

**PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS IN  
PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH MOTHER TONGUE LESSONS**

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**Annotation**

This article provides a scientific-theoretical and practical analysis of the pedagogical foundations for developing 21st-century skills in primary school students through mother tongue lessons. The study examines the essence and significance of 21st-century skills, their role in the educational process, and the didactic potential of the mother tongue subject in fostering these skills. In addition, the article identifies pedagogical methods and technologies used in mother tongue lessons that promote the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and information literacy skills. The research findings contribute to the effective implementation of a competency-based approach in primary education practice.

**Keywords**

primary education, mother tongue lessons, 21st-century skills, competency-based approach, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity.

In the modern education system, it is no longer sufficient to equip learners solely with knowledge; rather, it is essential to shape them as individuals who can think independently, engage in effective communication, solve problems, and apply their knowledge in real-life situations. From this perspective, the development of 21st-century skills has become one of the priority tasks of contemporary education. The primary education stage is considered the most crucial period during which the foundations of these skills are laid. In particular, the mother tongue subject occupies a leading position in the formation of students' speech, logical, and social competencies. Through mother tongue lessons, students learn to express their ideas orally and in written form, work with texts, engage in dialogue through question-and-answer activities, and articulate their own viewpoints. Therefore, aligning the content and methodology of mother tongue instruction with 21st-century skills is regarded as a pedagogical necessity.

In scientific literature, the concept of 21st-century skills is widely discussed and primarily encompasses critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and information and communication competencies. According to educational scholars, the development of these skills requires the use of active teaching methods within the learning process. Studies related to primary education particularly emphasize the role of the mother tongue subject in shaping personal and social competencies. An analysis of the literature indicates that traditional lesson formats are unable to fully foster higher-order thinking skills and learner independence. Consequently, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on the implementation of competency-based approaches, interactive methods, and integrative educational technologies in mother tongue lessons.

The research employed methods such as theoretical analysis, pedagogical observation, comparison, generalization, and experimental testing. In organizing mother tongue lessons in primary classes, methods including problem-based learning, clustering, brainstorming, role-playing, text-based discussions, and small-group work were tested. These methods were aimed at increasing students' learning activity, developing independent thinking, and fostering



communication skills. In addition, the use of tasks based on real-life situations during lessons contributed to the development of students' creative and critical thinking abilities.

In the 21st century, the education system is not limited to providing learners with knowledge alone but is oriented toward preparing them for the demands of modern life. Among these demands, the most significant is the set of competencies known as 21st-century skills. Identified by international organizations such as P21, OECD, and UNESCO, these skills are mainly based on the "4C" framework:

1. Critical thinking – the ability to analyze and evaluate information and draw logical conclusions.
2. Creativity – the ability to generate new ideas and find unconventional solutions to problems.
3. Communication – the ability to convey ideas clearly, comprehensibly, and effectively in both oral and written forms.
4. Collaboration – the ability to work effectively with others and share responsibility.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, educational reforms implemented since 2019, particularly the State Educational Standards (SES) and the new generation of textbooks introduced gradually between 2021 and 2025, are based precisely on these 4C skills. In primary education, mother tongue and reading literacy lessons are considered the most important and effective means of developing these competencies, as language education constitutes the fundamental foundation of learners' speech, cognitive, and social development.

#### The Role of Mother Tongue Lessons in Developing 21st-Century Skills

Mother tongue lessons in primary school play a crucial role in developing students' basic literacy skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This process naturally creates opportunities for the development of the 4C skills of the 21st century:

