DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING ON THE BASIS OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION AS A PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEM

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Annotation*: This thesis analyzes the pedagogical problem of developing students' critical thinking skills based on an integrated educational approach. Critical thinking is an integral part of the modern educational process, and its development serves to form students' abilities to independently analyze, solve problems, and draw logical conclusions. The thesis also reveals the essence of integrated education and its pedagogical foundations, and suggests strategies aimed at increasing the effectiveness of this approach.*

Keywords*: Critical thinking, integrated education, pedagogical approaches, pedagogical problem, interactive education, problem-based learning, creative thinking.*

Introduction. In the 21st century, individuals living in a knowledge-based society are required not only to possess knowledge, but also to analyze it, solve problems, make well-reasoned decisions, and think independently. From this perspective, critical thinking emerges as one of the central directions of modern education.

In particular, developing critical thinking skills in students studying at higher education institutions is of great importance not only for their academic success, but also for their future professional activities.

The primary goal of every higher education institution is to develop students into independent thinkers who are creative and capable of solving problems. To

achieve this, fostering students' critical thinking skills is an essential task, which requires shifting the educational process from subject-based teaching to an integrated approach.

Integrated education—meaning the delivery of knowledge based on interdisciplinary connections—is considered one of the most effective methods for developing critical thinking. This is because such an approach enables students to synthesize knowledge from different disciplines, apply it to real-life situations, and develop deep analytical thinking.

Critical Thinking: Essence and Importance. Critical thinking is not merely the acceptance of information, but the ability to analyze, justify, evaluate, and draw conclusions from it. Through this skill, a student is able to:

-justify their own viewpoints;

-approach others' opinions critically;

-find effective solutions to problems;

- resist manipulation.

The development of critical thinking enhances a student's social activity, professional competence, and academic potential.

Integrated Education: Opportunities and Advantages Integrated education is an approach aimed at the comprehensive development of learners by establishing logical connections between different disciplines and applying knowledge to real-life situations. This approach leads to the following outcomes:

-the development of holistic thinking in students;

-a deeper understanding of interdisciplinary connections;

-the ability to use knowledge from various fields when finding solutions;

-a tendency to seek solutions to real-life problems.

A number of studies have been conducted on the development of critical thinking and the integrated education approach as a pedagogical issue, and the scientific sources related to this topic are critically analyzed. Critical thinking, as one of the essential components of the educational process, has been extensively explored by various scholars based on the theory of reflective thinking. It represents the reflective processes of human cognition, suggesting that any educational activity should be grounded in conscious analysis and evaluation.

The model of critical thinking developed by foreign scholars Paul and Elder encompasses analytical thinking, logical reasoning, and independent decision-making processes. According to this model, in order to develop critical thinking, students need to acquire skills such as providing evidence for their ideas, seeking alternative solutions, and evaluating problems in a comprehensive manner.

Another foreign scholar, Fogarty, emphasized that the effectiveness of education can be enhanced through interdisciplinary connections based on the concept of integrated education. Beane, in turn, describes integrated education as a process of developing students' thinking abilities through the coherence of curricula and the integration of various disciplines. This approach helps students gain a deeper understanding of topics and consider interconnected ideas more broadly.

Research conducted by Fischer and others indicates that the use of digital technologies, distance learning resources, and artificial intelligence plays a significant role in developing critical thinking. Online learning platforms provide students with opportunities to think independently, analyze information, and make evidence-based decisions.

An analysis of the literature indicates that there is an intrinsic connection between the development of critical thinking and integrated education. Scientific sources support the idea that critical thinking can be developed through reflective

analysis, problem-based learning, interactive methods, and modern technologies. Furthermore, pedagogical studies confirm that the integrated approach is an effective method for strengthening interdisciplinary connections, expanding students' thinking, and fostering their independent decision-making skills.

Therefore, future research should focus on a deeper examination of the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical technologies and advanced interactive methods in developing critical thinking.

The Pedagogical Significance of Developing Critical Thinking through Integrated Education:

1. **As a Pedagogical Issue:** In many higher education institutions, education is organized around separate disciplines, and interdisciplinary integration is often insufficient. This can hinder the preparation of students to solve complex problems. Therefore, implementing integrated education represents a pressing pedagogical challenge.

2. **From a Didactic Perspective:** In integrated education, assignments are designed to stimulate critical thinking—for example, problem-based situations, real projects, debates, and case studies. These activities help students engage in deep thinking, analysis, and evaluation.

3. **Innovative Approach:** Digital technologies, distance learning, and artificial intelligence tools are taking integrated education to a new level. At the same time, students learn to use these tools critically, assess them effectively, and distinguish between facts and misinformation.

Conclusion. The development of students' critical thinking through integrated education represents a contemporary pedagogical challenge and is an important task for higher education institutions. Critical thinking is an essential component of modern higher education, and its development lays the foundation

for students' professional and life success. Integrated education serves as an effective platform for cultivating this skill.

From a pedagogical perspective, harmonizing these two approaches is one of the key responsibilities of educators and the education system. Expanding the use of integrated education is crucial for preparing students for real-life situations and for fostering analytical, critical, and creative thinking.

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