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EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL METHODS FOR DEVELOPING SCHOOL LEARNERS' CRITICAL THINKING AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS SKILLS THROUGH LITERARY ESSAY WRITING

Abstract. Developing critical thinking and textual analysis skills is one of the central goals of general secondary education. In current school practice, however, learners' written work in Kazakh language and literature lessons too often remains at the level of plot retelling. This article examines the role of literary essay writing in forming critical thinking and textual analysis skills in Grades 10-11 learners.

The aim of the work is to substantiate the effectiveness of organizing literary essay writing not as a one-off task, but as a systematic instructional cycle covering problem-based reading, analysis, thesis formulation, formative feedback, and revision. The article presents the theoretical foundations of the literary essay, contemporary normative requirements, a five-criterion assessment rubric, and the structure of an eight-week instructional cycle.

Methods include theoretical analysis, a pedagogical experiment, criteria-based assessment, and qualitative analysis. The results show that organizing the literary essay as a complete instructional cycle develops learners' ability to formulate a thesis, analyze evidence, and express an independent position significantly more than the traditional lesson format. The proposed methodological tools enable Kazakh language and literature teachers to implement Kazakhstan's updated educational standards focused on developing learners' functional literacy.

Keywords: literary essay writing, critical thinking, textual analysis, pedagogical experiment, Kazakh literature, formative feedback, academic writing.

Introduction

The development of critical thinking and textual analysis skills in school learners is among the priority tasks of modern education. In Kazakh language and literature lessons in Grades 10-11, this competence is of particular importance, since learners are required not only to reproduce the content of literary works, but also to interpret figurative details, evaluate the author's position, construct independent arguments, and formulate substantiated responses to complex moral and cultural questions raised in literary texts. The results of the PISA 2022 international study, in which 15-year-old learners from Kazakhstan demonstrated an average reading literacy score of 386 points against the OECD average of 476 points, confirm the relevance of developing analytical reading and written reasoning skills in the system of secondary education of the Republic of Kazakhstan [1].

Literary essay writing offers one way to address this issue. Traditional school compositions (shygarma), mainly ask learners to reproduce the content of a literary work. The essay asks more: a

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thesis that can be argued, evidence chosen from the text, and explanation of what each quotation is doing in the argument. Learners also weigh alternative interpretations and revise their work after receiving feedback. Close reading, critical thinking, dialogue, and academic writing come together in this single instructional process, matching the competence-based direction of Kazakhstan's updated secondary education curriculum.

The State Compulsory Education Standard sets the normative basis of the study; it was approved by Order No. 348 of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated August 3, 2022, together with the Concept for the Development of Preschool, Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 [2; 3]. At the subject level, the updated curriculum for Kazakh language and literature in Grades 10-11 requires learners to analyze literary works, justify interpretive positions, and demonstrate argumentative writing skills [2]. Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools developed a criteria-based assessment system built around five criteria: thesis, textual evidence, critical thinking, analytical depth, and academic language. These criteria correspond directly to the competences developed through literary essay writing [4]. A similar emphasis runs through OECD Education 2030 framework, which highlights learner agency, reflection, and competence-based learning [5], as well as through national methodological recommendations on formative assessment [6].

The study aims to provide theoretical justification and empirical examination of the effectiveness of systematic literary essay writing instruction in developing critical thinking and textual analysis skills among Grades 10-11 learners. The hypothesis follows: if literary essay writing is organized as a systematic instructional process, moving from close reading through thesis formulation and the analysis of textual evidence, and supported further by dialogic discussion, formative feedback, revision, and reflection, then learners' critical thinking and textual analysis skills will develop significantly more effectively than under the traditional lesson format. Forming an independent evidence-based position is an integral outcome of critical reading and analytical writing.

