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FROM LANGUAGE TO LOGIC: BUILDING CRITICAL THINKING IN LEGAL EDUCATION WITH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Critical thinking lies at the heart of legal education, forming the foundation of reasoning, analysis, and problem solving for law students. The ability to critically assess legal principles, construct persuasive arguments, and articulate ideas effectively is a hallmark of a competent legal professional. English language education plays a pivotal role in this process, as language is not only a medium of communication but also a tool for reasoning and argumentation. This article explores the use of project-based learning (PBL), particularly the "presentation with discussion" technique, to foster critical thinking in law students during English language courses.

Critical thinking is more than a set of skills; it is a systematic and reflective intellectual process that enables individuals to evaluate ideas, assess evidence, and make informed decisions. In legal education, critical thinking allows students to:

- analyze statutes, legal principles, and case law;
- weigh competing arguments and evaluate evidence;
- understand diverse perspectives and anticipate counterarguments.

For law students, critical thinking is indispensable in legal reasoning, where the ability to question assumptions, recognize biases, and synthesize information into logical arguments determines professional success.

Research highlights the strong correlation between critical thinking and academic performance, particularly in legal education. In language education, critical thinking fosters skills like argumentation, evidence-based reasoning, and text analysis, which align closely with the demands of legal practice. Studies

suggest that project-based learning methods, including collaborative research and structured discussions, enhance both critical thinking and language proficiency, making them ideal for law students.

S.V. Panchenko [2, p.695] and N. V. Yalaeva [5, p.79] highlight the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in preparing competent legal professionals. By integrating logic, linguistics, ethics, and formal-logical reasoning through training seminars and special courses, they emphasize the development of critical thinking, persuasive argumentation, and effective communication skills essential for law students' professional growth.

Project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching approach that emphasizes active student engagement in real-world challenges. According to N.A.Yushkova, “the integration of project-based learning (PBL) technologies, particularly those emphasizing public speaking, is a transformative approach in the training of law students [4, p.536]. This method plays a crucial role in cultivating the argumentative and discursive skills essential for future legal professionals. Below is an expanded exploration of this idea: one notable PBL technique is the "presentation with discussion" method, where students research legal topics, present their findings, and engage in structured peer discussions.

The "presentation with discussion" method is a structured PBL technique designed to integrate research, public speaking, and peer interaction. This approach unfolds in three stages:

Research and Analysis

Students select a legal issue, research relevant statutes and case law, and gather diverse perspectives. They critically evaluate their findings and synthesize information into coherent arguments.

Presentation Preparation

Students organize their research into structured presentations, practicing clarity, logic, and persuasion. They focus on using appropriate legal terminology and presenting their arguments in fluent English.

Discussion and Peer Feedback

Presentations are followed by peer discussions, where students analyze, evaluate, and debate arguments, fostering critical analysis and communication skills.

Practical Implementation

Research: students analyze academic articles, statutes, and case law, building critical reading and comprehension skills.

Presentation: findings are structured into clear, persuasive presentations.

Peer Discussions: collaborative discussions encourage evaluation, counterarguments, and deeper engagement with the material.

The textbooks “Legal English”, “Cybercrime, and Cybersecurity”, used for teaching law students at the Russian Technological University MIREA, provide various tasks to develop critical thinking skills. These tasks are designed to encourage research, analysis, and structured argumentation, helping students gain a deeper understanding of legal concepts while improving their English proficiency. Examples of these tasks include:

Task 1: Choose a country and speak about its legal system, following a model structure provided in the textbook. This activity requires students to analyze and compare different legal frameworks, fostering a global perspective and critical evaluation of legal systems [1, p.30].

Task 2: The class is divided into 2 groups. Group A stands for white-hat hackers, Group B stands for black-hat hackers. First, discuss with your group mates the advantages and disadvantages of your role model. Then be ready to present your ideas to the opposite group. The goal is to make a student from the opposite group to “change his hat”. [6, p.121].

Task 3: You are a group of experts, and your task is to prepare new regulatory tools for bilateral cooperation against cybercrimes. First, you need to gather the data. Conduct additional research if you need more information about these countries. Write a document to establish or foster cooperation between two

countries. Emphasize possible ways two countries may use to benefit from synergies of their advantages and counteract disadvantages [6, p.154].

Such tasks promote the development of communication and information analysis skills, as well as the use of foreign language in different contexts through the integration of digital technologies, making learning more engaging and interactive [3, p.106]. These activities encourage students to critically analyze legal principles, synthesize information from diverse sources, and present their findings effectively. Through group work, peer discussions, and presentations, students develop essential skills such as legal reasoning, critical evaluation, and collaborative problem solving, which are crucial for their future legal careers.

The "presentation with discussion" method exemplifies how project-based learning (PBL) bridges language education and critical thinking in legal education. By enhancing students' ability to analyze legal texts, present and defend arguments in English, and engage confidently with complex legal issues, this approach transforms classroom learning into practical skill building.

Collaborative discussions further deepen students' understanding of legal concepts by encouraging diverse viewpoints and critical analysis. As a tool for integrating reasoning and communication into English language courses, this method develops analytical and argumentative skills essential for legal practice. Future research could examine its broader application across disciplines in legal education, reinforcing its role in preparing students for the challenges of the legal profession.

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