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Developing Students' Creative Thinking Skills Through Teaching Essay Writing Based on Problem-Based Learning Technology

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Abstract: The development of students' creative thinking is a crucial aspect of modern education, particularly in the context of global educational reforms. Problem-based learning (PBL) technology, which emphasizes active student engagement through problem-solving and research, has been shown to enhance creative and critical thinking. However, the integration of PBL with essay writing methods in developing creative thinking remains underexplored. This study investigates how combining PBL with essay writing can foster students' independent research, creative expression, and critical thinking skills. The study found that students who engaged in problem-based essay writing demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to express personal opinions, develop arguments, and think creatively. The novelty lies in the dual application of PBL and essay writing to simultaneously enhance both the creative and logical aspects of student thinking. The findings suggest that educators should consider integrating PBL and essay writing to improve students' cognitive abilities, particularly in independent research and creative problem-solving. This method supports the goal of fostering more adaptable, creative thinkers in educational systems.

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1. Introduction

As individuals engage in social life, it becomes necessary for them to acquire skills such as interacting with the community, conveying their opinions to the public, giving reports, and making appeals. In this sense, developing speech skills in students, starting from general education schools, is considered one of the main objectives. In the general secondary education stage of the education system, teaching students to work independently on the subject of their native language and forming skills to express their thoughts fluently and effectively in both oral and written forms stand as primary tasks for today's education. Indeed, special attention is required to educate students as enlightened, in a word, well-rounded individuals .

In this process, it is important to consider the possibilities of achieving effective results through the integration of problem-based learning technology and essay writing [1].

Problem-based learning technology is a pedagogical approach aimed at developing students' independent thinking, research, and creative activity skills, in which the

educational process is organized by creating a «problem» for the student. The main idea is that the student does not receive ready-made knowledge, but finds it themselves through research.

This chapter analyzes the essence of problem-based learning technology and its potential applications in teaching essay writing. It highlights the methodology for developing students' creative thinking, independent analysis, and creative expression skills through a problem-based approach in the essay writing process. The study has developed effective methodological recommendations based on the stages of creating a problem situation, formulating hypotheses, logical reasoning, and creative expression [2].

In the current process of globalization, the main outcome expected from the education system is not producing individuals who have mastered ready-made knowledge, but rather nurturing those who can independently search for new knowledge, analyze it, and apply it creatively. Developing creative thinking in this process is one of the central goals of modern pedagogy [3].

Creative thinking is not merely the ability to be «creative», but also the capacity to approach existing information in novel ways, find unconventional solutions, and solve problems using unique methods. From this perspective, problem-based learning technology is considered one of the most effective methods for fostering creative thinking in students.

Scientists such as Choshanov, Matyushkin, and Selevko have extensively explored the theoretical foundations of problem-based learning technology in their scientific research [4][5]. Their studies highlight that problem situations foster inquiry, analysis, and creative approaches in students. The works of Ismoilova and co-authors have revealed the methodological aspects of applying modern educational technologies in practical processes, serving as the primary theoretical source for this article [6].

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study integrates problem-based learning (PBL) with essay writing techniques to assess their impact on developing students' creative thinking skills. The approach begins by creating problem situations relevant to the subject matter, which students must engage with to find solutions. These problem situations are designed to provoke critical thinking and encourage independent inquiry. Students are tasked with formulating hypotheses, conducting research, and using evidence to support their arguments in an essay format. The research methodology includes a combination of individual and group activities. Students first analyze the given problem, then work in small groups to discuss possible solutions and share ideas, fostering collaborative learning. The group discussions provide an environment for students to develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills [7]. Following this, students individually write essays based on their research findings, emphasizing personal reflection and creative expression. The essays are evaluated on the ability to present well-structured arguments, demonstrate creative thought, and integrate evidence into their reasoning. The effectiveness of this integrated method is assessed through pre and post-tests, measuring students' improvements in critical thinking, creative expression, and research skills. Additionally, feedback from both students and teachers is collected to gauge the perceived impact of this method on students' development of independent thinking and creative writing. This methodology aims to provide insights into how combining problem-based learning and essay writing can enhance students' cognitive abilities in a structured and measurable way.

