



Implementation of Critical Literacy and Creative Thinking Program to Improve Critical Thinking Competence of Elementary School Students Reviewed from Progressivism Education Philosophy

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Abstract

Critical and creative thinking skills are essential to equip students to face the challenges of the 21st century. Unfortunately, learning at the elementary school level in Indonesia is still dominated by conventional methods that focus on memorization, so that it does not develop students' potential. This article discusses the implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking through a progressivism philosophy approach, which emphasizes direct experience-based learning. This study uses a case study method involving students, teachers, and principals at an elementary school in Indonesia. The results of the study show that critical literacy can be instilled through project-based and experience-based learning, while creative thinking is developed through exploration of ideas and collaboration. However, the implementation of this program faces challenges, such as lack of teacher training and minimal supporting facilities. The solutions offered include intensive training for teachers, provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure, and integration of learning technology. This article provides practical guidance to improve student competence, with the hope of being able to produce a generation that is adaptive, innovative, and critical in facing global challenges.

Keywords: Critical Literacy; Creative Thinking; Progressivism; Elementary Education

Introduction

Technological advances in the current era have brought various new challenges, especially in the world of education. Human resources are a major component of economic reform, which means creating high-quality, talented, and competitive human resources in global competition, which have so far been ignored by students (Hermawan et al., 2024). One of the main demands is the ability to think critically and creatively which is not only useful in solving academic problems but also relevant to everyday life. At the elementary education level, this period is an important period for the development of children's mindsets. However, many education systems in Indonesia still focus on monotonous and memorization-oriented learning methods, which often ignore students' potential to think more deeply and creatively (Mulyani & Pratama, 2020). This gap is a serious concern. Research shows that critical literacy can help students understand and evaluate information better, a skill that is very much needed in the modern era (Fisher, 2020). In Indonesia itself, the approach to literacy still tends to be limited to technical aspects, such as reading and writing, without instilling deep analytical thinking (Rahman et al., 2021). In addition, the lack of training for teachers and the lack of infrastructure that supports the experiential learning process are also significant obstacles (Santosa & Nugraha, 2022).

Critical literacy not only helps students understand texts but also encourages them to become active learners who are able to voice their views and evaluate information objectively (Sari et al., 2021). Paulo Freire's thinking is an important basis in this regard, where learning is considered effective if it involves students as subjects, not just objects of education (Freire, 1970). This is in line with the philosophical view of progressivism which emphasizes direct experience as the key to learning (Dewey, 2019).

Based on this, in-depth studies on the implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking in elementary schools are still rare in Indonesia. Most studies discuss higher levels of

education (Iskandar & Fitri, 2023). In fact, the elementary education period is an important moment to instill critical thinking patterns that will shape students' character and abilities in the future (Yuliana & Ramadhan, 2022).

The application of experiential and collaborative learning is one of the most recommended solutions. Through this method, students are invited to not only understand the lesson conceptually but also be able to connect it to real experiences, resulting in a deeper understanding (Nugroho & Arifin, 2021). This approach is also considered relevant to answer the needs of 21st century skills, where high-level thinking skills are the key to success (Haryanto, 2023). This study focuses on the implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking programs at the elementary school level with a progressivism philosophical framework. It is hoped that the results of this study will not only provide academic insights but also practical guidance for teachers and policy makers in designing more relevant and effective learning.

Method

This study uses a case study method to analyze the implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking programs in improving the critical thinking competence of elementary school students, which is reviewed from the perspective of the philosophy of progressivism education. The study was conducted in an elementary school in Indonesia that has implemented the program, with research subjects including 5th grade students, class teachers, and principals. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the critical literacy program. The data analysis technique uses a thematic approach, which includes data reduction, categorization, and interpretation based on the theory of progressivism. Data validity is maintained by using triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information obtained. Through this method, the study aims to provide an in depth understanding of the implementation of critical and creative literacy programs in elementary schools as well as the challenges and solutions faced in their implementation.

Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

Education that is able to foster critical thinking skills in students is very important to produce a young generation who not only have broad knowledge, but also the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments objectively, and solve problems effectively. Progressive education, which is based on the philosophy of John Dewey, offers an approach that focuses on direct learning experiences that are relevant to students' daily lives (Putra & Santoso, 2021). In the context of elementary schools, this philosophy of progressivism can be an effective means of forming the foundation of students' critical thinking through active and participatory learning. In this section, the results of the study will be discussed regarding the implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking programs in improving the critical thinking competencies of elementary school students, with reference to the philosophy of progressivism education.

3.2 Discussion

Implementation of Critical Literacy in Elementary School Learning

Critical literacy is the ability to read, understand, and evaluate information in depth, which aims to build students' awareness of the social and cultural context around them. In elementary school learning, critical literacy is applied to develop students' critical thinking skills from an early age, which is an important foundation in facing the challenges of globalization and the increasingly rapid flow of information (Haryanto, 2023). Critical literacy involves not only literal reading skills, but also the ability to analyze, evaluate, and understand the social implications of a text. This approach is rooted in the philosophy of progressivism

which emphasizes the importance of education that is relevant to real life and builds independent thinking skills in students (Dewey, 2019). One way to implement critical literacy in elementary schools is through experiential learning, where students are invited to read texts that are relevant to their lives, such as environmental or social issues, and then encouraged to question and analyze the information. For example, students are invited to read articles about the impacts of climate change and discuss ways to reduce the carbon footprint. Through this activity, students not only understand the material, but also learn to think critically about the issues facing society. This approach is in line with Paulo Freire's thinking, which states that literacy is a tool to free individuals from ignorance and social injustice through a critical understanding of the surrounding reality (Freire, 1970). In addition, project-based learning is another effective method in integrating critical literacy. In this method, students are given the opportunity to work in groups to complete a specific project, such as creating an environmental literacy campaign or analyzing social issues relevant to their lives. This process encourages students to learn collaboratively, evaluate various sources of information, and generate creative solutions to problems found (Rahman et al., 2021). Vygotsky's constructivism theory also supports this method by emphasizing that learning is the result of social interaction and collaboration, where students construct meaning through shared experiences (Vygotsky, 2019). These approaches reflect the core of progressive education, which places students as active subjects in the learning process and meaning-making.

Creative Thinking in Learning

Creative thinking is the ability to generate new and original ideas, which are not only relevant to solving problems but also create innovation in various contexts. In elementary school education, creative thinking plays an important role in equipping students with divergent thinking skills, which are the basis for them to face future challenges. This process is in accordance with the principles of the philosophy of progressivism, which places students as active subjects who build their knowledge through experience and exploration (Dewey, 2019). Creative literacy can be applied through learning activities that involve experiments, exploration of ideas, and collaboration between students, so that they not only receive information but are also able to create innovative solutions. One method to encourage creative thinking is through project-based learning that allows students to develop their ideas freely in groups. For example, students are asked to create a simple prototype as a solution to everyday problems, such as an efficient recycling tool from used materials. This activity not only stimulates their creativity but also trains their ability to work together and communicate. Creative thinking can also be fostered through a constructivist approach, where students actively construct new understandings based on previous experiences and interactions with their learning environment (Vygotsky, 2019). Teachers act as facilitators who guide students' exploration process, not just as transmitters of information (Santoso & Rahmawati, 2021). In addition, a supportive learning environment is also an important factor in the development of creative thinking. Providing flexible learning spaces, varied teaching materials, and supporting technology, such as interactive learning applications, can help students to explore more freely. The philosophy of progressivism emphasizes the importance of creating a learning atmosphere that is relevant to students' lives, where they feel comfortable experimenting and innovating without fear of failure (Nugroho & Pratama, 2022). The results of the study showed that students who were involved in problem-solving and creativity-based learning tended to have higher critical thinking skills compared to students who only followed conventional learning methods (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Thus, the development of creative thinking in learning not only improves students' competence, but also reflects the main goal of progressive education, namely creating individuals who are adaptive and innovative in facing changing times.

Challenges in Program Implementation

The implementation of critical literacy and creative thinking programs in elementary schools faces a number of quite complex obstacles. One of the main challenges is the lack of teacher readiness in implementing critical literacy-based learning methods. Many teachers still rely on traditional approaches, making it difficult to adapt to learning models that encourage students to think critically and creatively (Santoso & Rahmawati, 2021). In the philosophy of progressivism, as expressed by Dewey, teachers must act as facilitators who help students build knowledge through experience and exploration. However, this role is difficult to carry out without adequate training for teachers.