The objectives of the study are:

- a) to analyze theoretical approaches explaining the relationship between literary essay writing, critical thinking, and textual analysis;
- b) to identify the normative requirements for analytical and argumentative writing in upper secondary Kazakh language and literature;
- c) to design an eight-week instructional cycle for teaching literary essay writing;
- d) to conduct a pedagogical experiment in two secondary schools;
- e) to assess learners' diagnostic and final essays using a five-criterion rubric, and to compare the dynamics of learners' written performance in the experimental and control groups.

The object of the study is the process of teaching Kazakh language and literature at the upper secondary level. The subject of the study is literary essay writing as a pedagogical mechanism for developing learners' critical thinking and textual analysis skills. The scientific novelty of the study consists in the development and empirical testing of an eight-week instructional cycle of literary essay writing that integrates close reading, thesis formulation, analysis of textual evidence, counter-interpretation, formative feedback, revision, and reflection as a unified pedagogical mechanism for developing critical thinking and textual analysis skills in Kazakh language and literature lessons. The practical significance of the study lies in the readiness of the proposed instructional cycle, the five-criterion assessment rubric, and the comparative assessment results for direct application in the practice of Kazakh language and literature teachers.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of the study is formed by J. Dewey's concept of reflective thinking [7], L.S. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning [8], L.M. Rosenblatt's transactional model of reading and writing [9], and L. Flower and J.R. Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing [10]. Contemporary research by S. Graham and colleagues confirms that process-oriented writing

instruction produces significant gains in the quality of secondary students' writing and reading comprehension [11; 12]. More recent empirical evidence from a quasi-experimental study of 278 high school students conducted by K. Fulton, T.-J. Lin and G. Newell demonstrates that integrating close reading with dialogic literary argumentation produces measurable gains in learners' literature-related argumentative writing and writing self-efficacy [13, p. 10], which corresponds directly to the structural logic of the eight-week instructional cycle proposed in the present study. Studies of Kazakhstani classroom practice consistently indicate that reproductive, content-recall writing remains the prevailing form of assessed response in Kazakh language and literature lessons, with learners more frequently asked to retell events than to construct and defend independent arguments [14, pp. 399–401; 15, pp. 94–95]. In her methodological study of teaching Rakhimzhan Otarbayev's works at the upper secondary level, published in the Bulletin of Yassawi University, P.M. Adieva similarly emphasizes the importance of moving learners beyond plot retelling toward interpretive engagement with the writer's stylistic, philosophical, and ethical positions [15, p. 94]. The literary essay writing model proposed in this article is aimed at addressing this gap. Recent research on AI-assisted text generation further emphasizes that systematic independent writing instruction is increasingly necessary for developing the cognitive ownership that automated tools cannot substitute [16]. The development of critical questioning, dialogic interpretation, and learner-centred reflection is also consistent with the approaches of R. Paul and L. Elder [17], M.M. Bakhtin [18], and Kazakhstani pedagogical theory represented by Sh.T. Taubaeva, S.T. Imanbaeva, and A.E. Berikhanova [19]. The empirical study by N. Qiaqbai, E. Argynbaev and R. Adilbaeva published in the Bulletin of Yassawi University further confirms that structured pedagogical cycles rather than isolated tasks are decisive for developing higher-order and critical thinking skills among Kazakhstani secondary school learners [14, p. 395].

Research methods and materials

The study employed both theoretical and empirical research methods. The theoretical component involved the analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization of scientific literature and normative documents related to critical thinking, textual analysis, literary essay writing, and the teaching of Kazakh language and literature.

The empirical component was conducted among 100 Grade 10-11 students from two general secondary schools in the «Sauran» district of Turkistan region. A convenience sampling technique was used, with participants recruited from existing classroom groups. The sample included 25 Grade 10 students in the experimental group and 25 Grade 10 students in the control group, as well as 25 Grade 11 students in the experimental group and 25 Grade 11 students in the control group. Thus, each group consisted of 50 students, with a total sample of 100 participants. The groups were comparable in terms of age, previously acquired curricular knowledge, and general level of subject preparation. The participants represented mixed-gender classroom groups and were not separated according to gender. These comparable starting conditions provided a consistent basis for examining the effects of the instructional approach.

