DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS

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Abstract: *This article explores effective ways to develop critical thinking skills among primary school students using active learning methods. In an era of information overload, equipping young learners with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make reasoned judgments is more important than ever. The paper discusses theoretical foundations of critical thinking, outlines the specific characteristics of young learners, and presents various active learning strategies—such as problem-solving, group discussions, and inquiry-based learning—that promote deeper engagement and cognitive development. Practical classroom applications and teacher roles are also examined.*

Keywords: *Critical thinking, primary education, active learning, problem-solving, inquiry-based learning, student engagement, cognitive development.*

Modern education is no longer confined to memorizing facts and reproducing them in tests. The rapid evolution of technology and the easy accessibility of information demand that students, even at the primary level, develop higher-order thinking skills. Critical thinking—defined as the ability to reason, question, analyze, and reflect—is becoming a core competency in education systems worldwide.

Primary school provides a crucial window for shaping learners’ cognitive habits. Children at this stage are naturally curious and eager to explore their environment, making it the perfect time to nurture analytical and evaluative thinking. However, traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote learning are insufficient to meet these needs. Instead, active learning strategies must be integrated to promote critical thinking from an early age.

This article aims to explore how active learning can be effectively used to develop critical thinking skills in primary school students, and what role teachers play in facilitating this growth.

Critical thinking is not an innate talent but a skill that must be taught and practiced over time. According to educational theorists such as John Dewey and Benjamin Bloom, critical thinking includes analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and reflection—skills that are vital not only in education but also in real-life decision-making.

In the context of primary education, developing critical thinking begins with creating a learning environment where students feel safe to ask questions, make mistakes, and express their opinions. Teachers must shift from being information providers to facilitators of thinking.

One of the most effective strategies to stimulate critical thinking is problem-based learning. In this method, students are presented with real-life or fictional problems and are

encouraged to find solutions through group collaboration, research, and reflection. For example, a math problem about budgeting for a class event can be used to develop reasoning and decision-making skills.

Instead of closed questions with one right answer, teachers should use open-ended questions such as “Why do you think that happened?” or “What would you do differently?” These types of questions challenge students to reflect, justify their thoughts, and consider alternative viewpoints.

Classroom discussions, when managed effectively, can become powerful tools for fostering critical thinking. Socratic questioning encourages students to dig deeper into their assumptions and articulate their reasoning. In group discussions, students learn to listen, disagree respectfully, and support their arguments with evidence.

This approach allows students to explore topics of interest through guided discovery. They learn to ask questions, collect information, and draw conclusions independently or in teams. For example, a science lesson about plants might involve students researching how sunlight affects plant growth and conducting simple experiments.

Reflection journals, “exit tickets,” or post-lesson discussions help students process what they have learned. These activities encourage metacognition—thinking about one’s thinking—which is essential for developing critical awareness.

To develop critical thinking in students, teachers must be critical thinkers themselves. They should model analytical behavior, encourage multiple perspectives, and avoid giving immediate answers. Instead, they can prompt students to explore options and make reasoned choices.

Teaching critical thinking in primary education is no longer optional—it is essential for preparing students to thrive in a complex, ever-changing world. Active learning methods such as problem-based learning, inquiry, and discussion are effective tools for engaging young minds and nurturing independent thought. By fostering a classroom culture that values questioning, reasoning, and open dialogue, educators empower students to become thoughtful, reflective, and capable learners. The development of these skills at an early stage lays the foundation for academic success, lifelong learning, and responsible citizenship.

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