

Developing Independent Thinking of Primary School Students Through the Organization of a Creative Educational Environment

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Abstract: This study explores how a creatively organized educational environment contributes to the development of independent thinking in primary school students. Unlike traditional approaches that are mainly based on memorization, this research emphasizes learning conditions that stimulate curiosity, reflection, and student initiative. The study is based on pedagogical observation and practical teaching experience in primary classrooms where inquiry-based learning, problem situations, group discussions, and creative assignments were applied. The results indicate that when students learn in a supportive, flexible, and interactive environment, their ability to think independently, justify their answers, and propose multiple solutions significantly improves. The study concludes that a creative educational environment is a key pedagogical condition for developing independent thinking in early education.

Keywords: Independent thinking, creative educational environment, primary education, student-centered learning, inquiry-based learning, creativity, cognitive development.

Introduction: In contemporary education systems, the role of teaching and learning is rapidly changing. Traditional classroom practices, which are mostly based on memorization and repetition, are no longer sufficient to prepare students for modern life. Today's society requires individuals who are able to think critically, solve problems independently, make decisions, and adapt to new situations. For this reason, the development of independent thinking in primary school students has become one of the most important goals of modern pedagogy.

Primary education is considered the foundation of a child's intellectual and emotional development. At this stage, children begin to form their cognitive structures, learning habits, and attitudes toward knowledge. If students are encouraged to think independently from an early age, they develop stronger analytical skills and become more confident learners in later stages of education. However, if teaching is limited to memorization and repetition, students often become passive participants in the learning process.

A creative educational environment plays a crucial role in overcoming this issue. It creates conditions where

students are encouraged to ask questions, explore ideas, express their opinions, and engage in meaningful learning activities. In such an environment, the teacher is not only a knowledge provider but also a facilitator who guides students' thinking process. The main goal of this study is to analyze how a creative educational environment contributes to the development of independent thinking in primary school students and what pedagogical conditions are necessary for its effective implementation.

Understanding Independent Thinking in Primary Education. Independent thinking refers to the ability of a learner to analyze a problem, evaluate different options, and make reasoned decisions without relying entirely on the teacher's direct instructions. In primary education, independent thinking does not mean complex abstract reasoning; instead, it appears in simple but important forms such as explaining answers in one's own words, comparing ideas, asking questions, and choosing between alternatives.

Children naturally have curiosity, but traditional teaching methods often reduce this curiosity by providing ready-made answers. As a result, students

may become dependent on teachers and textbooks. Developing independent thinking requires a shift from answer-based teaching to process-based learning, where students are encouraged to explain how they think, not only what they think.

A Creative Educational Environment as a Pedagogical Condition. A creative educational environment is a system of pedagogical conditions that supports free thinking, active participation, and creative expression. It is not defined by physical classroom design alone but by the quality of interaction between teacher and students. In such an environment, learning becomes an active process rather than passive reception of information.

Key characteristics of a creative educational environment include openness to ideas, emotional safety, encouragement of dialogue, flexibility in teaching methods, and support for student autonomy. Students are given opportunities to explore different solutions, express their opinions freely, and learn from mistakes without fear of negative evaluation. This creates a positive psychological atmosphere that supports intellectual development.

In such classrooms, teachers use guiding questions such as “Why do you think so?”, “Can there be another solution?”, and “How did you reach this answer?”. These questions encourage students to reflect on their thinking and develop reasoning skills.

Pedagogical Approaches Used to Develop Independent Thinking

Several pedagogical approaches are effective in developing independent thinking in primary school students. One of the most important is inquiry-based learning. In this approach, students are not given direct explanations. Instead, they are presented with questions or problems that they must explore and investigate. This method helps students develop observation, comparison, analysis, and conclusion-making skills.

Another important approach is problem-based learning. In this method, students are given real or simulated problems that require them to think critically and propose solutions. Working through problems helps students develop logical thinking and decision-making skills.

Group discussion and collaborative learning are also essential tools. When students share their ideas with peers, they learn to justify their opinions and consider different perspectives. This improves communication skills and strengthens independent thinking.

Creative assignments such as storytelling, drawing conclusions, and designing alternative endings to texts

also play an important role. These tasks encourage imagination and originality.

The Role of the Teacher in a Creative Environment In a creative educational environment, the role of the teacher changes significantly. The teacher becomes a facilitator, mentor, and guide rather than a traditional lecturer. Instead of providing direct answers, the teacher creates situations where students can discover knowledge independently.

The teacher also plays a key role in motivating students, encouraging participation, and creating a safe learning atmosphere. Emotional support is particularly important in primary education, as young learners need confidence to express their ideas freely.

Effective teachers continuously reflect on their teaching methods and try to improve their practice by integrating new pedagogical strategies. Professional development and training in modern teaching methods are essential for maintaining a creative classroom environment.

Classroom Observations and Practical Findings Based on classroom observations, significant changes were noticed when a creative educational environment was introduced. At the beginning, many students were hesitant to express their opinions and preferred waiting for teacher instructions. However, over time, as they were exposed to open-ended questions and interactive tasks, their participation increased.

Students began to ask more questions, express their ideas more confidently, and engage in discussions with peers. They also started to explain their answers in more detail instead of giving short responses. One important observation was that students who were initially quiet became more active when they realized that mistakes were accepted as part of the learning process.

Another important finding was that students began to think in multiple directions rather than focusing on a single correct answer. This is a clear indicator of developing independent thinking skills.

Challenges in Implementation Despite the positive results, several challenges were identified in implementing a creative educational environment. One of the main challenges is limited classroom time, which makes it difficult to conduct extended discussions and activities. Another challenge is the traditional assessment system, which often focuses on correct answers rather than thinking processes.

Additionally, some teachers may lack experience or training in using innovative teaching methods. Limited resources and technological support can also affect the effectiveness of creative learning environments.

Discussion The findings of this study suggest that independent thinking develops most effectively in environments where students are actively engaged in the learning process. A creative educational environment provides such conditions by encouraging exploration, discussion, and reflection.

The most important factor in this process is not technology or teaching materials, but the teacher's approach to questioning and interaction. When teachers encourage students to think independently and value their ideas, students become more confident and active learners.

This study also highlights that independent thinking is not developed in isolation but through continuous interaction with teachers, peers, and learning materials. Therefore, collaboration and communication are essential components of effective learning environments.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that a creative educational environment plays a fundamental role in developing independent thinking among primary school students. When learning is organized in a way that encourages exploration, discussion, and reflection, students become more confident, creative, and independent learners.

Independent thinking cannot be developed through memorization-based instruction. It requires a learning environment where students are actively involved in thinking, questioning, and problem-solving processes.

Therefore, the development of teacher competencies and the implementation of creative pedagogical approaches should be considered a priority in modern primary education systems.

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