eISSN: 2229-3213 pISSN: 2229-3205
The Journal of Applied Science and Social Science
Volume 16,Issue 03 March, 2026

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INFORMATION LITERACY COMPETENCIES THROUGH A CRITICAL APPROACH

Umida Erkinovna Khidirova
Doctoral Researcher (PhD), Navoi State University

Abstract. This article explores how a critical approach contributes to the development of information culture among university students, clarifying its nature, structure, and educational significance. It also examines the processes involved in building students' information literacy skills within a digital society and proposes a didactic model for fostering information culture grounded in critical thinking principles.

Keywords. Information culture, critical approach, media literacy, digital competence, information security, innovative educational technologies.

The processes of globalization and the rapid development of digital technologies pose new challenges to today's education system. In the digital environment, students face an enormous flow of information, various media materials, and fast-spreading, often unverified data from social networks on a daily basis. Under such conditions, the ability to search for information, evaluate its reliability, analyze it critically, and use it effectively becomes one of the key competencies of every student.

The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" adopted on September 23, 2020, the "Digital Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy, and the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System until 2030 define the formation of students' information culture as a priority task of modern education. Ensuring the effectiveness of this process requires the application of a critical approach in teaching and learning activities. Developing students' information culture through a critical approach is essential in today's knowledge-driven society. It equips learners with the ability not only to access information but to question, evaluate, and use it wisely, fostering intellectual independence and responsible citizenship.

According to Paul Zurkowski, information literacy involves the ability to effectively locate, evaluate, and use information, which forms the foundation for students' academic success. Christine Bruce emphasizes that information literacy is not only a set of technical skills but also a way of thinking that enables learners to engage critically with information. In the works of Carol Kuhlthau, the information search process is described as a cognitive and affective journey that requires guidance and reflection. Michael B. Eisenberg highlights structured models such as the Big6, which support students in solving information problems systematically.Research by James Elmborg shows that a critical approach encourages students to question the authority and context of information sources. Henry Giroux argues that education should empower learners to think critically and challenge dominant narratives in information environments. Studies by Neil Selwyn demonstrate that digital technologies require new forms of critical engagement with online information. Alan Bundy notes that integrating information literacy into curricula enhances students' independent learning abilities. According to Sonia Livingstone, critical evaluation of digital content is essential in combating misinformation in modern society. Overall, these scholarly perspectives confirm that developing students' information literacy competencies through a critical approach is essential for effective participation in the digital knowledge society.

The formation of students' information culture is an integral part of the modern educational process. This process includes essential components such as searching for information, selecting

and analyzing it, using it effectively, and ensuring information security. A student with a well-developed information culture can operate independently in the digital environment, conduct scientific research, use reliable sources in preparing presentations and written assignments, and work safely on the internet. One of the main components of information culture is digital literacy, which teaches students to use modern technologies correctly. Digital literacy implies not only technical skills but also the ability to apply technologies effectively in educational and research activities. For instance, students should develop skills in working with online libraries, scientific databases, electronic textbooks, and academic articles.

A critical approach is a methodological framework that activates students' thinking and fosters a conscious, analytical, and evidence-based attitude toward information. It constitutes the core content of information culture. This article scientifically analyzes the content of developing information culture based on a critical approach. The concept of information culture has been actively studied in global academic discourse since the late twentieth century. R. Paul and L. Elder associate information culture with an individual's ability to search for information, verify it, process it, and draw justified conclusions. C. Bruce interprets information culture as a "culture of conscious interaction with information."

In the works of Uzbek scholars such as B. Kodirov, N. Jo'rayev, D. Xudoyberdiyeva, and M. Usmonxo'jayev, the content of information culture is closely linked with media literacy, digital competencies, and information security. The theory of critical approach is based on the scientific views of J. Dewey, K. Popper, and R. Ennis. This approach helps determine criteria such as the value of information, transparency, and evidence-based validity. An analysis of the scientific literature shows that critical approach and information culture are closely interconnected, with each determining the quality and content of the other. However, a systematic implementation of this approach in higher education practice has not yet been fully established.

