Proceedings of ICEIPI 2026 Symposium: Inclusive Education, Cultural Transformation, and the Ethical Dimensions of Learning
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD33050

Developing Innovative Thinking in Primary School Chinese Classrooms under Reduced Academic Burden

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Abstract. The past few years have seen a decrease in students' academic burden, offering new possibilities to strengthen classroom learning at the primary level. Within this context, primary school Chinese classrooms play a growing role in supporting students' language development and thinking abilities. This study explores practical approaches for cultivating innovative thinking in primary school Chinese language teaching. Through a review of relevant literature and analysis of classroom teaching practices, the study examines several instructional strategies, including questioning and critical inquiry, the development of divergent thinking, imagination-based activities, and the integration of classroom learning with extracurricular reading. The result suggest that open and guided instructional design can effectively encourage students to engage in active thinking and creative expression. The findings provide practical insights for promoting innovative thinking in primary school Chinese classrooms under conditions of reduced academic burden.

Keywords: Primary School Chinese, Innovative Thinking, Classroom Teaching, Reduced Academic Burden, Thinking Ability Development

1. Introduction

In the primary school Chinese curriculum, the imparting of language knowledge is closely linked to the cultivation of thinking abilities. The course not only helps students master the language but also provides an important platform for thinking training for their development. Through the core tasks of reading and expression, students continuously develop their judgment and selection abilities as they understand the text, organize language, and construct scenarios. Due to the openness and diversity of Chinese content, the same article can have different interpretations and expressions, providing rich space for association and thinking expansion in the classroom. The primary school Chinese classroom plays a unique role in promoting students' innovative thinking. Existing research has explored the connotation, development mechanism, and cultivation paths of innovative thinking from different perspectives, providing theoretical support for related practices in classroom teaching [1]. At the same time, some studies have pointed out that factors such as teaching organization, interaction structure, and expression atmosphere have significant influences on the development of students' creative thinking from the perspective of classroom context and learning environment [2]. However, existing research mostly focuses on general teaching perspectives or the analysis of single teaching strategies, and rarely systematically integrates and comprehensively examines multiple

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teaching methods under specific subject contexts. In the context of reduced academic burden, the pace and structure of primary school Chinese classes have changed, giving more time for reading, talking, and expressing ideas, and making space for open and exploratory learning. Therefore, how to transform existing teaching concepts into operational classroom paths without increasing burden has become an important issue in primary school Chinese teaching. According to the analysis of innovative thinking theory and the characteristics of primary school students' thinking development, this paper systematically analyzes questioning and doubt training, divergent thinking, imagination guidance, and the connection between classroom and extracurricular learning. Through this analysis, it aims to integrate existing teaching methods structurally, present the cultivation path of innovative thinking in primary school Chinese classrooms from an overall perspective, and provide reference for related teaching practices.

2. The characteristics and theoretical foundations of innovative thinking

2.1. Core characteristics of innovative thinking

In educational contexts, innovative thinking is generally understood as the ability of individuals to break away from conventional thinking patterns when facing problems or learning tasks, analyze issues from multiple perspectives, and reorganize and apply existing knowledge and experience. Existing studies indicate that innovative thinking is not purely an inborn talent but a skill that can be developed, shaped by learning environments, instructional approaches, and psychological factors [3]. In terms of thinking performance, innovative thinking is primarily expressed through originality, flexibility, and the ability to reorganize ideas. This means generating multiple ideas around the same problem, adjusting thinking paths according to different contexts, and reorganizing existing information to create new meanings. Studies in primary education indicate that these characteristics can gradually be cultivated through classroom activities. In primary school Chinese teaching, these thinking characteristics are particularly compatible with the subject. Chinese learning involves text comprehension, language expression, and contextual construction, and its open nature allows students to engage in associations and multiple interpretations. Research has shown that open-ended writing tasks and varied forms of expression in reading and writing activities can effectively foster students' creative thinking [4]. In contrast, when classroom teaching emphasizes standard answers excessively, students' opportunities to express different ideas may be limited, which may hinder the development of innovative thinking [5]. Therefore, designing supportive classroom environments is essential for fostering innovative thinking in primary school Chinese education.

