

**NININS 2020****International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****NATIONAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES IN CRITICAL THINKING  
DEVELOPMENT AT REGIONAL STUDIES**

Olga V. Kuznetsova (a)\*, Yulia B. Dyundik (b), Margarita V. Novoselova (c),  
Natalia Yu. Khlyzova (d), Anna V. Chaykisova (e)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Irkutsk State University, 1, Karla Marksa str., Irkutsk, Russia, kuznetsova1@mail.ru

(b) Irkutsk State University, 1, Karla Marksa str., Irkutsk, Russia, dyular@mail.ru

(c) Irkutsk State University, 1, Karla Marksa str., Irkutsk, Russia, margo\_2611@mail.ru

(d) Irkutsk State University, 1, Karla Marksa str., Irkutsk, Russia, uspehvovsem5@gmail.com

(e) Irkutsk State University, 1, Karla Marksa str., Irkutsk, Russia, anncher@rambler.ru

**Abstract**

The article presents the authors' experience of effective critical thinking skills development among students specializing in regional studies. The authors explain why it is extremely important to equip university students with such skills and discuss different tasks and activities that can be used in class with bachelor and master students. Methods of theoretical (analysis of scientific and methodological literature) and practical analysis of critical thinking development as well as methods of observation and analytical systematization of education process are used in the article. The authors come to the conclusion that critical thinking development is an obligatory condition for the effective training of specialists in regional studies. This is also due to the fact that the list of competences, such specialists should acquire, includes the ability to analyze and interpret facts, events and statements. It is necessary to note that studying the ways of critical thinking development is a burning issue in various fields of humanities. High school lecturers possess a wide range of opportunities of effective critical thinking skills development while teaching foreign languages and other disciplines connected with regional studies. However, the usage of the tasks that are designed to improve critical thinking skills requires a profound theoretical background, great erudition and an ability to keep up discussions with students with different levels of competence.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Critical thinking, competence, educational process, national and global issues, region, regional studies



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays the world society demands more specialists able to cope with the global challenges of the 21 century – highly qualified experts in the field of international relations and regional studies. There is no doubt that critical thinking plays a significant role at the education of future professionals who can make national and global politics, economics, law and related sciences. The paper deals with the new methods of critical thinking development and formation of a linguistic picture of the world on the basis of learning a foreign language and studying a region. The phenomenon of critical thinking development is one of the most relevant topics in the studies of philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, teachers and specialists in other branches of the humanities in the 21st century.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Many fundamental works on the theory of critical thinking belong to American scientists, such as Klooster, Meridith, Paul, Steel, Temple, Halpern, Elder, etc. It should be noted that American Universities have introduced a special course “Critical Thinking” in their curricula.

Russian specialists have developed a great interest in the study of students’ critical thinking formation (Klimova, 2012; Shakirova, 2006; Strekalova & Belyakov, 2013; Tulasynova, 2010). Nevertheless, we cannot but agree with Plotnikova (2015, p. 38) that teachers in higher education believe that students’ critical thinking is formed automatically in the educational process, and it reaches the highest level in professional activity only as a result of many years of experience (Plotnikova, 2015). On the contrary, as the author rightly argues, practice and research do not confirm a direct relationship between the experience of a specialist and the level of critical thinking. Therefore, an important task of vocational education is the search for technologies for the purposeful and systematic formation of students’ critical thinking at the stage of vocational training (ibid.)

## **3. Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent are critical thinking skills important for the students specializing in regional studies?
- What are the core competences and skills associated with critical thinking?
- What are the most effective methods of critical thinking development that can be used when discussing national and global issues at regional studies?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The article aims to advocate the need for critical thinking formation among students specializing in regional studies and give a brief overview of the methods of critical thinking formation used by the authors in the educational process. Special emphasis is given to the analysis of national and global issues while teaching regional studies.

## 5. Research Methods

This article describes the methods of critical thinking skills development used by the authors in the process of teaching bachelor and master student majoring in regional studies. The methods of theoretical (analysis of scientific and methodological literature) and practical analysis of critical thinking development are used, as well as methods of observation and analytical systematization of the results of the educational process.

## 6. Findings

The term ‘critical thinking’ is defined in numerous and various ways in scientific literature. For example, Diane Halpern, an American psychologist, who made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of critical thinking, offers the following option: critical thinking is the use of cognitive techniques or strategies that increase the likelihood of obtaining the desired outcomes (Halpern, 2000).

The authors of the technology “Development of Critical Thinking through Reading and Writing” are convinced that thinking critically means being curious and using research methods: posing questions and carrying out a systematic search for answers (Temple et al., 1998, p. 41).

