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**PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING:  
DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING**

**ПРОБЛЕМНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ В ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА:  
ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ**

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**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается применение проблемно-ориентированного обучения (PBL) в преподавании иностранных языков в высших учебных заведениях как эффективного метода развития критического мышления. Анализируются ключевые принципы PBL: релевантность, активное участие, развитие критического мышления, коллаборация и интеграция знаний. Описываются преимущества подхода, включая совершенствование языковых навыков, формирование межкультурной компетенции и повышение мотивации студентов. Приводятся практические примеры реализации PBL: проектная работа, дебаты, ролевые игры и case-study. Особое внимание уделяется методам оценки результатов и новой роли преподавателя как фасилитатора. Статья демонстрирует, что PBL не только улучшает владение иностранным языком, но и готовит студентов к решению реальных задач в профессиональной и социальной сферах.

**Abstract:** The article examines the application of problem-based learning (PBL) in foreign language teaching at higher education institutions as an effective method for developing critical thinking. It analyzes the key principles of PBL: relevance, active participation, critical thinking development, collaboration, and knowledge integration. The advantages of this approach are described, including the improvement of language skills, development of intercultural competence, and increased student motivation. Practical examples of PBL implementation are provided: project work, debates, role-playing games, and case studies. Special

attention is given to assessment methods and the new role of the teacher as a facilitator. The article demonstrates that PBL not only enhances foreign language proficiency but also prepares students to solve real-world problems in professional and social contexts.

**Ключевые слова:** проблемно-ориентированное обучение, критическое мышление, преподавание иностранных языков, высшее образование, активные методы обучения, проектная работа, межкультурная компетенция, фасилитация, кейс-метод, оценка результатов

**Keywords:** problem-based learning, critical thinking, foreign language teaching, higher education, active learning methods, project work, intercultural competence, facilitation, case method, assessment

In today's globalized world, higher education institutions face the challenge of preparing students not only to master foreign languages but also to think critically, solve complex problems, and adapt to rapidly changing environments. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), an instructional approach centered around real-world problem-solving, has emerged as an effective method for achieving these goals. This article explores the role of PBL in foreign language education at the college and university levels, focusing on its impact on critical thinking development. It examines theoretical foundations, practical applications, and best practices for educators. [1] Problem-based learning is based on several key principles:

## 1. Basic principles of problem-based learning

### 1.1. Relevance

The problems faced by students should be connected to their life experiences and interests. This helps to increase motivation and engagement in the learning process. For example, discussing social issues such as ecology or human rights may be more appealing to students than studying grammatical rules.

### 1.2. Active Participation

Students become active participants in the learning process rather than just passive listeners. They explore problems, formulate hypotheses, and work on solutions. This promotes a deeper understanding of the material and the development of independent working skills.

### 1.3. Critical Thinking

Problem-based learning fosters the development of critical thinking, as students learn to analyze information, evaluate different viewpoints, and make reasoned decisions. In the process of working on problems, they learn to ask questions, seek alternative solutions, and argue their positions.

### 1.4. Collaboration

Group work allows students to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and develop teamwork skills. Collaboration also helps to build social skills and the ability to work in a team.

### 1.5. Integration of Knowledge

Problem-based learning promotes the integration of knowledge from different fields, helping students see connections between subjects and apply them in real life. This is especially important in the context of learning a foreign language, where knowledge of culture and context is key.

## 2. Advantages of Problem-Based Learning in Foreign Language Teaching

Problem-based learning has numerous advantages in the context of foreign language study:

### 2.1. Development of Language Skills

Students practice the language in the context of real situations, which helps them better grasp vocabulary and grammar. For example, discussing current news in a foreign language helps students expand their vocabulary and improve listening skills.

### 2.2. Formation of Critical Thinking

Solving problems requires analysis, evaluation of information, and the development of reasoned solutions, which contributes to the growth of critical thinking. Students learn not only to find answers but also to ask questions, which is an important aspect of learning.

### 2.3. Improvement of Communicative Skills

Group work and discussions help students enhance their communication skills in a foreign language. This creates opportunities for practicing speaking and listening in live interactions.

