

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROCESS OF FORMING THE COMPETENCE OF CRITICAL THINKING AMONG STUDENTS

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Abstract

The expediency of the process of forming the competence of critical thinking among university students, including two interrelated issues, is justified. The first question examines the effectiveness of the educational process as a whole through group activities that contribute to the formation of critical thinking of students. On the other hand, the formation of critical thinking competence is an important basis for the training of future specialists with professional competencies, namely, the ability to work in a team and with a high culture of critical thinking.

In this article, the authors of the study highlight the special role of teachers in the process of developing the competence to think critically in students of higher educational institutions. The introduction of special pedagogical tools, the project method, and the use of game activities in teams in the educational process contribute to the mastery of critical thinking skills by students.

The relevance of the research lies in the fact that it reveals both theoretical and practical aspects aimed at developing the competence to think critically. As an example, the authors of the study consider the introduction of elements of critical thinking in the process of teaching foreign languages in higher education. The detailed stages of the formation of critical thinking skills are aimed at the development of cognitive activity, internal motivation of students.

Keywords: Competencies, students, critical thinking, interaction, skills, foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

The process of social and professional development of students of higher educational institutions in the current situation depends on theoretical and methodological support of teachers' training. Teachers of general education and special subjects have a key role to play in vocational education as having adequate training they are expected to possess certain competencies [1].

The concept of "competency" introduced into the global education system is viewed as the implementation of a competency-based approach associated with assessing the quality of education. The competency-based approach is a sum of knowledge and skills in the field of professional experience.

Analysis of studies on expertise building in various fields of activity suggests that the problem is relevant. Let's consider different interpretations of concepts «competence» and «competency».

Verbitskii A.A. [2] defines competence as «will and determination for productive work with a clear understanding of responsibility for its results, work being implemented by means of self-regulatory mechanisms determining the overall success revealing itself as a student's competency».

From the point of view of Frumin I.D., «the competency-based approach appears in uploading the content of education in response to changing social and economic realities as well as strengthening the link between education and practice and actual social needs» [3].

«Competency is a competence put into operation; it is an integral individual characteristic shown in professional activity and underlying the success and responsibility for its results» [1, p.68].

«Competencies mean a synthesis of generalized modus operandi ensuring that the activities are implemented in a productive manner as well as one's ability to translate the competency into practice» [4].

«Competence is the ability to apply knowledge and skills for effective professional decision making in various fields – both in specific field of expertise and areas loosely tethered to specific projects, that is the ability to show flexibility in a rapidly changing labor market» [5].

The study suggests the authors' understanding of this term. The basic idea behind «professional competency» can be revealed through a set of certain skills (cognitive, practical, etc.), motivations, values that are used in professional practice. The process of forming this practice includes training in specific competencies, which can be identified with skills based on knowledge and experience with regard to practical application in various situations [6].

The area of expertise of teachers requires them to develop effective solutions, generate ideas and create new technologies, which directly depends on critical thinking competence level.

2 METHODOLOGY

The problem of the formation of critical thinking is viewed in various studies as an assessment of the psychological and pedagogical category of teaching mastery (Kuliutkin Yu. [7], Linyuchkina E.G. [8], Plotnikova N.F. [9]).

The existing informational approach to training a teacher to develop the skills does little to promote his creativity. As a rule, both the student and the teacher receive ready-made findings of pedagogical science, they are introduced to ready-made conclusions and guidelines, the information received does not become the basis for the development of the categorical apparatus of pedagogical and professional thinking. The reasons for the problems identified are:

- low skill level of teachers possessing critical thinking competence;
- lack of a sufficient diversity of ideas for the process of education and upbringing organization;
- inability for the heads of educational institutions, teaching staff and individual educators to choose concepts;
- decrease in the general educational and cultural level of young people entering the higher educational institutions;
- lack of psychological and pedagogical knowledge necessary for the formation of students' critical thinking.

In the authors' view, overcoming the problems described is associated with the transition from traditional, explanatory-illustrative teaching to a new one aimed at developing a teacher's ability to solve atypical pedagogical problems. When solving practical problems, the personality of a teacher, his level of theoretical knowledge and value of creative thinking are checked. This goal can only be achieved when the teacher takes the position of a researcher who:

- wonders «Why do I want students to learn this? How can I encourage them to think?»;
- understands that team members are different people, they have different abilities and skills, but all dedicated to a single purpose;
- encourages students to give their own opinions;
- through various tasks teaches students to formulate and express independent opinion, hear and listen, draw conclusions and understand that this is a democratic way of thinking.