2.2. Theoretical foundations of innovative thinking

From the perspective of cognitive development, primary school years represent an important stage in the development of students' thinking abilities. In this phase, students transition from thinking in concrete images to more abstract concepts, while maintaining a strong imagination and an openness to expressing ideas. Research indicates that innovative thinking does not emerge automatically but develops gradually through continuous thinking activities within supportive learning environments and teaching practices [6]. In creative thinking research, theories explain how creative work occurs. Some focus on mental processes like identifying problems, producing ideas, and assessing solutions. Another view highlights the role of surroundings and mental factors, showing that open classrooms and supportive learning spaces help students develop exploratory thinking. These perspectives highlight the crucial role of teaching contexts in the development of innovative thinking. From an

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instructional perspective, innovative thinking can also be understood as a set of cognitive skills that can be cultivated through classroom learning. Thus, these abilities involve generating multiple ideas, using flexible thinking, and organizing and evaluating information. With the right guidance and class practice, they can develop over time [7]. Consequently, this framework gives a theory-based guide for developing creative thinking in primary school Chinese lessons.

3. Practice and influence of innovative thinking in primary school Chinese teaching

3.1. Students' innovative ability and thinking development

The learning approaches and academic performance of students are directly influenced by their innovative abilities. In Chinese learning, students with innovative tendencies often propose different interpretations during reading and expression activities, actively identify problems, and attempt to explain or revise their ideas. These behaviors reflect their awareness of problems and their reflective thinking ability. When classrooms provide opportunities for students to raise questions and express different viewpoints, students are more likely to develop habits of active thinking.

Moreover, the cultivation of innovative thinking needs to match students' cognitive development. Primary school students often rely on communication and discussion when understanding texts and organizing language. Therefore, open-ended questions and collaborative learning environments can help students refine their ideas via comparison and discussion of different viewpoints. By doing so, optimizing classroom dialogue structures and interaction patterns can promote the development of creative thinking among students [8]. Furthermore, supportive classroom environments can reduce students' anxiety about expressing uncertain ideas, boost participation, and help develop innovative thinking.

3.2. Teachers' innovative ability and teaching improvement

Teachers' innovative teaching abilities play an important role in classroom learning. Teachers with strong innovative awareness can flexibly interpret teaching materials while following curriculum objectives and requirements. Through effective question design and task adjustment, they can guide students to engage in deeper thinking during reading and expression activities.

For example, during text interpretation, when teachers encourage students to analyze characters' motivations, plot development, and language use, students are more likely to understand texts from multiple perspectives. In expression activities, recognizing diverse forms of expression helps students develop the ability to compare and select appropriate ways of presenting ideas. Research indicates that dialogic teaching and well-structured questioning strategies can improve classroom communication and provide students with more opportunities for reflection, thereby enhancing their creative thinking performance [9]. Meanwhile, teachers who continuously reflect on and adjust their teaching practices can improve their instructional adaptability, thus supporting both higher teaching quality and the development of students' thinking skills.

3.3. Classroom conditions for cultivating innovative thinking

The cultivation of innovative thinking depends not only on specific instructional activities but on the overall classroom environment and learning conditions. In primary school Chinese classrooms, exploratory and open-ended tasks can encourage students to experiment, compare ideas, and revise their understanding during learning activities.

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The use of digital resources and educational technologies can also provide more diverse forms of presentation and interaction, helping students engage with learning materials more effectively. However, technology itself does not automatically enhance innovative thinking. Its effectiveness depends on how learning tasks and interactions are designed. Research suggests that whether digital learning environments support creativity largely depends on how teachers organize learning activities and classroom interaction [10]. Thus, the promotion of innovative thinking in Chinese language classrooms requires the integration of teaching objectives, task design, and classroom environments to establish sustainable learning conditions.

4. Methods for cultivating innovative thinking in Chinese language teaching

4.1. Promotion of student questioning and critical inquiry

Engagement in questioning and critical inquiry is essential for fostering innovative thinking. When students ask questions about texts or language usage during learning, it demonstrates their problem awareness and reflective thinking skills [11]. Prior studies showed that active questioning helps students move beyond passive knowledge reception and gradually develop the ability to construct knowledge independently [12].

