urgent need to teach students how to independently discover these principles and rules—that is, to equip them with strategies and methods for problem-solving. [1].

The concept of "critical thinking" is attracting increasing interest among specialists—and this is no coincidence. Critical thinking manifests itself in all areas of human life. A person may be unfamiliar with the phenomenon of critical thinking, and yet a critical perspective is often present in their reasoning. Both domestic and international researchers offer various definitions of the term "critical thinking" in their works; however, these definitions are largely similar in meaning. Richard Paul defines critical thinking as “disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought.” He distinguishes between two forms of critical thinking: the sophistic (weak) and the fair-minded (strong). The sophistic sense of critical thinking is oriented toward advancing the interests of a particular individual or group, without considering external or opposing factors. In contrast, the fair-minded sense of critical thinking involves taking into account the interests of diverse individuals or groups [6]. A.V. Klimanova, in her work, offers the following definition of critical thinking: “a reflective and self-regulated style of thinking governed by the subject of cognitive activity, associated with the individual’s motivational attitudes, in which a person acquires knowledge through the formulation and testing of hypotheses, as well as the argumentation of conclusions while considering a variety of alternative perspectives on the nature of the object of thought” [4 2016, p. 51]. D. Halpern defines critical thinking as “the use of cognitive techniques or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome” [5, 2000, p. 23].

Thus, definitions of critical thinking emphasize its characteristic features: the construction of logical reasoning, the development of internally consistent logical models, and the making of well-founded decisions regarding whether to reject a judgment, accept it, or postpone its evaluation. All of these definitions imply a form of mental activity directed toward solving a specific cognitive task. The word “critical” in the term “critical thinking” denotes an evaluative orientation. Often, this word is used to express a negative attitude toward something—for example, when one says, “He was highly critical of the book.” However, evaluation can and should be a constructive expression of both positive and negative attitudes.

“Criticality (from Ancient Greek κριτική τέχνη—‘the art of judgment, analysis’) is one of the properties of normal mental activity—the ability to recognize one’s own errors, to evaluate one's thoughts, to weigh arguments for and against emerging hypotheses, and to subject those hypotheses to thorough scrutiny” [5, 2000, p. 21]. A critical mindset is essential at all stages of the learning process, as analysis, comparison, generalization, and refutation are required throughout. The formulation of hypotheses is impossible without a critical approach to the problem. In the process of hypothesizing, the statement “the hypothesis is true if…” allows for verification of its validity.

Critical evaluation should be present during the phase of proving or disproving the hypothesis, as well as at the stage of summarizing, assessing the process and outcomes of learning activities—that is, during the diagnosis of task execution, problem-solving, evaluation of results or behavior, confirmation of conclusions, and the search for the most rational solution to a given problem. Even at the very first stage of problem-based learning—the stage of analyzing the problem situation and formulating the problem—criticism, self-criticism, and self-assessment play a vital role. An individual equipped with critical thinking skills is capable of evaluating the outcomes of their own cognitive activity—assessing how correct a decision was or how successfully a particular task was completed. Critical thinking also involves evaluating the thinking process itself—the reasoning that led to specific conclusions, or the factors considered in the decision-making process. Critical thinking is also referred to as "directed thinking", as it is oriented toward achieving a desired outcome. D. Halpern identified the key stages that should be present in the process of directed thinking. Let us take a closer look at each of these stages [3]:

1. What is the goal?

The first stage in the development of thinking is the identification of final goals. A clearly defined goal allows the thought process to be coordinated and directed in the necessary direction.

2. What is known?

This is the starting point of critical thinking. It involves the verification of information, through which the reliability and completeness of the information are determined.

3. What thinking skills will help you achieve the set goal?

Knowing how to move from the starting point to the final destination is the driving force behind critical thinking. When there are multiple goals, different strategies may exist for achieving them. This stage involves developing an appropriate system of strategies based on the goals set.

4. Has the goal been achieved?

The final stage of critical thinking, which involves summarizing the results and drawing conclusions.

