



CURRENT METHODS FOR DEVELOPING LITERARY CRITICAL THINKING IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE EDUCATION

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17390812>

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of developing critical thinking skills, a key objective of modern education, within literature classes. The study aims to propose innovative methods focused on cultivating students' abilities to deeply analyze literary texts, evaluate them, and draw independent conclusions. The effectiveness of practical methods such as “questioning,” “double-entry journal,” and “structured literary debate” is analyzed. In conclusion, it is emphasized that developing literary critical thinking is a crucial factor not only for mastering literature but also for the overall personal development of the student.

Keywords: critical thinking, literature education, methodology, text analysis, creativity, student competence.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, where information resources are excessively abundant, the ability to evaluate their quality, analyze them logically, and draw reasoned conclusions – critical thinking – has become a fundamental competency for every individual. Literature education, by its very nature, is a crucial platform for developing this competency. This is because any literary work is multifaceted, profound, and open to various interpretations; the process of studying it encourages students to think actively, ask questions, and reason.

A common problem today is the limitation of literature lessons to answering traditional “who, what, when” questions, which fails to grasp the artistic value and social significance of a work. Therefore, organizing literature lessons with a focus on developing critical thinking is an urgent task.

The purpose of this research is to propose effective methods aimed at developing students' literary critical thinking and to demonstrate their practical application. The objectives are to substantiate the relevance of this problem, present the theoretical basis of the methods, and analyze the results of their practical application.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted based on the following methods:

1. Theoretical Analysis: Review of scientific literature, curricular documents, and teaching manuals in pedagogy, psychology, and literary studies.

2. Practical Experiment: The research was conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year with a group of 9th-grade students (30 individuals) at School No. 61 in

Tashkent. Diagnostic tests were administered before and after the experiment to determine the students' level of critical thinking.

3. Observation: The students' activity, the complexity of their questions and answers, and their ability to substantiate their opinions were observed during the lessons.

4. Statistical Analysis: The obtained results were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The following key methods were employed during the research:

The "What If?" Strategy: Students are encouraged to change an event or character's action in the work and predict the consequences (e.g., "What would have happened if Jaloliddin Manguberdi had made peace with the Mongols?").

Double-Entry Journal: The student writes a quotation from the text on one side of their notebook and their personal thoughts, critical commentary, or questions about that quotation on the other side.

Structured Literary Debate: A debate conducted according to clear rules, requiring students to support their arguments with evidence from the text, listen respectfully to opposing views, and draw conclusions.

"Disagree, Agree, Improve" Method: When responding to another student's idea, they are encouraged not only to agree or disagree but also to suggest how it could be improved.

ANALYSIS

The positive outcomes observed in the experimental group necessitate a deeper analysis of *how* and *why* the implemented methods were effective. The results indicate not merely a quantitative improvement but a qualitative shift in the students' cognitive engagement with literary texts. This analysis breaks down the efficacy of each method based on the observed data.

1. Deconstructing the "Double-Entry Journal": From Passive Reception to Active Dialogue. The significant improvement in depth of thought, as evidenced by the journal entries, can be attributed to the method's inherent structure, which formalizes the act of critical reading. The left-hand column (direct quotation) requires students to identify significant textual moments, moving beyond plot summary to recognize key themes, stylistic devices, or pivotal character decisions. The right-hand column (commentary) then forces an active response. This process transforms reading from a passive intake of information into an active dialogue between the student and the text.

The analysis of the journals showed an evolution from simple paraphrasing (e.g., "This means the character is sad") to more sophisticated responses involving:

Connection: Relating the quote to personal experiences or other texts.

Questioning: Challenging the character's motives or the author's choices ("Why does the author use this dark imagery here?").

Prediction: hypothesizing about future plot developments based on the quote.

