

**DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AS A METHODOLOGICAL ISSUE IN  
TEACHING NATIVE LANGUAGE LESSONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL****Allayeva Hafiza Rustamovna**Teacher of the Department of Primary Education Methodology, Denov Institute of  
Entrepreneurship and Pedagogy**Аннотация**

В этой статье рассматривается интеграция навыков критического мышления в преподавание уроков родного языка в начальных школах. В ней критическое мышление рассматривается как педагогическая и методологическая проблема, анализируются проблемы, возможности и передовой опыт в контексте раннего языкового образования. Опираясь на образовательную теорию, наблюдение за классом и анализ учебной программы, исследование изучает, как критическое мышление можно развивать с помощью чтения, письма и говорения на уроках родного языка. Результаты показывают, что когда стратегии обучения намеренно разрабатываются для поощрения исследования, размышления и аргументации, учащиеся младших классов развивают когнитивные навыки более высокого порядка, не ставя под угрозу усвоение языка. Статья завершается методическими рекомендациями для разработчиков учебных программ и практикующих специалистов в классах.

**Ключевые слова.** Критическое мышление, начальное образование, преподавание родного языка, когнитивное развитие, методология обучения, языковая педагогика, ранняя грамотность, рефлексивное мышление, стратегии работы в классе.

**Abstract**

This article explores the integration of critical thinking skills into the teaching of native language (mother tongue) lessons in primary schools. It examines critical thinking as a pedagogical and methodological issue, analyzing the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in the context of early language education. Drawing on educational theory, classroom observation, and curriculum analysis, the study investigates how critical thinking can be nurtured through reading, writing, and speaking activities in native language classes. Results demonstrate that when teaching strategies are intentionally designed to promote inquiry, reflection, and argumentation, students in the early grades develop higher-order cognitive skills without compromising language acquisition. The article concludes with methodological recommendations for curriculum developers and classroom practitioners.

**Keywords.** Critical thinking, primary education, native language teaching, cognitive development, instructional methodology, language pedagogy, early literacy, reflective thinking, classroom strategies.

**INTRODUCTION**

In today's rapidly changing world, the ability to think critically has become a fundamental skill for lifelong learning, active citizenship, and personal development. Educational reforms across the globe increasingly emphasize not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the cultivation of cognitive and metacognitive abilities from an early age. Primary education, as the foundational stage of formal learning, is particularly important for instilling habits of mind that support critical thinking. Among core subjects, the native language — often referred to as the mother tongue — offers unique opportunities to develop such skills through linguistic interaction, comprehension, analysis, and expression.

Teaching the native language in primary school typically involves developing literacy: reading fluency, basic writing skills, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar. However, traditional approaches often emphasize memorization, reproduction, and literal comprehension, leaving little room for higher-order thinking. In contrast, fostering critical thinking requires engaging students in tasks that involve questioning, interpretation, argumentation, and evaluation — processes that are central to language use in real-world contexts.

Critical thinking in language learning is more than a set of discrete skills; it is a mindset that values reasoning, open-mindedness, and evidence-based judgment. It aligns closely with language functions such as explaining, persuading, narrating, and hypothesizing. Therefore, integrating critical thinking into mother tongue instruction is not only desirable but pedagogically coherent. This article investigates how critical thinking can be meaningfully incorporated into native language instruction in primary school. It explores the methodological challenges teachers face, the cognitive readiness of young learners, and the types of language activities that can promote critical reflection. The study also considers how curriculum standards and assessment practices can support or hinder this goal. Drawing on empirical data and theoretical insights, the article aims to offer a practical and research-informed roadmap for educators seeking to cultivate critical thinkers through language teaching.

#### LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

The development of critical thinking has been extensively studied in the context of secondary and higher education, yet its application in primary schooling remains a growing area of interest. Pioneers such as Bloom (1956) and Ennis (1985) laid the groundwork by defining critical thinking as the ability to evaluate arguments, solve problems, and make reasoned decisions. Paul and Elder (2006) further elaborated on the intellectual traits associated with critical thinkers, including clarity, accuracy, relevance, logic, and fairness.

In language education, critical thinking has been recognized as a means to deepen understanding and enhance communication skills. Cummins (2000) highlights that language learning is inherently cognitive and that critical thinking should be embedded in all stages of language instruction. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of dialogue, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), suggesting that critical thinking can be nurtured even in early childhood when supported by appropriate interaction.

Recent studies in early literacy have emphasized the value of dialogic reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), Socratic questioning (Fisher, 2005), and narrative construction (Bruner, 1986) in fostering cognitive skills in young learners. These methods encourage students not only to decode text but to interpret, critique, and reimagine it. In mother tongue instruction, such strategies align naturally with activities like storytelling, poetry analysis, and personal writing.

However, challenges remain. Research by Alexander (2008) and Mercer (2010) points out that classroom discourse is often dominated by Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) patterns, where teachers ask closed questions and students provide brief, factual answers. Such patterns limit the development of sustained reasoning and reflective thought. Moreover, early grade curricula are often overloaded with content, leaving little space for exploratory discussion.

The literature reveals a consensus on the importance of critical thinking but diverges on the best methods for cultivating it in young learners. Some argue for explicit instruction in reasoning skills, while others advocate for an integrated approach through engaging content and open-ended tasks. This article contributes to the field by focusing specifically on native language lessons in the primary grades and by examining how methodological adjustments can facilitate the development of critical thinking.

