

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING IN FUTURE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Critical thinking is regarded as one of the most essential skills of the 21st century, especially in the field of education. The changing demands of contemporary society, the rapid evolution of technology, and the growing complexity of knowledge have intensified the importance of developing critical thinking among future primary school teachers. As primary school teachers are tasked not only with imparting basic academic knowledge but also with shaping the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children, their ability to think critically becomes a fundamental prerequisite for effective pedagogy, curriculum development, and holistic student guidance.

**Keywords:** Critical Thinking, Primary Education, Teacher Education, Reflective Practice, Pedagogical Skills, Assessment, Digital Literacy, Collaboration, Ethical Development, Lifelong Learning

### INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the role of primary school teachers extends far beyond simple knowledge transmission. Future primary school teachers are expected not only to educate children but also to inspire, guide, and nurture their intellectual, emotional, and social growth. Among the vital competencies required in this process, critical thinking stands out as a crucial skill. The ability to think critically empowers teachers to analyze educational situations, make informed decisions, and address challenges effectively. It enables them to create a dynamic learning environment in which students learn to question, analyze, and innovate. Teacher education programs, therefore, bear great responsibility in equipping pre-service teachers with the tools, mindset, and understanding essential for critical thinking. Strengthening this competence paves the way for more effective teaching, better student outcomes, and a future generation capable of facing complex problems with creativity and sound judgment. As the demands on education rise, the importance of fostering critical thinking in future primary school teachers becomes ever more evident, serving as the cornerstone of a high-quality, forward-thinking educational system.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Critical thinking in the context of primary education is not just about answering questions correctly or following a traditional curriculum. It is a multifaceted process that involves analyzing, evaluating, questioning, and synthesizing information. Prospective primary school teachers must be able to assess new approaches, challenge existing assumptions, and adapt to the ever-changing needs of their students. The ability to think critically empowers future educators to identify true sources of information, detect bias, weigh evidence effectively, and provide a balanced perspective in the classroom environment. An essential aspect of cultivating critical thinking among future primary school teachers lies in the structure and content of teacher preparation programs. Comprehensive and dynamic training programs that emphasize inquiry-based learning, reflective practices, and problem-solving activities are crucial. Encouraging student teachers to participate in discussions, debates, and collaborative projects not only makes learning more engaging but also strengthens analytical thinking, logical reasoning, and open-mindedness. In this environment, university professors and mentors play a

central role by modeling critical thinking themselves and creating opportunities for prospective teachers to experiment, make decisions, and reflect on the results of those decisions [1].

Teacher education should deliberately integrate critical thinking into all components of its curriculum. This includes coursework on educational theories, child development, lesson planning, and instructional strategies, as well as practical teaching experiences during internship periods. Prospective teachers should frequently be exposed to real-world dilemmas and hypothetical situations that require them to analyze, compare, criticize, or defend different viewpoints. They also need opportunities to observe experienced teachers, engage in peer teaching, and receive constructive feedback in a supportive environment. The process of observation, imitation, and reflection enables future teachers to form their own ways of thinking and gradually internalize critical approaches [2].

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effective teacher educators understand that the development of critical thinking is a gradual and ongoing process. It cannot be achieved solely through lectures or reading textbooks, but it requires continuous practice, self-evaluation, and self-correction. Future teachers must be encouraged to challenge their prior beliefs and assumptions, confront contradictions, and seek out multiple sources of information. The fostering of intellectual curiosity, skepticism, and creativity is strongly linked to providing a learning environment that respects individual differences and diverse perspectives. Critical thinking, as it applies to teaching practice, demands the willingness to question not only the information being taught but also the methods by which it is delivered. Prospective primary school teachers should be able to scrutinize the goals of education, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the effectiveness of assessment strategies. They need to recognize that children come from various backgrounds with unique experiences, learning styles, and needs. A critically-minded teacher continually evaluates and adapts teaching methods to maximize every child's learning potential. Assessment plays a pivotal role in reinforcing or hindering critical thinking among student teachers. Traditional evaluation systems that reward rote memorization and correct repetition of information are detrimental to the development of analytical abilities. Instead, assessment approaches should focus on open-ended questions, project-based learning, classroom debates, and opportunities for self-reflection. Student teachers should be evaluated on their ability to provide reasoned arguments, support their opinions with evidence, and offer alternative solutions to educational problems [4].