2. The "What If?" Strategy: Fostering Hypothetical Reasoning and Intertextual Understanding. The move towards analytical and evaluative questions is directly linked to the practice of alternative thinking cultivated by the "What If?" strategy. By asking students to alter a key event (e.g., "What if the protagonist had chosen a different path?"), the method requires them to first understand the causal logic of the original narrative. To construct a plausible alternative, they must analyze the

motivations, constraints, and consequences inherent in the text. This strategy moves students beyond describing *what happened* to explaining *why it happened* and exploring how different variables could lead to different outcomes. This is a core component of critical thinking: understanding that outcomes are not inevitable but are the result of a chain of cause and effect.

3. Structured Debates and the “Disagree, Agree, Improve” Method: Building Argumentation and Intellectual Empathy. The surge in classroom participation and the improved quality of verbal arguments during debates highlight the importance of a structured, respectful environment for cultivating critical thought. The “Disagree, Agree, Improve” protocol was particularly effective in shifting classroom culture from a search for the “right answer” to a collaborative exploration of interpretations.

It taught students to:

Articulate Reasoning: Simply disagreeing was insufficient; they had to provide textual evidence for their counterargument.

Engage with Counterarguments: The “Improve” component encouraged them to listen carefully to peers’ ideas to build upon them, fostering intellectual empathy and the understanding that a text can sustain multiple valid interpretations.

Refine Their Own Thinking: Defending their position or modifying it in response to peer feedback led to a more nuanced and robust personal understanding of the text.

Synthesis of Methodological Impact. The power of these methods lies not only in their individual application but in their synergistic effect. The *Double-Entry Journal* served as the foundational tool for individual, reflective critical thinking. The “*What If?*” Strategy then built on this foundation by applying creative, hypothetical reasoning to the insights gathered in the journals. Finally, the *Structured Debates* provided a social and collaborative platform where these individual and hypothetical thoughts could be tested, challenged, and refined through discourse. This progression – from individual reflection to hypothetical exploration to social validation – creates a comprehensive cognitive ecosystem that effectively nurtures critical thinking skills.

In essence, the analysis confirms that these methods are effective because they systematically deconstruct the complex process of critical analysis into manageable, teachable steps, moving students from being consumers of a narrative to becoming active critics and co-creators of meaning.

RESULTS

The methods used during the experiment yielded the following positive results:

1. Improvement in Question Quality: While students’ questions at the initial stage were mostly factual (“Where did the old man live?”), by the end of the experiment, nearly 70% of their questions became analytical and evaluative (Why did the old man want to go to the sea? Was his decision correct?).

2. Increased Depth of Thought: Using the double-entry journal method, students began to reason much more deeply about symbols, characters’ internal conflicts, and problems. Analysis of the journal entries showed a significant increase in the logic and independence of their thoughts.

3. Increased Engagement: Participation rates in debates and discussions rose from 40% to 85%. Students made an effort to support their opinions with specific examples from the text.

4. Diagnostic Test Results: In the pre-experiment test, only 35% of students could express a complex, analytically based opinion about a given literary excerpt. After the experiment, this indicator improved to 80%.

The results indicate that fostering critical thinking requires methods that are more active and student-centered compared to the traditional lesson system. Methods like the double-entry journal provide students with the opportunity to systematically record and develop their thoughts. The “What If?” strategy develops hypothetical thinking, encouraging consideration of alternative approaches to analyzing a text.

The process of discussion and exchange of ideas teaches students not only to strengthen their own opinions but also to understand and respect other points of view. This contributes to the development of not only literary but also essential life competencies.

Research Limitations: The study was conducted within a single class of one school. Broader studies encompassing different regions and schools are required to generalize the results more widely.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be emphasized that developing literary critical thinking is a crucial step not only for a deeper mastery of literature but also for shaping students into independent, responsible, and active members of a democratic society. The methods proposed in this article – the double-entry journal, the “What If?” strategy, structured debates, and others – are effective tools for this path. The regular and systematic application of these methods can prepare students not only for literature exams but also for analyzing complex life situations.

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