Linda Elder and Richard Paul state that critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective. It includes the skills of effective communication and problem solving, as well as the willingness to overcome the inherent egocentrism and sociocentrism (Paul & Elder, 2007).

The following definition of critical thinking by the American Philosophical Association (APA) is the most comprehensive and relevant to the aim of our research: The process of purposeful, self-regulating judgment that is followed by interpretation, analysis, evaluation and interactivity, as well as an explanation of the obvious, conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations on which this judgment is based. The ideal critical thinking of a person is usually associated with curiosity, knowledge, reasons for trust, open-mindedness, flexibility, fairness in assessment, honesty in confrontation with personal prejudices, prudence in judgments, desire to reconsider, clarify problems and complex issues, thoroughness in finding the necessary information, rationality in the selection of criteria, consistency in the search for results that are as accurate as the original sources. This combination connects the development of critical thinking skills with the understanding of the foundations of a rational and democratic society (Fedorov, 2007).

There are particular features and characteristics of critical thinking formation of students specializing in different fields. Students specializing in regional studies should also cultivate critical thinking. The regional factor is becoming increasingly important in the specifics of modern international relations. Regional studies as a branch of knowledge are one of the promising areas of scientific and practical research, since the complexity and consistency of knowledge in this area allows us to analyze regional problems from different angles, and obtain more reliable information using methods of various sciences (Makeyeva & Kremnyov, 2017).

Having formed in the mainstream of regional studies, regional science is replenished with new ideas, which expand the range of issues under consideration, but there is a lack of integration of these ideas into a scientific paradigm (Kuznetsova & Karacheva, 2019).

There are plenty of works devoted to formation of critical thinking of students of various specialties, though not a single work aimed at students majoring in regional studies was found. Nevertheless, the possession of this competence seems to be most appropriate for these students. To confirm, we turn to the State Educational Standard of Higher Education – master’s program 41.04.01 Foreign Regional Studies. The ability to think critically is mentioned first on the list of universal competences a graduate should develop: “Systemic and critical thinking” is the name of the category of universal competences; the code and the name of the competence is: UC-1. Able to carry out a critical analysis of problem situations based on a systematic approach and develop an action strategy.

Taking into consideration the definition of critical thinking and the actions this process involves, we consider it necessary to list some other competences that a graduate specializing in regional studies should have. In the “Intercultural Interaction” category there is the competence UC-5. Able to analyze and take into account the diversity of cultures in the process of intercultural interaction. Under the category “Expert and analytical activity” there is a General Professional Competence: GPC-3. Able to evaluate, model and predict global, macro-regional, national, regional and local political-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political processes based on the application of theoretical and empirical research methods and applied analysis.

The formation of critical thinking among students specializing in regional studies seems to be one of the prerequisites for their quality training. The list of areas of professional activities in which graduates can be employed also confirms this: 01 Education and Science; 04 Culture, Art; 06 Communication, Information and Communication Technologies; 07 Administrative and Office Activities; 11 Mass Media, Publishing and Printing.

Graduates who know how to think critically have the right skills to perceive, interpret and evaluate numerous messages, they are able to detect contradictions, logical errors, manipulative technologies in texts, they can argue their point of view, which significantly increases their chances for suitable employment.

The Institute of Philology, Foreign Languages and Media Communication of Irkutsk State University offers a master’s program 04.41.01 Foreign regional studies, the specialization “Regional Studies and Ethnology of the Asia-Pacific Countries”, there is also a program 45.03.02 Linguistics, the specialization “Linguistic Support for Comprehensive Regional Analysis”. The curricula involve a wide range of regional studies disciplines. For instance, Regional and National Security; Regional Conflicts; Basics of Regional Analysis; Foreign Policy; Socio-Political System; Forming of Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, etc.

Accordingly, successful mastery of these disciplines implies a sufficient level of critical thinking. Formation of critical thinking begins in the first semester in foreign languages classes with accordance to the curriculum: Practical Course of the First Foreign Language; Foreign Language; Professionally Oriented Course of the First Foreign Language; Professionally Oriented Course of the Second Foreign Language.

A significant achievement in this area is that a considerable number of regional studies disciplines are taught in the language of the region of specialization, which allows student to interpret, analyze and assess authentic materials.

The most important characteristics of critical thinking are: independence of thinking; curiosity; formulating a problem and finding a solution; making sound decisions; statement of one's point of view (Plotnikova, 2015).

Let us consider in more detail what methods of critical thinking development can be used in classes. The curriculum for students majoring in regional studies does not provide for a separate course on the formation of critical thinking, the content of other disciplines includes tasks, problems, exercises aimed at developing mental skills and criticality of the mind, so the technologies for the formation of critical thinking are interdisciplinary and coherent for bachelors and masters.

