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METHODOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Yuldosheva Dildora Unarboy qizi
Teacher of the Chirchik State Pedagogical University,
Faculty of General Pedagogy, Chirchik, Uzbekistan
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7495-7305
dildorausarboyeva@gmail.com +998909428001

Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and pedagogical foundations and practical potential of a methodology for developing students' critical thinking through cooperative learning technologies. It explores the didactic potential of cooperative learning technologies in developing students' competencies in information analysis, evaluation of the reliability of evidence, comparison of alternative perspectives, drawing logical conclusions, and formulating evidence-based arguments in higher education. Furthermore, the article substantiates the methodological features of such approaches as small-group work, academic discussion, problem-situation analysis, and peer reflection, highlighting their role in enhancing students' cognitive engagement and independent thinking. Particular attention is paid to the pedagogical conditions necessary for the purposeful organization of cooperative learning, the establishment of effective communication among students, and the integration of individual thinking processes with collaborative learning activities. The scientific and practical significance of the article lies in exploring the possibilities of implementing cooperative learning technologies within a methodological framework aimed at developing critical thinking and in emphasizing the need to formulate methodological recommendations for improving higher education practices.

Keywords: Cooperative learning technologies, critical thinking, higher education, information analysis, evidence evaluation, logical reasoning,

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academic discussion, problem-based learning, peer reflection, independent thinking, teaching methodology.

Introduction

Current trends in the development of higher education require students not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but also to develop competencies in analyzing acquired knowledge, applying it in practical situations, evaluating the reliability of evidence, and making independent decisions. These requirements highlight the need to improve educational content and teaching methods, enhance students' cognitive engagement, and transform them into active participants in the learning process.

Critical thinking is a complex cognitive process that extends beyond the mere acquisition of information. It involves analyzing the content of information, distinguishing evidence from assumptions, comparing opposing viewpoints, evaluating the logical validity of conclusions, and reconsidering one's own perspectives when necessary. From this perspective, the development of critical thinking requires the integration of problem-based situations, inquiry-oriented tasks, and evidence-based communication into the educational process.

Cooperative learning technologies offer significant didactic potential for addressing these educational objectives. In collaborative learning activities, students work toward a common goal while fulfilling individual responsibilities, justifying their own viewpoints, analyzing the reasoning of others, and formulating collective conclusions. Research by Johnson and Johnson, grounded in social interdependence theory, demonstrates that the effective implementation of cooperative learning is associated with positive interdependence, individual accountability, and purposeful interaction among learners.

A study conducted by Loes and Pascarella involving 1,455 first-year students from 19 higher education institutions in the United States examined the relationship between collaborative learning activities and critical thinking outcomes. The findings indicated a positive association between collaborative learning and gains in critical thinking among certain groups of students; however, this relationship was not consistent across all student groups. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of cooperative learning should be evaluated not

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merely in terms of its label or organizational format, but also in relation to its pedagogical implementation and the active participation of students.

Therefore, developing students' critical thinking through cooperative learning technologies requires a methodological approach that integrates meaningful problem-based tasks, individual accountability, evidence-based discussion, criterion-referenced assessment, and reflection.

The aim of this study is to provide a theoretical justification for a methodology designed to develop students' critical thinking through cooperative learning technologies and to identify its constituent components.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a systematic analysis of scientific and pedagogical perspectives on critical thinking, collaborative learning, and the competency-based approach. In developing the methodological framework, the potential of systems-based, activity-oriented, and student-centered approaches is taken into consideration.

The systems-based approach makes it possible to examine cooperative learning as an integrated process comprising objectives, content, teaching methods, interaction, assessment, and reflection. The activity-oriented approach emphasizes not only students' acquisition of knowledge but also their engagement in analyzing information, solving problems, and formulating independent conclusions. The student-centered approach, in turn, aims to ensure each student's individual participation, opportunities to express personal viewpoints, and awareness of their own learning activities.

Given the theoretical and methodological nature of the study, the following research methods were employed:

- **Analysis of scientific literature** to examine the theoretical foundations of critical thinking and cooperative learning.
- **Comparative analysis** to identify the similarities and differences among various pedagogical approaches.
- **Systematization and synthesis** to classify methods that contribute to the development of critical thinking.