A pedagogical experiment was conducted to examine the effectiveness of systematic literary essay writing instruction in developing learners' critical thinking and textual analysis skills. The experiment consisted of three stages: diagnostic, formative, and control. At the diagnostic stage, students in both groups completed an initial literary essay to establish their baseline performance. During the formative stage, the experimental group participated in the structured eight-week instructional cycle described in the study, while the control group continued to receive instruction in the traditional lesson format. The intervention was conducted once a week over eight weeks, and each lesson lasted 50 minutes for both groups. The instructional cycle included problem-based reading, close reading, textual evidence analysis, thesis formulation, argument planning, draft writing, formative feedback, revision, and reflection.

At the control stage, both groups completed a final literary essay, which was assessed using the same criteria-based rubric as the diagnostic essays. The rubric consisted of five criteria: thesis

and independent position, textual evidence and commentary, critical thinking and alternative interpretation, analytical depth, and composition and academic language. Each criterion was evaluated on a four-level scale ranging from Level 1 (beginning) to Level 4 (advanced). All diagnostic and final essays were independently assessed by two raters using the same criteria-based rubric. The resulting scores were used for comparative analysis of changes in the experimental and control groups. In addition to the quantitative comparison of rubric scores, the essays were subjected to qualitative analysis in order to identify changes in students' use of thesis statements, textual evidence, analytical commentary, and interpretation.

Results and discussion

Diagnostic essays in both groups showed a number of recurring difficulties typical of learners with limited experience in analytical literary writing. Plot retelling dominated over interpretation. Thesis statements tended to be descriptive rather than argumentative. Quotations appeared without much analytical commentary, and learners showed limited awareness of alternative interpretations. These observations provided the empirical basis for the structured instructional cycle that followed.

All diagnostic and final essays were assessed by two independent raters against the same five criteria: thesis and independent position, textual evidence and commentary, critical thinking and alternative interpretation, analytical depth, and composition and academic language. Each was scored on a four-level scale from Level 1 (beginning) to Level 4 (advanced). For the qualitative component, the final essays were analyzed thematically, with coding focused on recurring patterns in plot retelling, thesis formulation, use of textual evidence and commentary, analytical depth, and engagement with alternative interpretations.

The qualitative analysis of the final essays indicated a shift from predominantly descriptive responses toward more analytical interpretation. Learners more frequently formulated contestable thesis statements, supported quotations with analytical commentary, and attempted to engage with alternative readings. To provide direct textual evidence of this development, the manuscript should include short, representative before-and-after excerpts from the same learners' diagnostic and final essays.

Comparative assessment shows that the experimental group recorded greater mean growth across all five criteria than the control group, with a total mean gain of +1.36 points against +0.50 points in the control group (Figure 2). The highest growth in the experimental group was recorded in the criteria "textual evidence and commentary" (+1.50) and "thesis and independent position" (+1.40). These results are consistent with the instructional emphasis on selecting quotations, explaining their argumentative function, and revising thesis statements.

The pedagogical model used in the experimental group rests on the simple idea: literary essay writing develops critical thinking and textual analysis skills most effectively when treated as a complete instructional process rather than assigned as a one-off final product. The eight-week cycle moved learners through problem-based reading, guided close reading, dialogic interpretation, thesis formulation and argument planning, draft writing followed by formative feedback and revision (Table 1). Three theoretical sources ground this cycle. L.S. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development holds that learners acquire analytical tools through structured social interaction, with instructional support gradually withdrawn [8, p.86]. L.M. Rosenblatt's transactional model treats the learner's cultural standpoint as a resource for independent interpretation [9, p.3]. Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory establishes that written reasoning develops recursively, through cycles of planning, drafting, and revision [10, p. 366].

Diagnostic essays in both groups showed a number of recurring difficulties typical of learners with limited experience in analytical literary writing. Plot retelling dominated over interpretation. Thesis statements tended to be descriptive rather than argumentative. Quotations appeared without much analytical commentary, and learners showed limited awareness of alternative interpretations. These difficulties gave the empirical grounds for structured instructional cycle that followed.