- Critical thinking. While working with texts, students do not merely read but analyze ideas, ask questions, identify the author's intention, and distinguish between facts and opinions. For example, after reading a fairy tale, questions such as "*Was the character's action correct?*" or "*What would I do if I were in that situation?*" foster critical thinking. According to the results of international assessment programs such as PISA and PIRLS, the ability to deeply comprehend texts and reason about them is considered a key indicator of critical thinking.
- Creativity. Mother tongue lessons include numerous creative tasks, such as continuing a story, inventing an alternative ending, writing poems, describing characters, drawing illustrations based on a text, or staging short performances. These activities enhance students' imagination and their ability to generate new ideas.
- Communication. The primary objective of mother tongue instruction is the development of speech. Students engage in dialogue, present texts orally, exchange ideas, and write reviews. Through these activities, they learn to express themselves clearly, logically, and appropriately for their audience.
- Collaboration. Group-based activities (such as joint story writing, text discussions, and role-playing games) help students learn to respect others' opinions, share responsibilities, and work effectively as part of a team.

#### Pedagogical Foundations

The development of 21st-century skills through mother tongue lessons is based on the following pedagogical principles:

- Competency-based approach. Traditional knowledge transmission is replaced by the formation of competencies. Students do not merely memorize texts but learn to apply their knowledge in real-life situations.



- Learner-centered education. Each student's interests, abilities, and pace of development are taken into account, and differentiated tasks are provided accordingly.
- Integrated education. Mother tongue lessons are connected with other subjects (for example, analyzing environmental issues through science-related texts or interpreting the language of mathematical problems). Such interdisciplinary integration fosters a holistic worldview.
- Principles of activity and interactivity. In this approach, the teacher acts not as the sole source of knowledge but as a facilitator and organizer of learning, while students actively participate in the educational process.

#### Methods and Techniques Used in Practice

To develop 21st-century skills in primary school mother tongue lessons, the following interactive methods have proven effective:

- Problem-based learning. Presenting a problem based on a text and encouraging students to seek solutions (critical thinking + creativity).
- Group work and project-based learning. Collaborative tasks such as writing book reviews or staging performances (collaboration + communication).
- Brainstorming. Encouraging the free expression of ideas related to a topic (creativity).
- The Six Thinking Hats method. Discussing texts from multiple perspectives (critical thinking).
- Role-playing and dramatization. Acting out the roles of literary characters (communication + collaboration).
- Creative writing tasks. Topics such as "*If I were the character...*" or "*An alternative ending to the story*" (creativity).
- Debates and discussions. Defending or refuting ideas expressed in a text (communication + critical thinking).

#### Practical Implementation in the Education System of Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the new generation of textbooks introduced since 2021 for Grades 1–4 ("*Mother Tongue and Reading Literacy*") is fully based on the 4C framework. These textbooks feature:

- Real-life, engaging texts of various genres;
- Tasks focused on analysis, reflection, and creativity rather than memorization;
- Extensive use of pair and group work;
- Assessment criteria aligned with the 4C skills (e.g., justification of opinions and proposing new ideas).

In addition, initiatives such as the "*Reading Promotion Program*," "*Speech Culture*" projects, and extracurricular reading activities integrate modern skills alongside national values.

Mother tongue lessons in primary education represent the most effective and natural means of developing 21st-century skills. Instruction in the mother tongue accelerates students' linguistic and cognitive development, while interactive methods and a competency-based approach strengthen critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. As a result, students grow not only as literate individuals but also as independent thinkers, creative learners, socially active participants, and future-ready citizens. This process largely depends on teachers' professional competence, their ability to apply modern teaching methods, and their commitment to continuous professional development.

The findings indicate that conducting mother tongue lessons solely through traditional, knowledge-centered approaches is insufficient to meet the demands of the 21st century. It is essential to actively engage students as central participants in the learning process. However, in some cases, insufficient methodological preparedness among teachers hinders the effective use



of interactive methods. Therefore, there is a need to enhance teachers' professional competencies and further improve methodological resources.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of 21st-century skills among primary school students through mother tongue lessons is a pedagogically significant and essential process. The mother tongue subject offers broad opportunities for fostering students' communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity skills. To organize this process effectively, it is recommended to implement a competency-based approach, make extensive use of interactive teaching methods, and enhance teachers' methodological preparedness. In the future, it is advisable to expand practical research in this area and to disseminate best pedagogical practices.

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