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Developing Critical Thinking as a Key Competency of a Modern Student

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Abstract: The article examines the importance of critical thinking as a key competence of a modern student. The essence and functions of this competence are revealed, as well as methods for its development in higher education. The role of the teacher in creating conditions that promote students' analytical and reflective skills is emphasized.

Keys words: critical thinking, competencies, students, higher education, teaching methods.

In modern society, characterized by rapidly advancing technology, a vast amount of accessible information, and constant social change, the ability to think critically is becoming not just a desirable quality, but a vital skill. In an environment of information overload, people are daily confronted with a flood of messages, news, and opinions that require thoughtful perception and evaluation. Critical thinking enables students not only to absorb knowledge but also to consciously apply it in their academic, scientific, and professional activities.

Critical thinking is a set of intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, and personal attitudes aimed at logical, reasoned, and balanced understanding of information. It includes the ability to analyze, compare, and generalize facts, identify cause-and-effect relationships, and distinguish between reliable information and subjective interpretations. An important component of critical thinking is the ability to formulate questions, develop hypotheses, challenge assertions, and articulate arguments for one's position. An integral part of this process is reflection—the awareness and analysis of one's own beliefs, assumptions, and errors—which promotes personal responsibility and independence in decision-making [4].

For today's students, critical thinking is a key competency that ensures successful learning and future professional development. It helps build the learning process based on analysis and evidence, rather than rote memorization. In the face of the proliferation of unreliable information and manipulative technologies, critical thinking becomes a tool for protecting against external influence and distortion of facts. Thanks to this skill, students are able to independently evaluate the credibility of sources, distinguish between scientific data and subjective opinions, and form their own, reasoned worldview [6].

This skill is especially important when working with scientific literature, where it is necessary to distinguish relevant research from outdated or refuted data. Critical thinking facilitates a deep understanding of the content of scientific works, the identification of contradictions, the analysis of research methodology, and the development of a personal research position. During lectures and seminars, it helps students not simply perceive information but also comprehend it, ask clarifying and problematic questions, engage in reasoned discussions, and propose their own solutions [1].

Developing critical thinking is also important beyond the classroom. In professional and everyday life, this skill helps you make rational decisions, analyze situations from multiple perspectives, and avoid impulsive or forced conclusions. For example, when applying for a job, the ability to analyze job postings, compare employer promises with reality, and recognize discrepancies in information helps you avoid mistakes and make informed choices [3].

Critical thinking in students is a special type of intellectual activity based on the ability to consciously analyze, evaluate, and interpret information, as well as to develop one's own logically sound judgments. Students with developed critical thinking are able to approach academic, scientific, and real-life problems thoughtfully, avoiding superficial and stereotypical judgments [5].

A student can be said to demonstrate critical thinking if they are able to locate and use primary sources, analyze facts, establish cause-and-effect relationships, examine a problem from different perspectives, formulate and test hypotheses, formulate logical conclusions, and articulately defend their position in a discussion. Such students don't simply passively absorb information, but strive to comprehend it, test it, and apply it in new contexts.

It should be emphasized that critical thinking is not an innate quality; it is a skill that develops through learning and ongoing practice. This is why developing students' critical thinking is considered one of the most important goals of higher education. The teacher's task is to create conditions for students' active engagement in analytical and reflective activities, using modern pedagogical technologies and methods [8].

One effective approach to developing this skill is the technology for the development of critical thinking (TDCT), which includes three key phases: challenge, comprehension, and reflection.

- At the challenge stage, the teacher encourages students to actively think, ask questions, make assumptions, and update their existing knowledge.
- The stage of comprehension is aimed at a deep study of new material, its analysis and interpretation.
- In the final phase—reflection—students summarize the knowledge they have acquired, formulate their own conclusions, and evaluate their validity.

The use of this technology makes the educational process not only more interactive, but also contributes to the development of students’ sustainable skills of analysis, argumentation and self-assessment [2].

Among modern interactive and digital teaching methods aimed at developing students' critical thinking, several effective approaches can be identified.

The "Draw an Argument Diagram (Visual Map)" Method" is a tool that helps develop students' analytical and logical skills. Its essence lies in visualizing the structure of an argument, including the thesis, arguments, counterarguments, and conclusion. This format allows for a clear understanding of the logic of reasoning and the identification of gaps and weaknesses in the argument. The method is implemented both using digital services (Coggle, MindMeister, XMind, Miro) and traditionally on paper. During the process, students create visual diagrams reflecting the flow of argumentation, after which they conduct a comparative analysis and discussion. The use of a mind map, argument map, or fishbone diagram makes the process of analyzing arguments interactive, promotes the development of systems thinking and the ability to construct logical reasoning, and increases learning motivation through visual and creative elements.

Backward Design This is a modern pedagogical approach based on the principle of building learning from ultimate goals to content and methods. First, the knowledge and skills students need to develop are determined, then criteria for assessing their success are developed, and then corresponding learning activities are planned. This approach ensures a focused and meaningful educational process, promotes students' ability to understand the logic of their own actions, and develops critical self-assessment skills.

For example, if the goal is to develop the ability to distinguish between strong and weak arguments,

assessment can be accomplished through text analysis and reflection, and the learning process can include exercises in analyzing arguments, identifying logical fallacies, and conducting debates. The use of the backward design method ensures a logical relationship between the goals, content, and learning outcomes, which increases the effectiveness and awareness of the educational process [7].

Thus, modern interactive and digital teaching methods promote the development of critical thinking, analytical, and reflective skills in students. Their use makes the educational process more meaningful, purposeful, and logically structured. The use of visualization, digital tools, and a project-based approach ensures students' active engagement in the learning process, developing their ability to independently analyze, reason, and evaluate the quality of their own reasoning, which meets the requirements of modern education. Consequently, The development of critical thinking should be considered one of the priority tasks of modern higher education, aimed at preparing active, competent and responsible specialists of the 21st century.

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