Another significant obstacle is the limited resources and facilities in various elementary schools, especially in remote areas. The lack of teaching materials that support the development of critical literacy, as well as the lack of access to learning technology, makes the implementation of the program less than optimal (Nugroho & Pratama, 2022). This condition is contrary to the principle of progressivism which emphasizes the relevance of education to students' real lives. Without adequate facility support, teachers often have to return to conventional methods that are not suitable for building students' critical and creative thinking skills.

In addition, resistance from various parties, such as parents, students, and even schools, is also an obstacle that needs to be overcome. Some students find it difficult to adapt to active learning that requires their full involvement, especially if they are used to a passive approach. Parents who focus on formal academic achievement, such as test scores, often do not support critical literacy programs because they are considered irrelevant to students' direct success in school (Rahmawati et al., 2023). In Paulo Freire's perspective, education should free individuals from passive mindsets to understand the world more critically, but without sufficient support from all parties, this idea is difficult to fully realize.

Solutions and Recommendations

To overcome the challenges faced in implementing critical literacy and creative thinking learning, one effective solution is the implementation of the Critical Literacy and Creative Thinking Program. This program provides a holistic approach to developing students' critical thinking skills and creativity from an early age, especially in elementary schools. Critical literacy teaches students not only to read and write, but also to analyze and question the information they receive from various sources. Critical literacy-based learning encourages students to think deeply and connect information with their experiences, as well as assess the truth or relevance of the information. In the philosophy of progressivism initiated by Dewey, education must be based on real experiences and deep reflection, where students are actively involved in the learning process (Dewey, 2019; Santoso & Rahmawati, 2021). With the implementation of this program, teachers act as facilitators who can help students develop critical and creative thinking skills through methods such as group discussions, project-based research, and relevant case studies. In addition, creative thinking is also a major component of the Critical Literacy and Creative Thinking Program. Creative learning does not only focus on conventional problem solving, but also on the application of out-of-the-box thinking and the creation of new solutions. This program can integrate various learning techniques that support creativity, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and collaboration-based learning. These techniques facilitate students to develop critical and creative thinking skills simultaneously. According to Vygotsky, students' intellectual development is greatly influenced by their social interactions and environment, so collaborative learning will greatly help students improve their creative and critical thinking skills (Vygotsky, 2019). In addition, research shows that project-based learning can help students to be more independent in thinking and innovating, as well as building critical thinking skills in real-world contexts (Nugroho & Pratama, 2022). To support an effective Critical Literacy and Creative Thinking Program, it is important for schools to

provide adequate resources. Complete educational infrastructure including access to technology, relevant teaching materials, and supportive learning spaces are key elements for the implementation of this program. The use of interactive educational technology, for example, can enrich students' learning experiences by providing access to a variety of information from diverse and trusted sources. In addition, technology also allows students to work collaboratively in solving problems or innovating. From a progressivism perspective, education should focus on students, taking into account their interests and needs, and providing opportunities to learn through direct experiences that are relevant to their lives (Nugroho & Pratama, 2022). By providing tools and resources that support active learning, schools can ensure that critical literacy and creative thinking programs can be run optimally and can improve students' critical and creative thinking skills in the future.

Conclusion

The importance of implementing critical literacy and creative thinking programs in improving critical thinking competencies of elementary school students based on the philosophy of progressivism. Critical literacy helps students understand, evaluate, and analyze information in depth, while creative thinking enables them to generate innovative solutions. The progressivism approach that emphasizes direct experience-based learning has proven effective in building critical and creative thinking skills through methods such as experiential learning and project-based learning. However, the implementation of this program faces various challenges, including lack of teacher readiness, minimal facilities and infrastructure, and resistance from parents and students. To overcome these obstacles, intensive training is needed for teachers, improvement of educational facilities and infrastructure, provision of teaching materials and supporting technology, and close collaboration between schools, parents, and the government. With optimal support, this program is expected to form a generation that is adaptive, innovative, and able to face global challenges.

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