Table 1 - Eight-week instructional cycle for literary essay writing

Week	Instructional focus	Learner activity	Assessment focus
1	Diagnostic essay and rubric introduction	Learners write an initial essay and discuss criteria of strong analytical writing with reference to exemplar texts.	Baseline level per criterion (ungraded)
2	Problem question and close reading	Learners annotate Abai's Qara Sozderi and identify key conceptual tensions in the text.	Accuracy and depth of textual observation
3	Textual evidence and commentary	Learners select quotations and explain their argumentative function using a citation-commentary table.	Evidence-commentary connection; avoiding paraphrase
4	Thesis formulation	Learners formulate contestable thesis statements and compare strong and weak examples in pairs.	Clarity and independence of thesis
5	Argument planning and counter-interpretation	Learners plan essay structure and prepare a counter-position with a logical response.	Logical structure and critical evaluation of alternatives
6	Draft writing	Learners write a full draft using textual evidence, analytical commentary, and a counter-argument.	Coherence of draft; integration of evidence
7	Formative feedback and revision	Learners receive teacher and peer feedback and revise thesis, commentary, and overall structure.	Quality of revision decisions; metacognitive reflection
8	Final essay and reflection	Learners submit final essays and write brief reflection notes explaining key changes made.	Summative rubric score; quality of self-reflection

All diagnostic and final essays were assessed by two independent raters against the same five criteria: thesis and independent position, textual evidence and commentary, critical thinking and alternative interpretation, analytical depth, and composition and academic language. Each was scored on a four-level scale from Level 1 (beginning) to Level 4 (advanced). Figure 1 presents the overall pedagogical model of the study, from the initial diagnostic state through the eight-week instructional cycle to the achieved outcome.