In the field of education, there is a common misconception that critical thinking is equated with cognitive processes such as memorization and comprehension. It is important to understand that, while memory development is significant, memorization is not the same as thinking. The development of intelligence is more closely related to the cultivation of independent thinking than to the reliance

on memory. Comprehension, on the other hand, is only one of the preliminary conditions for critical thinking.

D. Kluster identifies five aspects that distinguish critical thinking from other types of thinking [5]:

1. Critical thinking is independent thinking.

2. Information is the starting point, not the final destination of critical thinking. Knowledge creates motivation, without which a person cannot think critically.

3. Critical thinking begins with the formulation of questions and clarifying the problems that need to be solved.

4. Critical thinking aims for convincing argumentation.

5. Critical thinking is social thinking.

P. Facione defines critical thinking as the ability to reflect on and hold judgment before making a decision. The author concludes that critical thinking encompasses a set of cognitive skills as well as a range of affective dispositions. Cognitive skills include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Additionally, the author notes that critical thinking is also based on personal qualities such as [2]:

- curiosity about a wide range of issues;

- a desire for new knowledge;

- confidence in one's own reasoning abilities;

- foresight in regard to divergent views of the world;

- flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions;

- understanding of other people's opinions;

- objectivity in evaluating reasoning, honesty in confronting one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, egocentric or socio centric tendencies. - Caution when suspending, making, or changing decisions;

- willingness to reconsider one's views.

Interest in critical thinking as a distinct cognitive process has emerged only recently. It is only in recent years that educators have begun developing curricula aimed at enhancing students' cognitive abilities. It is hard to imagine any area of life where the ability to think clearly would not be necessary. Critical thinking skills can help, for example, to recognize propaganda and thus avoid falling victim to it, analyze false premises in arguments, identify obvious deception, assess the reliability of a given information source, and thoughtfully consider each task or decision made.

Collaborative research by educators and scholars worldwide has led to the creation of what is known as critical thinking technology. This technology consists of various techniques aimed primarily at engaging the learner (awakening their research and creative activity), then providing them with the conditions to reflect on the material, and finally, helping them generalize the acquired knowledge. In other words, it is a system of strategies that integrates teaching techniques based on types of educational activities, regardless of the specific subject content. This technology allows students to master different ways of integrating information, develops their ability to form their own opinion based on the reflection of various experiences, ideas, and concepts, to draw conclusions and logical chains of reasoning, and to express their thoughts clearly, confidently, and respectfully towards others.

Conclusion

In today's rapidly changing socio-economic landscape, the ability to critically assess and solve problems is more important than ever. Professionals must not only possess knowledge and technical skills, but also be adept at working with information across various disciplines. The shift from a traditional education model, which primarily focused on the transmission of ready-made knowledge, to one that encourages independent learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking, is essential for preparing students to meet the challenges of the modern world. By fostering critical thinking skills, the education system can better equip students to analyze information, make informed decisions, and evaluate facts and opinions in accordance with moral and ethical values. This transformation in teaching methods will ultimately enable students to develop a deeper understanding of complex issues, work effectively in interdisciplinary contexts, and contribute meaningfully to society. Therefore, integrating critical thinking into the educational process is not just a necessity but a key to unlocking the full potential of future professionals.

Reference

1. Afanaseva, A.E. (2017). Структура и содержание межкультурнойкомпетенции учащихся старших классов при обучении иностранному языку// Молодой ученый. — 2017. — №11. — С. 440-442, 11, 440-442.

2. Facione, P. (2010). 'Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts?" Millbrae, CA: Peter A. Facione, Measured Reasons and the California Academic Press.

3. Halpern, D. (2000). "Psychology of Critical Thinking". St. Petersburg: Piter, 496p.

4. Klimanova, A.V. (2016). Representations of critical thinking in the consciousness of modern youth. "Izvestiya Rossiyskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta im. A.I. Gertsen, 108, 51-58.

5. Kluster, D. (2001). What is critical thinking? “Peremena: International Journal of Development of Thinking through Reading and Writing”, 4, 36-40.
6. Paul, R.W. (1990). “Critical Thinking”. Sonoma State University, 571 p.