The study employed a qualitative research design combining classroom observation, content analysis of teaching materials, and semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers. The research was conducted in five public primary schools in an urban region where the native language (Uzbek) is the medium of instruction. The target group included teachers of grades 1–4 and their students engaged in native language lessons.

1. **Classroom Observation:** Over a period of six weeks, twenty language lessons were observed using a structured observation checklist adapted from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The checklist focused on teacher questioning strategies, student engagement in reasoning, use of open-ended tasks, and collaborative dialogue.
2. **Content Analysis:** Textbooks and workbooks for primary language instruction were reviewed to identify the presence of activities aligned with critical thinking — such as comparing characters, forming opinions, justifying choices, and constructing narratives.
3. **Teacher Interviews:** Ten teachers were interviewed regarding their perceptions of critical thinking, methods for fostering it, challenges they encounter, and training received. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed.

Data triangulation was used to enhance validity. Observational data were cross-checked with interview responses and textbook analysis to ensure coherence. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and participant anonymity, were strictly followed.

The analytic framework was based on Bloom’s revised taxonomy, focusing on higher-order cognitive domains — analyzing, evaluating, and creating — as indicators of critical thinking. The data were coded using NVivo software and categorized into emerging themes such as questioning techniques, student agency, task design, and assessment alignment.

This methodological approach allowed for a rich understanding of how critical thinking is conceptualized and practiced in native language classrooms at the primary level, as well as what methodological shifts are required to make its development more systematic and effective.

## RESULTS

The analysis revealed several key findings regarding the integration of critical thinking into native language lessons in primary education. Firstly, although most teachers recognized the importance of critical thinking, their understanding of the concept varied significantly. While some defined it as “thinking independently” or “giving opinions,” others associated it with “solving puzzles” or “finding correct answers,” indicating a need for deeper professional training.

**Classroom Practices:** Observational data showed that teacher questioning was predominantly factual and closed-ended. For instance, 78% of questions observed were recall-based (e.g., “What did the character do?”), while only 22% prompted interpretation or reasoning (e.g., “Why do you think he did that?”). Opportunities for student discussion were often limited to choral responses rather than individual expression. In classrooms where open-ended questions were used, student engagement and enthusiasm noticeably increased.

**Curriculum Materials:** Textbooks contained few tasks explicitly designed to promote critical thinking. Most exercises focused on grammar drills, vocabulary matching, and reading comprehension with multiple-choice answers. However, some units included stories or poems that could be used as springboards for critical discussion, such as comparing character motivations or imagining alternative endings. These opportunities were underutilized in observed lessons.

**Teacher Capacity and Constraints:** Interviews revealed that teachers were often constrained by time, large class sizes, and rigid curricula. Many expressed interest in fostering critical thinking but felt ill-equipped to do so. Only three out of ten had received any training on critical pedagogy.

Teachers also noted that assessments focused primarily on correct answers and grammatical accuracy, which discouraged them from experimenting with more open-ended tasks.

Despite these challenges, some promising practices were observed. In two classrooms, teachers used story mapping to help students analyze narrative structure. In another, students engaged in a debate about a character's decision, demonstrating emerging skills in argumentation and justification. These instances suggest that when methodological conditions are favorable, even young learners can engage in critical reflection.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the potential for critical thinking development in native language lessons exists, it is not yet systematically realized. Both curriculum content and instructional methods need to evolve to prioritize inquiry, dialogue, and cognitive engagement.

### CONCLUSION

The teaching of native language in primary school holds untapped potential for fostering critical thinking, yet this potential remains largely underutilized due to methodological, curricular, and systemic limitations. The findings of this study confirm that while teachers value critical thinking and recognize its importance, they often lack the necessary training, resources, and support to implement it effectively.

Critical thinking is not a peripheral skill but a central component of meaningful language use. When students are encouraged to interpret texts, express opinions, and support their arguments, they develop not only linguistic competence but also intellectual autonomy. Integrating such skills into native language instruction aligns with modern educational goals that emphasize holistic development and lifelong learning.

To advance this agenda, several methodological shifts are required:

- **Teacher Professional Development:** Training programs should focus on equipping teachers with practical strategies for integrating critical thinking into daily lessons. This includes designing open-ended questions, managing classroom dialogue, and assessing higher-order skills.
- **Curriculum Reform:** Textbooks and instructional materials should include activities that stimulate reflection, analysis, and creativity. Literary texts should be accompanied by tasks that ask students to evaluate character actions, make predictions, and articulate moral judgments.
- **Assessment Alignment:** Evaluation systems must evolve beyond rote memorization to include rubrics for assessing reasoning, coherence, and originality in student responses. Portfolios, self-assessment, and peer feedback can complement traditional tests.
- **Learning Environment:** A classroom culture that encourages questioning, tolerates ambiguity, and values diverse perspectives is essential for cultivating critical thinkers from an early age.

In conclusion, developing critical thinking in native language lessons is not only feasible but essential for empowering young learners in a complex world. With deliberate methodological planning and institutional support, primary education can lay the groundwork for a generation of thoughtful, articulate, and reflective citizens.

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