Shakirova (2006) in her work "Student's Critical Thinking Formation: Model and Technology" divides all the methods of critical thinking development into four groups: problem-based learning, critical writing and reading, the resolution of invention-related tasks, and interactive learning. The first is subdivided into dialogical, research, heuristic, and indicative methods. The methods of interactive learning are brainstorming, round table discussions, business role-playing games, free associations, case studies, trainings, and Socratic discussions (Shakirova, 2006).

The expert and analytical activity, including assessing and forecasting of global and regional processes, is an essential work of an expert in the field of regional studies. Accordingly, the training of such specialists is supposed to develop their media literacy, ability to operate with the media.

Thus, the article by Dyundik and Kuznetsova (2019) "Improvement of critical thinking skills through analysis of news content of modern media: from work experience," gives the detail algorithm of students' work with news content, where students think and evaluate the problem critically from different positions, developing their own reasoned position, according to their experience and available knowledge. Such an activity promotes not only critical thinking skills, but also potential, personal and professional development, readiness of the graduate to interact with the surrounding world as a professional in general (Dyundik & Kuznetsova, 2019).

Teaching the disciplines of regional studies listed above implies the wide materials of journalistic discourse in the educational process in order to form the ability to evaluate and interpret analytical articles critically. Content analysis plays an important role in the analysis of journalistic discourse, which can include both analytical technique of the entire media content-formal complex, analysis of certain problem-thematic blocks of content, information campaigns, genre forms, and analysis of individual media works (Fedorov, 2007).

An effective tool to develop critical thinking is considered to be the case-method, based on a situational approach. The main advantage of the case-method is that it focuses on "question-setting," while other methods focus on "proposed solutions." This advantage allows students to analyze, prepare and make decisions. Unquestionably, one of the most effective ways of learning is to learn from your own experience: to be in a real situation, to feel the gravity of real problems and the burden of responsibility for solving them, to analyze influencing factors, to make decisions, to face the consequences of these decisions, to analyze them and learn from your own mistakes. The case-method provides a new, active style of students' behavior in the educational process, develops analytical abilities, skills of argument and decision-making, ability to work in the team (Strekalova & Belyakov, 2013).

In the methodological context, the case-method is known as a complex system where simpler methods of cognition integrates – a simulation, a system analysis, a problem method, a thought experiment, description methods, classifications, game methods that perform specific functions in the case-method.

As a result, the case-method develops the following skills and abilities of students: analytical and predictive; practical: to make the right decisions in the conditions of uncertainty; to develop an algorithm for making a decision; to investigate situations objectively; to take into account the views of other experts on the problem in the question when making a final decision; creative: to generate alternative decisions sometimes illogically; communicative: to conduct a discussion, to defend own point of view, to convince opponents; social: to estimate verbal and nonverbal behavior of people, to support a discussion, to carry out introspection, etc. (Argunova et al., 2007).

The case-method in classes with senior students often includes business games on the following topic: a press conference of world power leaders. The students are “journalists” and “politicians”. The task of “journalists” is to bring “politicians” to a standstill by cavernous, provocative questions, the task of “politicians” is to save face, to get out of the situation and give a politically competent an answer to difficult questions. This role-playing game requires a serious preparation of both sides and clear preliminary instructions of the teacher – all participants are supposed to orient well in the current political situation, be familiar with the latest world news, available conflict and problem blocks. However, the students are ready to improvise. The language of the press conference is a studied one that makes the tasks of this kind more effective and allows the students to improve the skills of spontaneous speech and communicate in the foreign language.

If the level of professional competence and language proficiency is higher, the students can be offered more complicated business games, such as: reproduction of one of the recent political events (UN General Assembly meeting, G-7 summit, round table of representatives of different countries on issues of disarmament/global warming/information security, meetings within the framework of international events, etc.). Each student takes a role of a certain country representative, whose position he/she shows during the game. The preparatory stage includes studying protocol norms of the organization of the selected type of meeting, analysis of the discussed issues and the positions of the participating countries, forecasting events. Such tasks may include both the reproduction of one of the actual international events and the projecting of possible meetings aimed at discussing the global challenges of our time.

After the role-playing game, it is obligatory to analyze and discuss the most successful and unsuccessful moments, the students share their opinions about the most complicated tasks, their preferences, given answers, choose the best one.