Today, information has become one of the most valuable resources in the world. The rapid development of information technologies requires every individual to possess the ability to work with information responsibly, evaluate it correctly, and disseminate it ethically. This process has led to the formation of the concept of "information culture." Information culture is not merely the mastery of technologies but also the ethical and effective use of information.

Information culture represents a combination of an individual's knowledge, skills, and values related to working with information. It includes searching for information, analyzing it, selecting relevant data, and applying a critical attitude toward it. The exponential growth of information flows makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between accurate and false, useful and harmful information. Therefore, information culture encompasses not only technical knowledge but also ethical principles.

Information culture plays a significant role not only in personal development but also in social life. From the education system to professional activities, information culture is a crucial factor for success in all fields. The widespread use of the internet and social networks further increases the need to develop information culture. Fake news, cybersecurity threats, and conclusions based on misinformation pose serious risks to social stability.

Within the educational process, a critical approach is formed based on the following content components:

1. Logical thinking — understanding the relationships between information elements;
2. Analysis of evidence — assessing the reliability of information;
3. Recognition of alternative viewpoints — comparing contradictory information from different sources;
4. Identifying problems and developing solutions;
5. Drawing well-grounded conclusions.

Integrating a critical approach into student activities transforms learners from passive consumers of information into active subjects of the educational process.

In today's world, success depends not simply on having access to information, but on the ability to locate, evaluate, and apply it effectively. Therefore, a key objective of the education system is to develop students' information competence in a meaningful way. This competence is a multifaceted psycho-pedagogical concept that encompasses not only technical abilities, but also critical thinking, ethical awareness, and a culturally informed approach to information use.

Observations and research show that many students struggle to navigate the overwhelming flow of information in the digital age. With the rapid growth of online resources, the ability to filter content, differentiate between reliable and false information, and use data purposefully has become increasingly important. This challenge pushes higher education institutions to adopt innovative teaching strategies. From a pedagogical standpoint, fostering information competence requires interactive, student-centered learning environments. In this context, the teacher's role shifts from being a source of knowledge to acting as a mentor, advisor, and facilitator of critical thinking. Methods such as project-based learning, gamification, and problem-based instruction are especially effective in promoting students' independence in working with information.

Scholarly discussions emphasize that students should be equipped not only with technical skills, but also with ethical and cultural awareness when handling information. This calls for integrating values, social responsibility, and critical awareness into the educational process. Information is more than just knowledge—it is a powerful social resource, and the ability to manage it reflects an individual's intellectual and moral development.

Approaches to developing information culture—including interactive methods, problem-solving activities, project-based tasks, and the use of digital technologies—help students not only find and analyze information, but also present and communicate it effectively. These strategies contribute to building a modern information culture, strengthening professional competencies, and expanding overall knowledge. Ultimately, this development enables students to make informed and responsible decisions in both academic and everyday contexts, preparing them to become ethical and competent leaders.

Promoting students' information culture through a critical approach is a central priority in contemporary higher education. Analysis indicates that a critical perspective fosters a thoughtful, reasoned, and analytical attitude toward information; that information culture includes components such as media literacy, digital skills, and information security; that critical thinking enhances active and independent learning; and that the proposed didactic model ensures a structured and consistent development of information culture.

In conclusion, an education system grounded in a critical approach equips students with the essential skills needed to navigate and succeed in today's complex information environment.

References

1. Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2014). *Critical Thinking Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*.
2. Dewey, J. (1933). *How We Think*. New York.
3. Bruce, C. (2003). *Seven Faces of Information Literacy*.
4. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education".
5. "Digital Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy.
6. Kodirov, B. (2020). *Fundamentals of Information Culture*. Tashkent.
7. Khudoyberdiyeva, D. (2021). *Pedagogical Foundations of Media Literacy*. Tashkent.
8. Jo'rayev, N. (2019). *Information Culture in Modern Education*. Tashkent.
9. Karimova, N. B. *Factors and Criteria for Developing Students' Information Competence*.