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PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN STUDENTS

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Annotation
This article discusses the psychological mechanisms that underlie the development of critical thinking among students. The study emphasizes that the ability to think critically is not an innate quality but a cognitive and emotional skill that can be developed through systematic psychological and pedagogical approaches. It focuses on the interaction between cognitive flexibility, metacognition, motivation, and emotional regulation as core factors influencing the growth of critical reasoning. The article also explores the role of teachers in creating an educational environment that fosters analytical and independent thinking. The research highlights that dialogic learning, reflective questioning, and problem-based activities significantly enhance students' capacity for logical reasoning and decision-making.

Keywords: critical thinking, cognition, metacognition, psychological mechanisms, reflection, learning process, emotional regulation, analytical thinking.

Main Part

Critical thinking is one of the most essential psychological skills in modern education. It enables students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in a logical and independent manner. According to contemporary cognitive psychology, the development of critical thinking involves a complex interplay between mental processes such as perception, attention, reasoning, and self-regulation.

From a psychological standpoint, critical thinking is closely related to **cognitive flexibility**—the ability to adapt one's thinking to new and unexpected situations. Students with high cognitive flexibility tend to be more tolerant of ambiguity and open to different viewpoints. Another crucial factor is **metacognition**, which refers to the awareness and regulation of one's own thought processes. Metacognitive reflection helps students monitor their reasoning, recognize errors, and modify their problem-solving strategies.

Emotional intelligence also plays a significant role in shaping critical thinking. Students who can manage emotions effectively are more capable of maintaining objectivity and rationality during complex cognitive tasks. Furthermore, **motivation**—both intrinsic and extrinsic—drives learners to question, explore, and engage actively with new information.

Psychologically informed teaching strategies, such as **Socratic questioning, reflective discussions, and collaborative problem-solving**, can significantly enhance the development of critical thinking. The teacher acts not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a facilitator who encourages inquiry, doubt, and logical justification.

Empirical studies show that students exposed to interactive and reflective teaching methods demonstrate improved analytical reasoning, higher academic engagement, and greater self-confidence in intellectual debates. Creating a psychologically safe environment where students can freely express their opinions without fear of criticism is also essential for nurturing independent thought.

Thus, the development of critical thinking depends on both **individual psychological traits** and **the social-educational context**. Integrating emotional, cognitive, and social components of learning ensures a holistic approach to fostering reasoning and creativity.

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