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- **Methodological modelling** to establish the relationships among educational objectives, methodological tools, learning activities, and assessment criteria.

Based on these methods, a methodological model was developed to orient collaborative learning activities toward the development of critical thinking skills. The model aims to demonstrate how the findings of theoretical analysis can be applied in pedagogical practice.

No empirical experimental studies were reported within the scope of this research. Therefore, the findings presented in the article are limited to theoretical analysis, methodological synthesis, and the proposed model. The practical effectiveness of the methodology should be evaluated through a separate empirical study involving experimental testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Pedagogical Nature of Critical Thinking

Education aimed at developing critical thinking seeks to transform students' engagement with information into an active, conscious, and evidence-based cognitive process. In this context, students go beyond simply receiving information and critically examine its sources, reliability, logical structure, and relevance to supporting particular conclusions.

These aspects are closely interrelated. For example, when proposing a solution to a problem-based situation, a student first analyzes the problem, identifies relevant evidence, compares alternative solutions, and justifies the final conclusion. Reflection enables the student to reassess the validity of the selected solution and determine whether the reasoning and supporting evidence are sufficiently convincing.

From this perspective, learning tasks designed to develop critical thinking should focus not merely on identifying the correct answer but also on demonstrating the logical consistency, analytical depth, and evidential justification of the thinking process.

The mechanisms through which cooperative learning contributes to the development of critical thinking can be explained as follows.

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The first mechanism is cognitive conflict. Different approaches to the same problem among group members may encourage students to reconsider their initial assumptions and viewpoints. In this process, opposing perspectives should be examined and evaluated on the basis of evidence.

The second mechanism is argumentation and explanation. When students explain their conclusions to others, they select relevant evidence, organize their ideas, and clarify the logical relationships underlying their reasoning.

The third mechanism is peer feedback. Questions, comments, and constructive criticism from group members help identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing arguments and provide opportunities to refine conclusions.

The fourth mechanism is the integration of individual and collective accountability. Students' responsibility for their assigned tasks supports active participation in group activities. However, achieving a collective outcome should not replace or undermine each participant's independent thinking.

The fifth mechanism is reflective analysis. At the end of a learning session, students examine which pieces of evidence influenced their views, how they arrived at their conclusions, and whether their initial assumptions have changed during the learning process.

Johnson and Johnson's theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of positive interdependence and individual accountability in organizing collaborative learning activities. The findings of Loes and Pascarella likewise indicate that the relationship between collaborative learning and critical thinking should be evaluated by taking into account contextual factors and differences among student groups.

Therefore, cooperative learning should not be regarded as a method that automatically ensures the development of critical thinking. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of learning tasks, the nature of interpersonal interaction, individual participation, and the clarity of assessment criteria.

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CONCLUSION

Developing students' critical thinking through cooperative learning technologies requires the integration of problem-based tasks, meaningful communication, evidence-based discussion, and reflective activities into the educational process. The theoretical analysis indicates that collaborative learning can expand students' opportunities to compare different perspectives, evaluate evidence, justify their viewpoints, and reconsider their conclusions.

This article proposes a methodological model for developing critical thinking that comprises four interrelated components: objectives, content, instructional processes, and assessment and reflection. The model is based on the integration of learning objectives, problem-based tasks, cooperative learning methods, and assessment criteria. The systematic application of small-group activities, academic discussions, peer assessment, and reflection is recommended for its implementation.

The key conditions for implementing this methodological approach include ensuring individual accountability, encouraging the active participation of every student, facilitating evidence-based communication, and assessing thinking processes according to clearly defined criteria. These conditions distinguish purposeful collaborative learning from merely completing group assignments and help orient learning activities toward the development of higher-order cognitive skills.

In conclusion, the systematic application of cooperative learning technologies within a methodological framework aimed at developing critical thinking represents a promising pedagogical approach in higher education. It can provide opportunities to foster students' independent reasoning, evidence-based decision-making, and ability to analyze complex problems. Further empirical research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed methodological model in specific educational contexts.

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