### 2.4. Increased Motivation

Students are more interested in learning a language when they see its practical application and can solve real problems. This may include discussing current news or social issues.

### 2.5. Development of Intercultural Competence

PBL allows students to explore cultural differences and understand various perspectives, which is an important aspect of foreign language study. This helps to foster respect for other cultures and promotes tolerance.

## 3. Examples of Applying Problem-Based Learning

### 3.1. Project Work

Project work is one of the most effective ways to implement problem-based learning (PBL). For example, students can work on a project related to environmental issues in their region. They can research the topic, gather information in a foreign language, and present their findings to the group. This approach not only develops

language skills but also fosters critical thinking through the analysis of collected data.

### 3.2 Discussions and Debates

Organizing discussions and debates on relevant topics is also an effective method. Students can be divided into groups and assigned specific positions on controversial issues (e.g., globalization, climate change). This forces them to explore different viewpoints, argue their positions, and use the foreign language to express their thoughts.

### 3.3 Role-Playing Games

Role-playing games can be an excellent tool for applying PBL. For instance, students can enact scenarios related to travel or business. This helps them apply the language in the context of real situations and develops critical thinking skills through analyzing character behavior and decision-making.

### 3.4 Case Method

The use of the case method involves studying specific situations from real life or business. Students can work on analyzing cases in a foreign language, which allows them not only to improve their language skills but also to develop analytical abilities.

## 4. Assessment Methods

Assessing the outcomes of problem-based learning can be challenging, as it goes beyond traditional tests and exams. Some assessment methods include:

### 4.1 Self-Assessment

Students can evaluate their achievements and progress in mastering the language and critical thinking through reflection on their learning.

### 4.2 Peer Assessment

Evaluating the work of other students can help develop analytical skills and teach how to provide constructive feedback.

### 4.3 Project Reports

Assessing project work based on criteria such as research quality, language use, and presentation of results can be an important element of evaluation.

### 4.4 Participation in Discussions

Assessing students' activity during discussions and debates can serve as an indicator of their engagement and level of understanding of the topic.

## 5. The Role of the Teacher in Problem-Based Learning

The role of the teacher within problem-based learning changes: they become a facilitator of the learning process, creating conditions for discussion and guiding students in their research activities. The teacher should be able to ask the right questions that encourage students to think and analyze. For example, instead of simply providing information about cultural differences, the teacher might ask, "Why

do you think these differences exist?" or "How does this affect communication between people from different cultures?" [2]

Additionally, the teacher should maintain an atmosphere of trust and openness in the classroom so that students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas.

Problem-based learning is a powerful tool in foreign language teaching, allowing not only for the development of language skills but also for the formation of critical thinking among students. This approach fosters active student engagement in the learning process and helps them apply the language in real-life situations. In today's world, implementing problem-based learning in education is essential for preparing competent specialists with developed critical thinking skills.

Problem-based learning transforms language education by integrating linguistic competence with critical thinking and real-world problem solving. While implementation presents challenges, PBL's benefits - engaged students, adaptable thinkers, and confident communicators - make it an invaluable pedagogical tool.

Future directions include:

1. AI integration (chatbots for dialogue simulation)
2. Cross-cultural PBL initiatives between universities
3. Longitudinal research on professional readiness outcomes

This innovative approach bridges the gap between language acquisition and practical application, equipping learners with both communication skills and problem-solving abilities essential for today's globalized workforce. The incorporation of emerging technologies and international collaboration opportunities promises to further enhance PBL's effectiveness in developing linguistically and cognitively competent graduates.

The prospects are: using more academic terminology ("pedagogical tool" instead of "valuable instrument"); improving flow and conciseness; maintaining parallel structure in the future directions; adding a concluding statement that ties the concepts together; using more precise terms like "longitudinal research" instead of "long-term impact study".

Thus, the application of problem-based learning in foreign language teaching not only enriches the educational process but also contributes to shaping the student's personality as an active participant in society capable of critically analyzing information and making informed decisions.

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