Motivation and commitment to the implementation of the critical style of thinking in professional activity imply systematic forms of continuous education of teachers in higher education. This can be implemented in the form of lectures on the topic, individual special courses, through seminars, involving the mastery of higher school teachers in the methods and forms of self-formation of critical thinking and its formation among students. The process of daily professional activity includes various levels – from preparation for seminars and practical classes to participation in major innovative projects.

In connection with the above, it became necessary to outline the main provisions of the concept of mastering the competencies of critical thinking of teachers, on which a clear idea of the content and the specifics of the formation of students' critical thinking in the educational process is formed.

Improving the skills of teachers in the formation of critical thinking of future professionals during a special course fulfills a number of important functions that determine the effectiveness of the teacher's activities:

- the function of applying the acquired new knowledge and skills by a practitioner in various situations of the educational process and meeting the requirements for his professional pedagogical activity;
- the function of improving the level of qualification, filling training gaps to create the necessary conditions for the development of the teacher's personality;
- the function of comprehending the theoretical foundations of critical thinking and awareness of the need to form critical thinking in students;
- introduction to modern achievements of pedagogical science and practice for a creative approach to pedagogical innovations.

3 RESULTS

The authors of the study have developed a course program aimed at the formation of critical thinking by university teachers.

Aims:

- 1 to frame the problem of critical thinking formation through teamwork as an important element of overall system of higher educational institutions students training for teaching them reflection and assessment skills;
- 2 to consider critical thinking as a way to contribute to the self-determination of students and teachers to the most diverse manifestations of the surrounding world and its productive transformation;
- 3 to include in the comprehension of critical thinking:
 - ways to implement principles and approaches;
 - various educational programs;
 - forms of organization of scientific students' work
 - course papers and graduate works, teaching manuals;
 - teaching aids, ways of organizing activities.
- 4 to use systematic forms of continuous education of a university teacher, which are implemented in the form of a series of lectures on critical thinking formation, special courses, seminars, aimed at making both teachers and students capable of mastering the methods and techniques of self-formation of critical thinking;
- 5 to apply the new knowledge in daily professional activities, including teachers' preparation for seminars and practical classes and participation in innovation projects;
- 6 to develop a special course for students that will enable them to form critical evaluation of the environment and include the course in the content of existing disciplines by means of tasks and exercises aimed at the formation of critical thinking.

The programme on critical thinking formation among higher educational institutions' teachers proposed by the authors of the study has the following structural elements [10]:

- exploration of a new system of knowledge about critical thinking;
- building a new framework for relations;
- mainstreaming pedagogical creativity;
- determining factors acting against the realization of the teacher's creative potential;
- experimental verification of various models of critical thinking formation.

Simultaneously with the objectives, those challenges are addressed which in turn are the conditions of their implementation: inclusion of teachers in the environment for the formation of critical thinking, development of the reflexive ability of teachers, i.e. creation of environment, which forms the basis for any innovation, creative emancipation of the teacher as a person.

In our study, the projecting of the author's model of critical thinking formation acts as a technology that integrates the content of the formation of critical thinking and organization of training in teams. As an example, scenario of a practical class on projecting of such a model is given below.

- **Subject:** Author's models of students' critical thinking formation.
- **Objective:** to improve skills of compilation and analysis of university teachers' experience on developing a system of critical thinking formation.
- **Form of implementation:** project defense.
- **Preparation and framework of work:**
 - 1 To form research groups.
 - 2 To investigate experience with an author's system of critical thinking formation (groups from different educational institutions are represented) and to compile the gained knowledge in the form of a creative project.
 - 3 To defend the author's system of students' critical thinking formation.
 - 4 To analyze and evaluate the research work of each group.
- **Independent work:** creating a model of the system of critical thinking formation in the university of the future.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Thus, any pedagogical activity is ultimately aimed at building an ideal society, and even one group trained in the fundamentals of critical thinking is a significant step towards achieving great goals. Teaching students to think critically is only part of the teacher's multifaceted work. By learning modern pedagogical ideas and teaching technologies, competencies of creative and critical thinking, teachers of higher educational institutions form these kinds of thinking in students.

Critical thinking does not automatically appear as a by-product of conventional education in any field. To achieve the expected results requires a systematic effort to improve thinking. Each new fact is subjected to critical thinking, and the learning process is becoming individual and productive.

The ability to form creative and critical thinking and influence these kinds of thinking in students is an indicator of teacher's professional competency. This implies his commitment and willingness to improve critical thinking skills, to develop cultural, moral, creative potential, to explore new ways of communication and interaction, to conduct research work and to reflect on his activities.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest relating to the material presented in this paper.

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