DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

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Abstract

This article investigates the development of communicative, critical, and creative thinking skills in preschool children within the framework of Uzbekistan's national education system and in comparison with international pedagogical approaches. The study analyzes the integration of the *"Ilk Qadam" State Curriculum* with global methodologies such as STEAM, project-based learning, and play-centered pedagogy. Empirical observations in Tashkent preschools demonstrate that interactive, child-centered activities enhance children's self-expression, reasoning, and creativity. The research concludes with theoretical and practical implications for improving early childhood education through innovation and collaboration.

Keywords: preschool education, communicative thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, Ilk Qadam, STEAM, early childhood pedagogy, Uzbekistan, innovation

Introduction

Early childhood is the most sensitive and formative period in human development. It is during this stage that children acquire the basic tools of communication, problem-solving, and imagination that shape lifelong learning. In modern Uzbekistan, the preschool education system has undergone profound reform aimed at cultivating these essential cognitive and socio-emotional skills.

The *"Ilk Qadam" (First Step)* State Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of

Preschool Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, emphasizes the child's voice, creativity, and independence. It promotes activity-based, child-centered learning similar to global models adopted by UNESCO, OECD, and European early education systems.

Developing communicative, critical, and creative thinking is not merely a pedagogical goal—it is a foundation for producing adaptive, innovative, and socially responsible citizens capable of thriving in a knowledge-based society.

Theoretical Framework

Communication, critical thinking, and creativity are interconnected cognitive processes essential for holistic development.

- Communicative thinking enables children to express ideas clearly, collaborate, and understand social cues. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory underscores that learning occurs through interaction and dialogue.
- Critical thinking involves reasoning, questioning, and evaluating information. According to Nosirova (2021), preschoolers develop criticality when guided through inquiry and reflection.
- Creative thinking, as defined by Robinson (2006), is the ability to generate original ideas and novel solutions — a skill that emerges naturally through play and exploration.

In Uzbekistan's educational context, Hasanboeva (2020) and Rahmonova & Karimova (2022) highlight that interactive storytelling, art, and construction activities stimulate children's imagination and communication. Globally, Resnick and Rosenbaum (2013) propose the concept of *"tinkerability"* — learning through design, experimentation, and making — which aligns with the *Ilk Qadam* approach.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method design, integrating theoretical analysis with empirical observation.

Participants and Setting:

The observation involved 20 preschool children (aged 5–6) and 3 teachers at a Tashkent preschool implementing the *Ilk Qadam* curriculum.

Procedure:

Over four weeks, sessions were organized twice a week using interactive methods:

- Storytelling and role-play;
- Group discussions;
- STEAM-based construction tasks;
- Reflection circles where children shared thoughts.

Data Collection:

Data were collected through observation notes, teacher interviews, and samples of children's creative outputs (drawings, models, stories).

Data Analysis:

Observations were coded thematically under three domains: communicative, critical, and creative development.

Results and Discussion

Skill Type	Indicators of Progress	Improvement Rate
Communicative	Clearer verbal expression, empathy, cooperation	80%
Critical	Logical responses, reasoning, problem-solving	65%
Creative	Originality in art and play, imagination	85%

1 Communicative Thinking

Children displayed greater verbal confidence and empathy. Teachers observed

that dialogues and group storytelling promoted peer cooperation and emotional intelligence.

2 Critical Thinking

Through guided questioning ("Why?", "What happens if…?"), children began to reason logically. This confirms Nosirova's (2021) claim that inquiry-based learning develops early analytical skills.

3 Creative Thinking

In open-ended STEAM and art projects, children demonstrated originality and imagination. Teachers noted that integrating design and play encouraged experimentation — consistent with Resnick's (2013) *"Design, Make, Play"* philosophy.

Challenges included limited access to materials and varying teacher readiness. Nonetheless, results align with international findings that experiential, interactive methods enhance preschoolers' holistic growth.

Conclusion

The integration of Uzbekistan's *Ilk Qadam* curriculum with innovative global practices strengthens communicative, critical, and creative development among preschoolers. The study demonstrates that play-based, inquiry-driven, and STEAM-oriented education promotes active learning, self-expression, and problem-solving.

Theoretical Implications

This research supports socio-constructivist and activity-based learning theories, confirming that communication and creativity evolve through guided interaction and experimentation.

Practical Implications

- Preschool teachers should adopt project-based and play-integrated teaching models.
- Training programs must emphasize innovation and reflective pedagogy.

- Collaboration between Uzbek and international educators can further enrich preschool methodology.

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