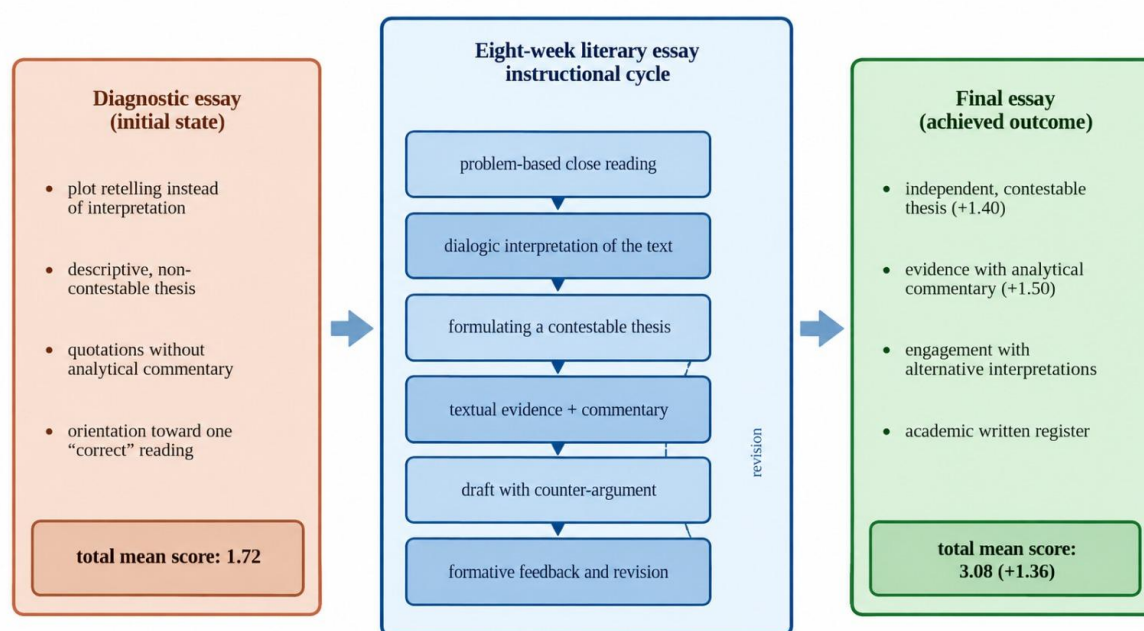


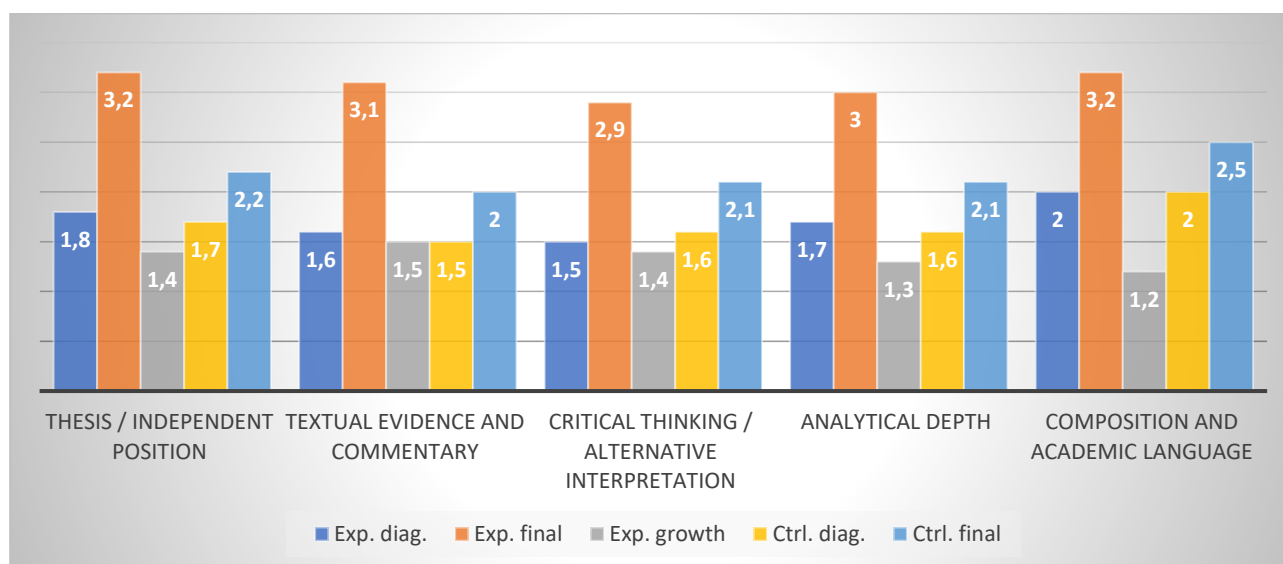
Figure 1 – Pedagogical model of developing learners’ critical thinking and textual analysis skills through systematic literary essay writing

At the control stage, the mean scores of the diagnostic and final essays of both groups were compared across the five criteria (Table 3).

Table 3 - Comparative results of diagnostic and final essays

Criterion	Exp. diag.	Exp. final	Exp. growth	Ctrl. diag.	Ctrl. final	Ctrl. growth
Thesis / independent position	1,80	3,20	+1,40	1,70	2,20	+0,50
Textual evidence and commentary	1,60	3,10	+1,50	1,50	2,00	+0,50
Critical thinking / alternative interpretation	1,50	2,90	+1,40	1,60	2,10	+0,50
Analytical depth	1,70	3,00	+1,30	1,60	2,10	+0,50
Composition and academic language	2,00	3,20	+1,20	2,00	2,50	+0,50
Total mean score	1,72	3,08	+1,36	1,68	2,18	+0,50

Note. Mean scores were calculated by dividing the total criterion points awarded by the number of participants in each group. Growth was defined as the difference between the final mean and diagnostic mean. The total mean score is the arithmetic average of the five criterion means. For example, the experimental group's diagnostic total mean = $(1.80 + 1.60 + 1.50 + 1.70 + 2.00) / 5 = 1.72$; final total mean = $(3.20 + 3.10 + 2.90 + 3.00 + 3.20) / 5 = 3.08$; growth = +1.36.

