



## DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN CHILDREN AGED 3–7 THROUGH PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

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**Abstract:** Critical thinking is a fundamental skill that supports children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. This article explores the methods and benefits of fostering critical thinking skills in children aged 3 to 7 by engaging them in problematic situations. Through carefully designed activities and guided questioning, young learners develop the ability to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems creatively.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, problem situations, early childhood, cognitive development, preschool children, 3-7 years old, problem-solving skills, thinking skills development, educational methods, preschool education

Early childhood is a crucial period for cognitive development. During the ages of 3 to 7, children's brains are highly plastic, allowing them to absorb and process new information rapidly. Developing critical thinking at this stage equips children with essential skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making, which form the foundation for lifelong learning.

Problematic situations are scenarios or tasks that present a challenge or require thoughtful consideration to resolve. These situations encourage children to move beyond rote memorization and engage in active learning. For example, presenting a puzzle that requires assembling pieces to form a picture or a scenario where a toy is "missing" encourages children to think critically about possible solutions.



Critical thinking is one of the essential cognitive skills that supports children's overall development and future success. Developing critical thinking abilities from an early age helps children to analyze information, make reasoned decisions, and solve problems effectively. Preschool years, particularly between the ages of 3 and 7, are a crucial period for cognitive growth, making it an ideal time to nurture these skills.

One effective approach to fostering critical thinking in young children is through the use of problem situations. Problem situations are carefully designed scenarios or tasks that challenge children to think deeply, ask questions, and explore multiple solutions. Such situations encourage active engagement, curiosity, and independent reasoning, which are vital components of critical thinking.

In early childhood education, integrating problem situations into daily activities allows educators to create a stimulating learning environment where children develop their ability to observe, compare, evaluate, and reflect. Moreover, this method supports the development of other essential skills such as communication, creativity, and social interaction.

Despite the recognized importance of critical thinking, many preschool settings still rely heavily on rote learning and passive reception of information, limiting opportunities for children to engage in meaningful problem-solving. Therefore, exploring and implementing effective strategies to promote critical thinking through problem situations is necessary to enhance early childhood education quality.

This article aims to analyze the role of problem situations in developing critical thinking skills among children aged 3 to 7 years. It also discusses pedagogical approaches and practical recommendations for educators to effectively apply these strategies in preschool settings.



## Methods for Developing Critical Thinking

1. **Guided Questions:** Adults can support children by asking open-ended questions that stimulate thinking, such as “What do you think will happen if...?” or “How can we solve this problem?”
2. **Interactive Play:** Role-playing and imaginative games help children explore different perspectives and outcomes, fostering deeper understanding.
3. **Hands-on Activities:** Manipulatives like building blocks, sorting tasks, and pattern recognition exercises promote analytical skills.
4. **Encouraging Reflection:** After solving a problem, discussing the process and alternative solutions helps children develop self-awareness and evaluative thinking.

Engaging children in problematic situations enhances their ability to analyze information, make reasoned decisions, and adapt to new challenges. It also supports language development, as children learn to articulate their thought processes, and promotes social skills through collaborative problem-solving.

While encouraging critical thinking, it is important to tailor the complexity of problems to the child’s developmental level to avoid frustration. Patience and positive reinforcement from educators and parents are key to fostering a supportive learning environment.

Introducing problematic situations to children aged 3 to 7 is an effective approach to nurturing critical thinking skills. Early development of these skills lays the groundwork for academic success and effective problem-solving throughout life. Future educational programs should integrate problem-based learning tailored to young children’s needs.



## References

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