

THE ROLE OF A TEACHER IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING METHOD

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Abstract:

In this study, it is shown that the PBL method stimulates active cooperation with students in the educational process and is important in the development of their critical thinking skills. The thesis analyzes the methodology of teachers in the PBL process, organizational skills, and relationships with students. The necessary conditions and strategies for the development of critical thinking will also be developed. The research results can help teachers deepen their students' thinking processes by using the PBL method.

Key words: Project-Based Learning (PBL), facilitator, critical thinking, collaboration, teamwork.

Introduction

In the modern education system, the development of students' critical thinking skills is of great importance. This ability is necessary not only for acquiring knowledge, but also for solving problems in various spheres of life. Teachers play an important role in the educational process not only as informants, but also as individuals who direct and support students' thinking processes. Project-based learning (PBL) is a project-based learning methodology that allows students to apply knowledge in practice by solving real-life problems. This approach encourages students to actively participate and serves to develop their critical thinking skills. The teacher actively participates in the PBL process as a mentor and guide, and also encourages students to think independently.

This thesis analyzes the role of the teacher in improving critical thinking through PBL. The role of the teacher's tasks, guidelines, and strategies in achieving successful results in the PBL process will be considered. It also analyzes what methods and approaches teachers can use to improve the effectiveness of PBL programs. This is intended to contribute to improving the quality of the educational process and preparing future generations as individuals capable of critical thinking.

The Project-Based Learning methodology is known as an educational approach that helps students solve problems, study real-life problems, and think creatively (Thomas, 2000). In this process, the teacher plays an important role: they guide students, provide them with the necessary resources, and increase motivation during the process. The teacher's role in the PBL process is largely expressed as a facilitator (Bell, 2010). The teacher encourages students to actively participate, helps them think more deeply by asking questions, and supports them to move forward during the project.

Various studies have shown that the PBL approach significantly improves students' critical thinking skills (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). In such an environment, the teacher should be a guide and encourage cooperation among students.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a highly effective approach that enhances students' ability to solve problems, think critically, and express creativity. Through this method, students engage in meaningful, real-world projects that allow them to explore subjects in depth. However, for PBL to be successful, the teacher plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting students throughout the learning process. The following are the key responsibilities of teachers in facilitating PBL effectively:

1. Creating motivation. One of the teacher's primary responsibilities in PBL is to create motivation and spark students' interest in learning. To achieve this, teachers should carefully select projects that are relevant, engaging, and aligned with students' interests and real-world

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issues. By choosing topics that students find meaningful, teachers can encourage deeper exploration and a stronger sense of ownership over their learning. Additionally, linking projects to real-life situations or problems can enhance students' enthusiasm and increase their willingness to invest effort in research and problem-solving.

2. Providing Guidance and Direction. While PBL allows students to take an active role in their learning, the teacher must provide continuous guidance throughout the project. This includes helping students define research questions, set goals, and organize their workflow. Teachers can facilitate this process by asking thought-provoking questions, encouraging discussions, and providing constructive feedback. Furthermore, guiding students in developing a structured approach to problem-solving ensures that they remain focused and do not lose direction during the project. This support can be provided through one-on-one mentoring, group discussions, or even digital tools that help track progress.

3. Development of critical thinking skills. An essential aspect of PBL is fostering critical thinking skills. The teacher should encourage students to analyze information critically, evaluate different perspectives, and make reasoned conclusions. This can be achieved by posing challenging questions that push students to think beyond the surface level and engage in discussions that require them to defend their ideas with logical reasoning. By exposing students to different viewpoints and encouraging debates, the teacher helps them develop independent thinking and the ability to make informed decisions.

4. Support for collaboration and teamwork. Collaboration is a fundamental component of PBL, as projects often require students to work together to achieve a common goal. The teacher should create an environment that promotes teamwork by encouraging communication, cooperation, and shared decision-making. Assigning group roles and responsibilities can help students develop leadership and teamwork skills while ensuring that each member contributes effectively. Additionally, teachers should mediate conflicts that may arise within groups and guide students in resolving disagreements constructively. Creating opportunities for peer learning and knowledge exchange enhances students' ability to work in diverse teams, preparing them for real-world professional collaboration.

5. Providing Constructive Feedback and Evaluation. Evaluation is a critical component of the PBL process. Teachers must assess students' work not only based on the final product but also on the learning process, creativity, and problem-solving skills demonstrated during the project. Providing timely, constructive feedback helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback should be specific, highlighting what students did well and offering suggestions for refining their work. Additionally, incorporating peer assessments and self-evaluations can further support students in understanding their progress and making necessary improvements.

6. Encouraging Reflection and Self-Assessment. Once a project is completed, reflection is an important step in consolidating learning. Teachers should engage students in reflective discussions where they analyze their experiences, challenges faced, and lessons learned throughout the project. By reflecting on their work, students can assess their performance, recognize areas for growth, and develop strategies for future projects. Teachers can facilitate this process through reflective journals, group discussions, or self-assessment forms that encourage students to think critically about their learning journey.

7. Providing Necessary Resources and Support. To ensure the success of PBL, teachers should provide students with access to relevant resources, including books, academic articles, videos, online databases, and expert interviews. Offering diverse materials helps students gain a broader understanding of their topic and supports their research. Additionally, teachers should introduce students to digital tools and platforms that can assist in project management, collaboration, and presentation. By ensuring that students have access to high-quality information and tools, teachers enable them to produce well-informed and impactful projects.

Conclusion

The role of the teacher in the process of developing critical thinking through the PBL methodology is invaluable. The teacher acts not only as a leader directing students towards project activities, but also as a person who stimulates and supports their thinking process. Teachers, together with students, must actively participate in the processes of identifying

problems, developing solutions, and evaluating them. In this process, the teacher's role as a consultant, motivator, and mentor contributes to the formation of important skills for students.

In developing critical thinking skills through the PBL methodology, teachers should apply innovative approaches, encourage teamwork and communication skills. It is also important to set tasks that help improve the ability for self-analysis and reflection. As a result, students' ability to think independently and solve complex problems increases.

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