In primary school, students are naturally curious about the world. Through guided questioning and discussion, teachers can help students gradually develop thinking habits. Classroom practice shows that students' questions often focus on textual details or the logic of language expressions, and they verify their ideas via textual evidence and discussion. In teaching practice, questioning activities can be integrated into normal classroom processes. For example, after an initial reading of a text, teachers can encourage students to raise questions and then organize group discussions to compare different interpretations. Teachers should avoid providing standard answers too quickly and instead use follow-up questions and delayed evaluation to encourage deeper thinking. Besides, structured questioning activities can help students develop questioning strategies and gradually strengthen innovative thinking abilities [13].

4.2. Cultivation of students' divergent thinking and creative abilities

Innovative thinking largely relies in large part on divergent thinking. And it encourages students to generate multiple interpretations and expression paths when facing the same problem [14]. In Chinese learning, divergent thinking helps students interpret texts from different perspectives and develop diverse ideas in writing tasks.

In creativity research, divergent thinking is considered a prerequisite for creative activity because it focuses on generating multiple possibilities, with creativity focusing on both originality and suitability [15]. The Chinese language curriculum standards also encourage multiple interpretations and diverse forms of expression, providing a basis for developing divergent thinking in classroom teaching [16]. In practice, teachers can cultivate students' divergent thinking through open-ended questions, mind maps, and tasks that allow multiple solutions. For example, in reading lessons teachers may guide students to interpret characters' behaviors from different perspectives, while writing tasks can encourage students to explore multiple themes or narrative possibilities.

4.3. Enhancement of students' imagination and textual creativity

Imagination is an important foundation of innovative thinking, as it enables students to construct new contexts beyond their immediate experiences. In Chinese language learning, students can

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extend storylines, reinterpret characters, or create new meanings through imaginative thinking [17].

Existing studies show that when students enter textual contexts through role-based experiences, they are more likely to generate new interpretations based on their own experiences and express them through language [18]. Therefore, integrating imagination into classroom activities aligns well with students' cognitive characteristics. Classroom activities such as role reading, text adaptation, and scenario simulation can help students understand texts from different perspectives. For example, role-playing activities in lessons like Yan Zi's Diplomatic Mission to Chu can encourage students to analyze different diplomatic responses, while rewriting story endings in lessons like Borrowing Arrows with Straw Boats can help students explore characters' wisdom from multiple perspectives. Through the combination of imagination and expression, students deepen their understanding of texts while also strengthening their innovative thinking.

4.4. Teacher support and independent extracurricular learning

The link between classroom learning and independent extracurricular study is a key factor for the ongoing development of innovative thinking. Besides, classroom teaching provides demonstrations of thinking strategies, while extracurricular learning allows students to practice and apply these strategies in different contexts.

For example, when students acquire clear learning strategies, they are more capable of planning, monitoring, and reflecting during independent learning, which improves learning autonomy [19]. Reading research also indicates that when students transfer comprehension strategies learned in the classroom to independent reading, their ability to analyze texts and think critically improves significantly [20]. In classroom teaching, teachers can guide students to use basic reading strategies, including questioning, identifying key information, and summarizing ideas. During extracurricular learning, students may select reading materials independently and organize their ideas through tools such as mind maps or reading journals. Through this connection between classroom learning and independent study, students gradually develop the ability to think independently and express ideas creatively.

5. Conclusion

Under the background of reducing students' academic burden, primary school Chinese classrooms provide a more flexible environment for the development of innovative thinking. Based on theories of innovative thinking and the practical context of primary school Chinese teaching, this study examines several approaches to fostering innovative thinking, including questioning and critical inquiry, developing divergent thinking, imagination-based learning, and integrating classroom with extracurricular learning. The analysis suggests that open and guided classroom design, together with teaching practices that respect students' cognitive development, can encourage students to develop habits of active thinking and creative expression. It offers practical insights into fostering innovative thinking in primary school Chinese classrooms and suggests implications for the future teaching practices. At the same time, cultivating innovative thinking requires continuous efforts from both teachers and educational institutions. Effective classroom practices should create opportunities for students to ask questions, express personal viewpoints, and participate in meaningful discussions. By designing learning activities that combine language learning with thinking development, teachers can help students gradually form habits of independent inquiry and creative expression. In the long term, these practices may contribute not only to improved language learning outcomes but also to the broader development of students' critical and innovative thinking abilities.

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