Critical thinking developing takes place not only in group work with students, but also in the performance of their main individual tasks – writing course and final qualification works. The scientific topic for research papers is formulated due to the fact that the student will have to demonstrate the skills of analytical activity, the ability to assess and predict events in the world, the ability to give expert opinions when writing the work. The research can be devoted to investigating and attempts to provide an analytical assessment of any politicians:

- The comparative analysis of US foreign policy course in the East Asian region of the administration of Obama and Nixon (based on the English-language sources); Diplomatic style of the American politician: communicative, gender, linguistic factors and party tradition; The comparative analysis of US political policy of the administration of Reagan in 1981–1985 and Trump (based on the English-language sources).
- The research object may be a separate direction of social, political, cultural or economic activity:
- Formation of ecological consciousness: sociocultural and linguistic aspects; Cybersport in China: formation and development; Modern American diplomacy: political and discourse analysis; Family as a social institute: transformation of family values in China under the influence of globalization.

The purpose of some researches is to compare, analyze and assess the available theoretical papers on the topic: – Approaches of the Russian, western and Chinese experts to definition of a party system in the People’s Republic of China; Contribution of the American scientific schools to research the problems of regional development; Analysis of modern Chinese sociological theories on the problems of regional development.

As we can see, most of the topics involve transdisciplinary research containing data and methods of various sciences – political science, linguistics, economics, sociology, psychology, etc. In addition, besides traditional popular scientific methods, students use various modern scientific methods that stimulate the development of critical thinking – case analysis, SWOT-analysis, content-analysis, news-analysis, etc.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, let us summarize some of the results. This article precedes a series of publications on a more detailed description of selected critical thinking technologies. In this regard, the authors do not intend to give a detailed exhaustive list of all ways of critical thinking developing in students’ profiles related to regional research. The purpose of the work is to justify the need of such work with the students specializing in the study of regional studies, as with future analysts and specialists in the field of intercultural communication. After all, it seems obvious that only a well-trained critical thinker can: bring up the vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely; collect and estimate relevant information, using theoretical concepts for its interpretation; conclude and make decisions, checking them by relevant criteria and standards; think impartially; communicate effectively with others to solve complex national and global problems (Paul & Elder, 2007).

## **Acknowledgments**

The research was supported by grant from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research «History and Methodology of the Asia-Pacific Regional Studies in the Context of Modern Transdisciplinary Regionology» (Project no. 19-011-00040).

## References

- Argunova, T. G., Andreeva, V. N., Pastukhova, I. P., & Podvoyskiy, V. A. (2007). *Application of Case Study in Educational Process and Methodical Activity in Specializes Secondary Schools*.
- Dyundik, Yu. B., & Kuznetsova, O. V. (2019). Analyzing modern Mass Media news as a means of critical thinking development: sharing experience. *Human. and Ed.*, 10(2), 57–62.
- Fedorov, A. V. (2007). *Development of Mediacompetence and Critical Thinking among Students of Pedagogical Institutes*. Publ. house MOO VPP UNESCO “Inform. dlya vsekh”.
- Halpern, D. (2000). *Psychology of Critical Thinking*. Peter.
- Klimova, T. V. (2012). Ways of Student’s Critical Thinking Formation. *Bull. of Orenburg State Univer.*, 2(138), 78–85.
- Kuznetsova, O. V., & Karacheva, N. S. (2019). W. Isard and Foundation of American Regional Science. *III Gotlib’s readings (Theory, methodology, and practice of Oriental and Asia-Pacific Regional Studies)* (pp. 275–280). Publ. house IGU.
- Makeyeva, S. B., & Kremnyov, E. V. (2017). The Development of Regional Studies Master’s Programs in Russia in a Condition of Widening Interregional Russian-Chinese Cooperation (basing on the master’s program “Asia-Pacific Regional Studies and Ethnology”). *Herald of Russ. Acad. of Ed. Univer.*, 1, 19–24.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2007). *Critical Thinking. Concepts and Tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.
- Plotnikova, N. F. (2015). *Student’s Critical Thinking Formation in Course of Team Work*. Kazan. Un-t Publ.
- Shakirova, D. M. (2006). Student’s Critical Thinking Formation: Model and Technology. *Ed. Technol. & Society*, 9(4), 284–292.
- Strekalova, N. D., & Belyakov, V. G. (2013). *Development and Usage of Educational Cases*. Otdel operat. poligrafii NIU VShE.
- Temple, C., Steel, J. L., & Meredith, K. S. (1998). *Critical Thinking – Advanced Technique*. Instit. Publ. house “Otkrytoye obshchestvo”.
- Tulasynova, N. Yu. (2010). *The Development of Students’ Critical Thinking While Teaching Foreign Languages* [Cand. Dissertation]. Yakutsk.