**Developing Critical Thinking in 10th Grade EFL Students through Guided Discovery-Based Argumentative Writing Lessons**

**Abstract**

This Lesson Study investigates the efficacy of the Guided Discovery approach in fostering critical thinking skills among 10th grade students in an English language classroom. The study employed a collaborative teaching cycle involving lesson planning, observation, and reflective discussion. The results indicate that the Guided Discovery method significantly contributed to the development of learners' analytical reasoning, inference-making, and autonomous learning behaviors. These findings underscore the potential of constructivist methodologies in enhancing critical thinking within the English language curriculum.

**Introduction**

In contemporary educational discourse, critical thinking is widely recognized as a core competency essential for academic success and lifelong learning. The curriculum framework places strong emphasis on developing higher-order thinking skills, particularly in subjects such as English, where interpretation, analysis, and communication are integral. This Lesson Study seeks to explore how the Guided Discovery approach—a student-centered, inquiry-based methodology—can support the development of critical thinking skills in a Grade 10 English language classroom.

**Research Focus**

*Research Question:*

How does the Guided Discovery approach contribute to the development of critical thinking skills among 10th grade students in the English language classroom?

**Methodology**

*Context and Participants*

The research was conducted involving 18 students aged 15–16 with English proficiency levels ranging from B1 to B2. Three English language teachers collaborated on the Lesson Study cycle.

**Lesson Topic**

The lesson focused on “Argumentative Writing: Expressing Opinions with Justification.” The objectives were to:

* By the end of the 80-minute lesson, students will be able to identify at least three key components of a written argument (claim, supporting evidence, counterargument) in a sample essay with 80% accuracy, as demonstrated through completion of an analytical worksheet.
* By the end of group analysis, students will collaboratively discover and list five structural and linguistic features of an opinion essay, such as thesis statement placement, use of linking devices, and modal verbs, and present their findings to the class in a short 2-minute explanation.
* Within the writing task period, each student will independently write one argumentative paragraph (5–7 sentences) on a familiar topic, applying at least two of the identified argumentative structures and three persuasive language features, as assessed using a peer-reviewed checklist.
* During the peer review stage, students will evaluate a classmate’s argumentative paragraph using a rubric and provide constructive feedback on argument clarity, evidence use, and organization, completing the task within 10 minutes.
* By the end of the lesson, students will reflect on their reasoning and learning process by completing a self-assessment form with at least two specific examples of how they applied critical thinking or revised their opinion based on evidence.

**Instructional Approach**

Guided Discovery was utilized to facilitate active student engagement with authentic materials such as editorials, debate transcripts, and model essays. Instead of direct instruction, the teacher posed scaffolded, open-ended questions designed to elicit student inference and reasoning. The approach was underpinned by constructivist theory, emphasizing learner autonomy and the co-construction of knowledge.

**Implementation**

The lesson was structured into the following stages:

*Engagement Activity*

Students were introduced to the prompt: “Social media does more harm than good.” They were invited to express preliminary opinions in a think-pair-share format.

*Discovery Phase*

Students examined two argumentative essays presenting opposing views. Using a structured worksheet, they identified key features such as thesis statements, cohesive devices, and logical progression. Teacher facilitation employed Socratic questioning to promote inference rather than explanation.

*Critical Thinking Task*

Working in groups, students analyzed the strength of each argument, identifying logical fallacies, implicit assumptions, and persuasive strategies. Each group presented their analysis and justified their evaluations using textual evidence.

*Application Activity*

*Students independently composed argumentative paragraphs on a personally relevant topic. Peer review followed, guided by a rubric emphasizing clarity of argument, evidence use, and logical structure.*

*Reflection and Self-Assessment*

Learners completed a metacognitive reflection, evaluating their own thought processes and engagement with the Guided Discovery methodology.

**Observations and Findings**

Analysis of classroom observations and student output revealed several key outcomes:

* Enhanced Learner Autonomy: Students actively engaged in hypothesis generation and testing, indicating increased ownership of their learning.
* Deepened Conceptual Understanding: Learners demonstrated an ability to internalize and apply argumentative structures through active construction rather than memorization.
* Improved Analytical Skills: Students showed greater competency in evaluating evidence, identifying bias, and structuring logical arguments.
* Effective Collaborative Learning: Group interactions fostered dialogic reasoning, which is central to the development of critical thinking.
* Identified Challenges: Some learners initially struggled with open-ended tasks, highlighting the necessity of scaffolding and differentiated instruction.

**Reflection and Teacher Learning**

Post-lesson discussions among the participating teachers emphasized several professional insights:

* The shift to a discovery-based format encouraged teachers to reconsider their roles from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of inquiry.
* The importance of question design and task sequencing emerged as critical for supporting student reasoning.
* Teachers noted a need to further cultivate a classroom environment that embraces uncertainty and intellectual risk-taking.

**Conclusion**

The Guided Discovery approach demonstrated significant potential in cultivating critical thinking skills within the English language classroom. By encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and construct knowledge through inquiry, the method aligned effectively with the educational goals. While implementation requires careful planning and learner readiness, its long-term impact on intellectual autonomy and analytical competence is considerable.

**References**

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