**Figure 2 – Mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the diagnostic and final essays by assessment criterion**

Comparative assessment shows that the experimental group showed higher growth in all five criteria than the control group, with a total mean gain of +1.36 points against +0.50 points in the control group (Figure 2). The highest growth in the experimental group was recorded in the criteria “textual evidence and commentary” (+1.50) and “thesis and independent position” (+1.40). These results suggest that systematic practice in selecting quotations, explaining their argumentative

function, and revising thesis statements was particularly effective in moving learners from descriptive writing toward analytical interpretation. This pattern echoes the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model proposed by K.R. Harris and S. Graham [20], and the disciplinary literacy framework of T. Shanahan and C. Shanahan [21]. It also matches quasi-experimental evidence reported by K. Fulton, T.-J. Lin and G. Newell, who found that combining close reading with dialogic literary argumentation produces significant improvements in high school students' literature-related argumentative writing [13, p. 11]. These studies point to a shared conclusion: explicit instruction in subject-specific evidence use, dialogic interpretation, and self-regulated revision produces sustainable gains in analytical writing.

The control group also grew, but modestly – a uniform +0.50 across all five criteria. Traditional instruction without a scaffolded writing process left analytical commentary and critical evaluation noticeably weaker. Qiiqbaï, Argyñbaev and Adilbaeva found much the same in the Bulletin of Yassawi University: developing higher-order thinking calls for a systematic approach, not isolated tasks [14, pp. 395–397].

Qualitative analysis of the final essays told a similar story. Learners relied less on plot retelling and more on interpretation. They formulated contestable thesis statements more often, backed quotations with analytical commentary, and at least attempted to engage with alternative readings.

The pattern observed in the qualitative findings can be interpreted in relation to the structure of the eight-week instructional cycle. The sequence of problem-based reading, dialogic discussion, thesis formulation, evidence-commentary work, drafting, feedback, and revision provided repeated opportunities for learners to move from describing what happens in a text toward explaining how textual details support an interpretive claim. This interpretation is consistent with the process-oriented writing and disciplinary literacy perspectives discussed in the literature review.

The practical implementation of the cycle requires consistency rather than special classroom conditions. Teachers can apply the same eight-week structure to philosophical prose (Abai's Qara Sozderi), epic narrative (Auezov's Abai Zholy), or lyric poetry (Zhumabaev) within regular curriculum lessons. The diagnostic task, analytical reading, draft-feedback-revision loop, and final assessment should therefore be implemented as one continuous instructional sequence rather than as isolated activities.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the study makes a theoretical and practical case for treating literary essay writing as a purposeful, systematic process in upper secondary Kazakh language and literature lessons, not a one-off assignment. The theoretical analysis clarified how critical thinking, textual analysis, and the literary essay relate — and pointed toward the essay as an integrative activity, one that draws together attentive reading, dialogue about the text, independent interpretation, and academic writing.

The results of the research showed that analytical writing skills develop most effectively when the literary essay is taught as a complete instructional cycle leading learners from problem-based reading and dialogic interpretation to thesis formulation, work with textual evidence, formative feedback, and revision. Under these conditions the character of learners' written work changes qualitatively: retelling of the plot gives way to argued interpretation, quotations begin to serve an analytical rather than illustrative function, alternative readings of the text are taken into account, and written speech acquires a more academic register. The empirical data confirmed that such structured organization of essay writing strengthens learners' independent position and evidence-based reasoning.

Summarizing this work, it can be concluded that the proposed instructional cycle, the criteria-based assessment of essays, and the accompanying methodological recommendations are consistent with the updated content of secondary education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and can be applied by Kazakh language and literature teachers within ordinary lessons, without introducing a separate

elective course. In this direction, the development of systematic methodological support for teachers in organizing learners' analytical writing remains relevant.