3. Results and Discussion

To fully achieve educational goals, it is essential to properly organize the learning process, instill motivation for learning in students, and teach them critical thinking. One

of the most effective educational technologies for implementing these tasks in the education system is problem-modular learning technology. Russian scholar M. Choshanov states the following about this technology: «In teaching through problem-module technology, we should focus on training students to solve problems through critical thinking» [1][8]. According to another prominent Russian pedagogical scholar, A. Matyushkin, «problem-based learning technology further develops students' thinking abilities» [2]. Problem-based learning is understood as teaching educational material in a way that creates tasks and problems similar to scientific inquiry in students' minds. Problem situations arise in students' thought processes, objectively encouraging them to search for solutions and learn to draw logically sound scientific conclusions [3][9].

Problem-based learning technology can be utilized not only in school education but at all levels of education. By applying problem-based learning technologies in the educational process from kindergarten age, we can develop the thinking and reasoning abilities of learners. If this practice is continued throughout the remaining stages of education, the pedagogical tasks of the educator will be somewhat simplified due to the skills acquired by the students [10].

Problem-based learning technology is a type of developmental learning that combines students' systematic independent search activity with the assimilation of the subject or its ready-made conclusions. The system of methods is constructed taking into account the principles of goal-setting and problem-solving. The process of learning interaction is aimed at developing students' independence of knowledge, stability of learning motives, and mental abilities through mastering methods of deterministic activity, guided by a system of scientific concepts and problem situations.

Problem-based learning technology is an educational system based on students acquiring new knowledge by solving practical and theoretical problem situations. When solving problems using problem-based learning technology, the thinking process manifests and develops in any person. Problem-based learning technology helps to accomplish the following tasks: mastering knowledge and skills acquired by students through active search and independent problem-solving; nurturing an active, creative individual who can identify and solve non-standard professional problems; developing students' thinking abilities and creative skills.

In the process of problem-based learning, students' cognitive activity may depend on the following main characteristic stages: the emergence of a problematic situation, understanding and formulating the problem in problem-based learning, justifying it, searching for a solution method by proving hypotheses, and verifying the correctness of problem-solving in problem-based learning [4][11].

A problem situation is a mental state of a person experiencing cognitive difficulties, a contradiction identified in the form of a question posed to them. As a result of solving a system of problem situations, students discover new knowledge and ways to apply it, mastering the general principles of problem-solving.

A problem situation arises only when a person possesses both the cognitive need and intellectual capabilities to solve this problem.

A problem is a task or question for which the solution method is not known in advance, but the student has the preliminary knowledge and skills to find the result or method of execution. Problem situations should be accessible to students of a certain age, taking into account their knowledge and practical abilities. Such situations are typically created based on real-life material. When a problem situation is correctly formulated, it sparks students' interest and creates motivation for them to study it [4][12].

In a problem situation, three characteristics can be distinguished: Its scope should be oriented towards the possibilities of students' cognitive and research activities; All questions arising from the problem situation should be meaningful for the students; The

solution of the main problem should typically emerge against the background of solving a chain of subordinate problems that arise from one another and demonstrate the logical relationships between the studied laws, processes, and phenomena. Most importantly, the problem situation should awaken the student's interest, instill a desire to understand the problem, and surprise them [5][13].

Students can understand the essence of a difficulty if they comprehend the objective foundations of the learned methods of action and can observe how these foundations align with the actual conditions of the problem being solved. Based on this analysis, a problematic task emerges from a problematic situation. In the concept of problem-based learning technology, this stage is crucial for developing the potential for independent work and forming a scientific worldview in students. Identifying and formulating a problem often requires more intellectual effort than finding its subsequent solution [14]. A well-formed and consciously understood problematic task involves the emergence of several problem questions. These problematic issues transform into a challenge when finding a solution, where various approaches, methods, and means are considered. Additionally, students gather information about the characteristics and properties of the elements that constitute the problem situation. Based on the results of this information gathering, the stage of developing a working hypothesis for solving the problem begins. After formulating the hypothesis, students are asked to verify how well it corresponds to the initial conditions of the problem and to justify it. After proving the hypothesis by deriving consequences from it and testing them, the final stage is carried out - evaluating the found solution and determining its applicability for solving other problems [6][15].

