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DEVELOPING FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article explores the theoretical and practical foundations of developing functional literacy in primary school students—one of the top priorities in the modern educational system. The article highlights the essence of the "functional literacy" concept and the interconnectedness of its core components: reading, mathematical, and scientific literacy. Furthermore, it analyzes the methodology for enhancing students' ability to effectively apply theoretical knowledge gained at school to real-life situations, problem-solving, and social communication.

Keywords: functional literacy, reading literacy, mathematical literacy, PISA, critical thinking, practical skills.

In today's rapidly evolving information age, the primary challenge facing the education system is not merely producing knowledgeable youth, but fostering life-ready and competitive individuals. Consequently, the concept of "functional literacy" has taken center stage in educational content. Functional literacy is an individual's ability to effectively apply the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired at school to everyday life situations, communication, and various problem-solving tasks.

Primary education serves as the foundation for this process. It is specifically in grades 1–4 where a child's logical thinking, text analysis potential, and the ability to link mathematical operations to real-life needs begin to form. Currently, international assessment programs (such as PISA and PIRLS) evaluate students not on how much information they have memorized, but on how effectively they can utilize that information in life (their functional literacy).

The reforms within Uzbekistan's education system, particularly the introduction of new-generation textbooks, are aimed at sparking critical and creative thinking in students. Without functional literacy, a child will struggle to derive correct conclusions from the flow of information and face difficulties adapting to complex social processes in the future. Therefore, the skill of a primary school teacher is reflected in their ability to connect lessons with real life and provide practical answers to the student's question: "Why do I need this knowledge?".

Key Components of Functional Literacy

According to the analysis of international studies (such as PISA and PIRLS), the following four areas are crucial for primary school students:

1. Reading Literacy: Understanding the text, extracting necessary information, and comprehending the author's intent. It is vital to move beyond simple storytelling in primary grades and focus on working with "implicit" meanings. We utilize the following methods:

"Reading with Pauses": Predicting the character's next move or the story's conclusion.

Working with Non-Continuous Texts: Training children to extract information from tables, diagrams, receipts, or theater posters. This connects the lesson directly to real-life situations.

2. Mathematical Literacy: Solving everyday problems (e.g., calculations, time management) using mathematics. Instead of abstract "water pipes and pools" problems, we offer practical assignments:

"Calculate how many rolls of wallpaper are needed to renovate your own room."

The modern world requires a primary school graduate to not only read quickly and calculate correctly but also to navigate accurately through an endless stream of information. Functional literacy is a "knowledge reserve" that assists a child in successful social integration. Our task as educators is to shift the focus from the question "What do I know?" to the question "How can I apply this knowledge?"

"Imagine you have 50,000 soums in your wallet and create a lunch menu for your family." Such problems provide a direct answer to the student's question: "Why do I need mathematics?"

3. Scientific Literacy: The Experiment Method

A young learner is a natural researcher. The best way to master material is through experimentation. We implement short-term projects ranging from growing salt crystals to observing the phases of the moon. It is crucial for the child to independently formulate a hypothesis and draw conclusions.

Pedagogical Tools. The following are considered most effective in implementing these tasks:

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Technology: Creating situations in the classroom that do not have a ready-made answer in the textbook.

Small Group Work: Developing skills for collaboration and the distribution of roles.

Digital Platforms: Interactive games and assignments that allow students to master material at an individual pace.

Effective Methodological Techniques Used in Lessons:

A. The "INSERT" Method (For Reading Literacy)

While reading a text, the student makes marks in the margins:

"V" — I know this;

"+" — New information for me;

"–" — Contradicts what I knew;

"?" — Unclear or needs more information.

Result: The child works with the text consciously and critically.

B. "Cinquain" (For Logical Thinking)

Summarizing the topic in 5 lines:

1. Noun (The topic name).
2. Two Adjectives.
3. Three Verbs.
4. A phrase or sentence related to the topic.
5. A synonym (Summary of the essence).

V. "Case Study" (Problem-Based Situation)

Students are given a real-life scenario. For example: "You entered a store with 20,000 soums. Your list includes bread, milk, and apples. Calculate the prices and determine if you have enough money."

Practical Recommendations for Teachers:

Do not limit yourself to the textbook: Bring newspaper clippings, instruction manuals, maps, and various diagrams into the classroom.

The art of questioning: Instead of "What is this?" (closed question), ask "What would happen if it were like this?" (open question).

Working with mistakes: A student should not be afraid to make mistakes. Analyzing an error is the most powerful method of learning.

In developing functional literacy, the teacher should act not as a "provider of knowledge" but as a "facilitator" (guide). During the lesson, it is essential to provide:

Freedom: Creating an environment where there is no fear of making mistakes.

Communication: Developing collective problem-solving skills through pair and group work.

Reflection: Seeking an answer at the end of every lesson to the question: “Where will what we learned today be useful in life?”

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that developing functional literacy in primary school students is not merely an educational requirement or another pedagogical innovation, but a strategic investment aimed at increasing the intellectual potential of our country.

The primary goal of modern elementary education has shifted from filling a student's memory with facts to teaching them how to use those facts as a “tool” for solving life's problems. Research shows that a child who establishes a strong foundation of functional literacy in primary school becomes accustomed to:

Extracting the most necessary information from the flow of data;

Seeking logical solutions without panicking in complex life situations;

Working in a team and proving their point of view with evidence.

Recommendations for Teachers and Methodologists:

Moving Beyond the Textbook: Lessons should be enriched by supplementing textbook examples with real-life scenarios (e.g., calculating receipts, navigating using a map, or writing a formal letter).

International Experience: Logical questions from international assessment systems like PISA and PIRLS should be regularly integrated into the “flash-questions” (warm-up) part of the lesson.

Reforming the Evaluation System: It is essential to reward students not only for the correct answer but also for their original approach and logical thinking in reaching that answer.

After all, today’s student is tomorrow’s doctor, engineer, or entrepreneur. Their ability to connect knowledge with real life starting from the school desk ensures efficiency and progress in all sectors of society. Therefore, functional literacy is the key to a successful future.

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