The conclusions and recommendations formulated on the basis of the research results are aimed at improving the teaching of Kazakh language and literature and at developing school learners' functional literacy, critical thinking, and textual analysis skills. Promising avenues for further work include broader approbation of the model, the study of the transfer of essay-writing skills to other subjects and writing contexts, and the adaptation of the proposed cycle to digital and blended learning environments.

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Әдеби эссе жазу арқылы мектеп оқушыларының сыни ойлау, мәтіндік талдау дағдыларын қалыптастырудың тиімді педагогикалық әдістері

Аңдатпа. Сыни ойлау мен мәтіндік талдау дағдыларын дамыту – жалпы орта білім берудің басты міндеттерінің бірі. Алайда қазіргі мектеп тәжірибесінде қазақ тілі мен әдебиеті сабақтарында оқушылардың жазба жұмысы көбіне мазмұндап беру деңгейінде қалып отыр. Бұл мақалада әдеби эссе жазудың 10-11-сынып оқушыларының сыни ойлауы мен мәтіндік талдау дағдыларын қалыптастырудағы рөлі қарастырылады.

Жұмыстың мақсаты – әдеби эссе жазуды жеке тапсырма ретінде емес, проблемалық оқу, талдау, тезис құру, формативтік кері байланыс және түзету кезеңдерін қамтитын жүйелі оқыту циклі ретінде ұйымдастырудың тиімділігін негіздеу. Мақалада әдеби эссенің теориялық негіздері, заманауи нормативтік талаптары, бес критерийлік бағалау рубрикасы және сегіз апталық оқыту циклінің құрылымы ұсынылады.

Зерттеу барысында теориялық талдау, педагогикалық эксперимент, критериалды бағалау және сапалық талдау әдістері қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижесінде әдеби эссені толық оқыту циклі ретінде ұйымдастыру оқушылардың тезис құру, дәлелді талдау және өзіндік ұстаным білдіру қабілеттерін дәстүрлі сабақ форматымен салыстырғанда айтарлықтай дамытатыны дәлелденді. Ұсынылған әдістемелік шешімдер қазақ тілі мен әдебиеті мұғалімдеріне оқушылардың функционалдық

сауаттылығын дамытуға бағытталған Қазақстанның жаңартылған білім беру стандарттарын тәжірибеде жүзеге асыруға мүмкіндік береді.

Кілт сөздер: әдеби эссе жазу, сыни ойлау, мәтіндік талдау, педагогикалық эксперимент, қазақ әдебиеті, формативтік кері байланыс, академиялық жазылым.

Формирование критического мышления и навыков текстуального анализа учащихся посредством написания литературного эссе

Аннотация. Формирование критического мышления и навыков текстуального анализа является одной из ключевых задач общего среднего образования. Однако в современной школьной практике письменные работы учащихся на уроках казахского языка и литературы зачастую остаются на уровне пересказа содержания. В данной статье рассматривается роль литературного эссе в формировании критического мышления и навыков текстуального анализа учащихся 10-11 классов.

Цель работы – обосновать эффективность организации литературного эссе не как разового задания, а как системного учебного цикла, охватывающего проблемное чтение, анализ, формулирование тезиса, формативную обратную связь и редактирование. В статье представлены теоретические основы литературного эссе, современные нормативные требования, пятикритериальная оценочная рубрика и структура восьминедельного учебного цикла.

В исследовании использовались теоретический анализ, педагогический эксперимент, критериальное оценивание и качественный анализ. Результаты показали, что организация литературного эссе как целостного учебного цикла развивает у учащихся умение формулировать тезис, анализировать доказательства и выражать собственную позицию значительно эффективнее, чем традиционный формат урока. Предложенные методические решения позволяют учителям казахского языка и литературы реализовывать обновлённые образовательные стандарты Казахстана, направленные на развитие функциональной грамотности обучающихся.

Ключевые слова: литературное эссе, критическое мышление, текстуальный анализ, педагогический эксперимент, казахская литература, формативная обратная связь, академическое письмо.

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