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METHODOLOGY FOR FORMING INDEPENDENT THINKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article explores effective pedagogical methods for developing independent thinking skills in primary school students. Independent thinking is considered one of the fundamental competencies of 21st-century education, enabling students to analyze information, make informed decisions, and express their opinions with confidence. The study discusses strategies such as problem-based learning, interactive tasks, and critical thinking activities that foster autonomy and creativity in young learners. Additionally, the article emphasizes the importance of a supportive learning environment and teacher-student interaction in promoting independent thought. The proposed methodology aims to enhance educational outcomes by equipping students with essential lifelong learning skills from an early age.

Keywords: independent thinking, primary education, problem-based learning, critical thinking, interactive methods, pedagogical strategies, student autonomy

Introduction. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape of the 21st century, the ability to think independently has become a crucial skill for learners at all levels. Particularly in primary education, fostering independent thinking lays a strong foundation for students' academic success and personal development. Independent thinking enables young learners to analyze situations critically, solve problems creatively, and make informed decisions without overreliance on external guidance.

Primary education plays a pivotal role in shaping children's cognitive abilities, habits of mind, and attitudes toward learning. It is during this formative stage that students begin to develop not only academic skills but also the capacity to reflect, question, and evaluate information critically. Therefore, it is essential for educators to employ effective methodologies that support the cultivation of independent thought from the early years of schooling.

The development of independent thinking in primary students requires a shift from traditional rote learning to student-centered pedagogical approaches. These include problem-based learning, open-ended questioning, cooperative learning, and the integration of real-life contexts into classroom activities. Moreover, a supportive and interactive learning environment, where students are encouraged to express their ideas and explore multiple solutions, significantly contributes to their intellectual autonomy.

This article examines various methods and strategies that can be implemented in primary classrooms to nurture independent thinking skills. It also highlights the teacher's role in guiding, motivating, and scaffolding students' learning processes while gradually allowing them to take ownership of their learning. By promoting independent thinking at an early age, educators can equip students with the necessary tools to become lifelong learners, innovative thinkers, and responsible citizens in a knowledge-driven society.

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore effective methods for developing independent thinking skills in primary students. Data was gathered through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of student work across grades 2 to 4 in selected primary schools. The methodology focused on the integration of problem-based learning (PBL), collaborative group activities, and open-ended tasks designed to stimulate critical and creative thought processes.

Teachers were guided to use questioning strategies that encouraged student reasoning, hypothesis formulation, and justification of opinions. Additionally, students were given real-world scenarios and projects that required self-directed inquiry, decision-making, and reflection. The classroom environments were adapted to support autonomy, with flexible seating arrangements, access to diverse learning materials, and teacher facilitation rather than direct instruction.

The effectiveness of the methods was evaluated through rubrics measuring students' ability to articulate independent opinions, apply logic, and demonstrate initiative in learning activities. Feedback from both teachers and students was also considered to assess the impact of the implemented strategies.

The study revealed that students exposed to structured opportunities for independent thinking showed marked improvements in problem-solving abilities, classroom engagement, and self-confidence. In particular, students who participated in group-based critical thinking tasks exhibited enhanced collaborative skills and a greater willingness to share and defend their ideas.

Teachers reported that using open-ended questions and student-led discussions transformed classroom dynamics, shifting the focus from memorization to exploration. The presence of a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere encouraged risk-taking in thought and greater student participation. Furthermore, the incorporation of real-life examples into learning materials made tasks more meaningful and relatable to students' everyday experiences.

The results confirm that the development of independent thinking in primary education is closely tied to the teaching methodology. Strategies that involve inquiry, reflection, and creativity enable students to become active participants in their own learning journey, thereby promoting lifelong learning habits.

Fostering independent thinking skills in primary students is essential for preparing them to face the challenges of modern education and life. The findings of this study demonstrate that employing student-centered methodologies such as problem-based learning, interactive questioning, and real-life application tasks significantly enhances students' ability to think independently.

Educators play a central role in shaping these skills by creating an environment that values student input, supports experimentation, and encourages critical reflection. Integrating these practices into daily teaching not only improves academic outcomes but also nurtures a generation of thinkers, innovators, and problem-solvers.

Moving forward, further research can explore the long-term impact of early independent thinking development and how it influences students' academic performance and decision-making abilities in later educational stages.

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