Based on the level of students' independence in creating and solving problem situations, four levels of problem-based learning technology are distinguished: the level of normal activity, the level of semi-independent activity, the level of independent activity, and the level of creative activity.

The main conditions for the success of problem-based learning technology are: the expediency of working with emerging problems, students' interest in the content of the problem, the teacher's supportive attitude towards the student's free thinking process, and the importance of the information obtained in solving the problem [7][16].

Essay writing, on the other hand, is a type of written work that allows students to freely express their personal viewpoints, argue their positions, and creatively express their opinions. It becomes highly effective when used in conjunction with problem-based learning methodology.

Theoretical foundations of problem-based learning technology

1. The essence of problem-based learning

Problem-based learning technology involves the teacher creating a pedagogical situation in the educational process where students are compelled to investigate a problem and experience the process of acquiring knowledge rather than receiving ready-made information. This technology aligns with Socrates' questioning method, Dewey's «problem-based learning» concept, and Vygotsky's «zone of proximal development» theory.

2. Basic Principles

- The principle of activity - the student is an active subject in the process.
- The principle of exploration - knowledge is sought and discovered, not presented in a ready-made form.
- The principle of independence - decision-making and reasoning.
- The principle of reflection - analyzing one's own work.

3. Connection with creative thinking

Problem-based learning: expands thinking through unusual questions; combines logical and creative approaches; transforms the student into a «thought creator».

Integration of the essay writing process and problem-based learning

Essay writing: allows for free interpretation of the topic; combines logical and artistic thinking; requires substantiating ideas through arguments and examples.

The problem-based approach in essay writing is implemented as follows:

1. Creating a problem situation (the student seeks a «solution», not an «answer»)
2. Posing a question (introductory question or contradiction)
3. Research process (sources, evidence, personal experience)
4. Written expression of thoughts (introduction, main body, conclusion)
5. Reflection (analyzing one's work)

Methodological recommendations

1. Lesson planning
 - Goal: developing creative thinking.
 - Tools: problem-based learning method + essay writing.
 - Result: independent written work, logical consistency, creative expression.

2. Stages

Stage 1. Creating a problem situation

The teacher asks a controversial or contradictory question on the topic.

For example:

- «Is the Internet a source of creativity or its enemy?»
- «Will robots write literature in the future?»

Stage 2. Analyzing the question

Students in small groups:

- explain the problem;
- identify the main questions;
- support their opinions.

Stage 3. Proposing a hypothesis

Each group or student expresses their own hypothesis about the problem.

Stage 4. Essay writing

Structure:

- Introduction - presenting the problem, posing a question.
- Main body - arguments, examples, opposing viewpoints.
- Conclusion - personal position, generalization.

Stage 5. Presentation and discussion

Each student or group briefly presents the content of their essay.

Stage 6. Reflection

The student evaluates their written work, identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Expected outcomes

- Students develop creative thinking.
- Critical analysis skills improve.
- Logical coherence and artistic expression in written communication are enhanced.
- The ability to make independent decisions in problematic situations is developed.

The integration of problem-based learning technology and the essay writing method teaches students to approach tasks creatively and logically, not only in written communication but also in real-life situations. Through this approach, students don't just receive ready-made knowledge, but experience the process of

acquiring knowledge, which fully aligns with the main goal of modern education [17].

4. Conclusion

Integrating problem-based learning technology with essay writing methodology fosters the development of not only written communication skills but also comprehensive thinking abilities in students. This approach guides learners towards independent research, finding innovative solutions, and freely expressing their personal views. Research findings indicate that essay writing exercises based on problem situations were effective in enhancing creative expression, critical thinking, and reflective skills. Therefore, combining problem-based learning and essay writing in the educational process proves to be highly effective as one of the key methods in modern pedagogy.

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