Critical thinking also thrives in an environment that values collaboration and dialogue. Teacher education institutions must create a culture of trust, respect, and openness to critical exchange among future teachers. Group work, peer feedback, collaborative lesson planning, and mutual observation not only foster teamwork but encourage the sharing of diverse viewpoints. The resulting synergy sharpens critical faculties and broadens one's understanding of educational challenges. Another important dimension is the ethical development of future teachers. Critical thinking is intrinsically bound to moral responsibility, empathy, and fairness. Candidate teachers must learn to recognize their own biases and reflect on the impact of their decisions on students' lives. Courses in educational ethics, multicultural education, and social justice can cultivate this awareness and support the formation of educators who are not only critical but also compassionate and principled. The challenge of fostering critical thinking is further amplified by the pervasive influence of information and communication technologies in today's classrooms. Future primary school teachers need digital literacy and media literacy, the capacity to evaluate the validity, reliability, and relevance of online sources, and the skills to incorporate appropriate digital tools into their teaching. Technology offers enormous

opportunities but also brings new risks, such as misinformation, superficial learning, and distraction. Critical thinking empowers teachers to use technology wisely and teach students to do the same. In the global context, teacher preparation programs increasingly emphasize the importance of intercultural competence alongside critical thinking. Modern classrooms are diverse, featuring students from different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Prospective teachers must be prepared to approach diversity not as a challenge but as a resource. Critical thinking enables future teachers to question stereotypes, re-examine prejudices, and create inclusive learning environments that honor every student's identity [5].

It is important to note that developing critical thinking in future primary school teachers does not mean disregarding local traditions or educational values. Instead, it is about providing young teachers with the tools to analyze, engage with, and enhance those traditions in response to contemporary challenges. Future educators need to become agents of positive change, able to blend the strengths of their communities with best global practices for the benefit of their students. The journey towards critical thinking starts with self-awareness and personal growth. Teacher education should encourage future teachers to engage in self-analysis, set realistic goals, and take responsibility for their lifelong professional development. Reflective journals, professional portfolios, and mentoring processes inspire student teachers to review their experiences critically and extract meaningful lessons. Through ongoing dialogue with peers and mentors, they identify both strengths and areas for improvement in their thinking processes. Research methodology, though often overlooked in teacher education, is a crucial avenue for expanding critical faculties. Future teachers should have basic familiarity with action research, data collection, and classroom-based inquiry. Systematic observation, careful analysis of results, and the application of findings to improve practice are all aspects requiring critical and scientific thinking. Encouraging student teachers to design, conduct, and evaluate simple research projects in education provides them with authentic opportunities to practice critical thinking and problem-solving. Furthermore, the development of critical thinking must continue beyond pre-service education. Policy makers and educational leaders should ensure that professional development and in-service training programs for teachers include opportunities for further reflection, study, and scholarly exchange. Continuing education workshops, teacher study groups, and participation in educational conferences can maintain the momentum of critical thinking development and keep teachers abreast of the latest pedagogical and scientific innovations. With all the above in mind, the role of educational leadership in promoting critical thinking cannot be overstated. School administrators, curriculum designers, and educational policy makers set the tone for the culture of critical reflection, inquiry, and improvement. They should encourage risk-taking, value constructive feedback, and reward innovation among teachers. When the entire educational community is committed to critical thinking, the benefits extend far beyond individual classrooms to the whole education system and, ultimately, to society at large.

The process of cultivating critical thinking among future primary school teachers is neither easy nor straightforward. It requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders—universities, teacher trainers, school mentors, policy makers, and the future teachers themselves. It demands time, patience, resources, and an unwavering belief in the value of independent, analytical, and creative thought. Yet, in the long run, the investment in critical thinking yields powerful dividends: teachers who are confident, adaptable, and visionary; students who are motivated, inquisitive, and responsible; and schools that serve as beacons of democratic, just, and resilient societies.

## CONCLUSION



In summary, the development of critical thinking among future primary school teachers is a foundational undertaking that shapes the future of education. Through carefully crafted curricula, practical experiences, reflective practices, collaboration, ethical sensitivity, digital and intercultural competence, continuous self-improvement, and supportive leadership, it is possible to prepare a new generation of teachers who are intellectually equipped, morally grounded, and ready to face the challenges of tomorrow's schools. The commitment to critical thinking strengthens not only individual careers but the very fabric of society by nurturing discerning, responsible, and active citizens.

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