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ISSUES OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING OF FUTURE EDUCATORS

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Abstract. This article explores the issues, challenges, and strategies associated with the development of critical thinking among future educators. In the context of modern higher education, critical thinking is not merely an academic skill but an essential professional competence that determines the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make reasoned judgments in pedagogical practice. The study discusses theoretical foundations of critical thinking, its pedagogical significance, and the role of reflective and problem-based learning in fostering it.

Keywords: critical thinking, teacher education, pedagogy, reflection, analytical skills, higher education, problem-based learning.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the transformation of education has placed new demands on teachers. They are no longer seen merely as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators of thinking and creators of learning environments that nurture intellectual autonomy. Critical thinking, therefore, becomes a central component of professional competence for future educators. It encompasses the ability to question, interpret, analyze, and synthesize information in order to make balanced and evidence-based decisions [1].

However, the development of critical thinking in teacher education remains one of the most complex pedagogical challenges. Many students entering pedagogical universities are accustomed to reproductive forms of learning that emphasize memorization rather than evaluation or reflection. Consequently, teacher educators must create conditions that transform passive learners into active inquirers. Developing critical thinking requires not only methodological innovation but also a shift in pedagogical culture toward openness, dialogue, and reflective practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The concept of critical thinking has been the focus of philosophers and educators for centuries. Socratic dialogue, Baconian empiricism, and Deweyan pragmatism all stress the importance of questioning and evidence-based reasoning. In modern pedagogy, critical thinking is viewed as a cognitive and affective skill set that allows individuals to process information analytically and apply knowledge in new contexts. For future educators, this skill is particularly vital because they must model independent and reflective thought for their students.

Critical thinking development in pedagogical education involves multiple dimensions — cognitive, emotional, and ethical. Cognitively, it enables students to interpret and evaluate information. Emotionally, it cultivates intellectual courage and openness to alternative viewpoints. Ethically, it fosters responsibility and intellectual integrity in decision-making. To develop these qualities, teacher educators must employ instructional methods that stimulate inquiry, discussion, and self-reflection [2].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem-based learning (PBL) is one of the most effective approaches in this regard. It situates learning within realistic, ambiguous scenarios that demand analysis and solution-finding. When

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future teachers engage in problem-solving related to classroom management, curriculum design, or ethical dilemmas, they not only acquire knowledge but also learn to weigh evidence, anticipate consequences, and defend their reasoning. PBL thus serves as both a pedagogical tool and a simulation of professional practice.

Another significant method is reflective learning, rooted in John Dewey's philosophy that "we do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." Reflection helps future educators evaluate their actions, assumptions, and values. Through reflective journals, peer discussions, and case analysis, students learn to identify biases, question authority, and make conscious pedagogical choices. Reflection transforms intuition into conscious reasoning — a hallmark of critical thought [3].

Dialogical pedagogy also contributes to developing critical thinking. Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, this approach views learning as an exchange of ideas where truth emerges through interaction rather than imposition. In teacher education, dialogical methods — such as debates, seminars, and Socratic questioning — encourage students to articulate arguments, consider counterpositions, and build collective understanding. Such communication fosters tolerance and intellectual empathy, essential traits for educators working in diverse classrooms.

Despite its theoretical appeal, implementing critical thinking in teacher education faces several practical barriers. Traditional assessment systems often prioritize correct answers over reasoning processes, discouraging risk-taking and creativity. Curriculum overload leaves little time for discussion-based learning. Moreover, many teacher educators themselves lack specialized training in critical pedagogy, which limits their ability to model these skills. Overcoming these challenges requires institutional reform, ongoing professional development, and a reevaluation of teaching objectives.

The use of technology can also enhance the cultivation of critical thinking. Digital platforms that support collaborative learning — such as online forums, simulation tools, and interactive case studies — allow students to engage in analytical discussions and share perspectives. However, technology should not replace dialogue but rather extend it. The key lies in using digital tools as a means of inquiry rather than passive information consumption.

Furthermore, the integration of research-based learning into teacher education programs significantly strengthens critical thinking. When students participate in small-scale pedagogical studies, classroom observations, or action research, they experience the process of knowledge construction firsthand. Research activity develops skepticism toward unverified information and reinforces the link between theory and practice — an essential competency for reflective practitioners [4].

CONCLUSION

The development of critical thinking among future educators is both a pedagogical necessity and a societal imperative. In an era defined by information overload and ideological polarization, educators must serve as guides in the search for truth and meaning. Critical thinking equips them to navigate complexity, evaluate conflicting data, and make reasoned, ethical judgments.

To achieve this, teacher education institutions must create learning environments grounded in inquiry, reflection, and collaboration. Problem-based tasks, reflective journals, and dialogical methods should replace rote learning and authoritarian instruction. Only through such transformative approaches can higher education prepare teachers who are not mere transmitters of knowledge but cultivators of thought.

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