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DEVELOPING A MECHANISM AIMED AT ENHANCING STUDENTS' CONCEPTUAL THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the problem of developing students' conceptual thinking in higher education institutions. In the modern educational process, it is an urgent task not only for students to acquire knowledge, but also to develop the ability to understand logical relationships between pieces of knowledge, generalize concepts, and apply them in new situations. The study describes the structural components and stages of a pedagogical mechanism that supports the development of conceptual thinking, as well as ways to implement it in the educational process.

KEYWORDS

Conceptual thinking, higher education, pedagogical mechanism, competence, innovative education.

INTRODUCTION

One of the priority tasks facing the higher education system is to train highly qualified specialists who are competitive, capable of independent thinking, and able to put forward innovative ideas. Today, the needs of society and the labor market require a specialist not only to possess professional knowledge and skills, but also to be able to approach problems in new ways, think analytically and systemically in complex situations, and apply existing knowledge effectively in new conditions. These requirements create the need to form and develop students' conceptual thinking within the educational process.

Conceptual thinking manifests itself in a person's ability to perceive knowledge not as a collection of separate facts, but as an integrated system; to understand internal connections between concepts and phenomena; and to apply them consciously in practical activity. This type of thinking is considered one of the key indicators that determine the level of a student's intellectual development. Therefore, developing conceptual thinking in higher education is recognized as one of the pressing issues of modern pedagogy. However, an analysis of current educational practice shows that in many cases reproductive thinking predominates in lessons, meaning students are oriented toward memorizing and reproducing ready-made knowledge. As a result, skills such as deeply understanding the essence of concepts, analyzing them, and adapting them to new situations are not sufficiently formed. This situation limits students' independent and creative thinking. For this reason, developing an effective pedagogical mechanism aimed at enhancing students' conceptual thinking becomes a relevant scientific and pedagogical task.

In this study, methods such as analyzing scientific and pedagogical literature, observing the educational process, comparison and generalization, and pedagogical modeling were used to examine the problem of developing conceptual thinking. Based on these methods, a theoretical model of a pedagogical mechanism designed to develop students' conceptual thinking was developed.

The problem of developing students' conceptual thinking has been investigated by many local and international scholars, and their scientific views form the theoretical foundation of this research.

In particular, I. A. Zimnyaya interprets thinking as a person's intellectual activity and emphasizes that, in higher education, meaningful understanding of knowledge and identifying logical connections between concepts are of great importance. According to the scholar, developing students' conceptual thinking is an essential condition for forming their professional competence, and this process is closely linked to reflective activity. Zimnyaya's approach has methodological significance in this study for substantiating the reflective component.

In addition, M. V. Klarin pays special attention to the role of innovative and problem-based teaching technologies in developing conceptual thinking. He argues that traditional reproductive teaching methods do not sufficiently contribute to the development of students' higher-level thinking activity. The scholar provides a scientific justification that the use of problem situations, project activities, and concept maps creates opportunities for students to perceive knowledge systematically and apply it in new conditions. These views serve as an important source in the present study for substantiating the activity component.

Among local scholars, B. Kh. Khodjayev has conducted in-depth research on developing students' independent and creative thinking in the higher education system. In his scientific works, he emphasizes that the educational process should be organized in such a way that students acquire knowledge not in a ready-made form, but through inquiry, analysis, and generalization. According to the scholar, effective use of interdisciplinary integration and problem-based tasks is one of the key pedagogical conditions for developing conceptual thinking. This scientific approach contributes to substantiating the content component of the present study. Thus, the scientific views of the scholars mentioned above serve as a solid theoretical foundation

for developing a pedagogical mechanism aimed at enhancing students' conceptual thinking and ensure the scientific validity of the research results.

First, the goal-oriented component involves defining the development of conceptual thinking as a strategic objective within the educational process. The content component includes selecting and systematizing learning materials based on problem-oriented and conceptual knowledge that ensure interdisciplinary integration. The activity component is aimed at activating students' cognitive activity through the use of interactive methods such as problem-based learning, the project method, case study, and concept maps. The reflective component, in turn, ensures the development of students' skills to understand, analyze, and evaluate their own thinking process.

The implementation of this mechanism should be organized in sequential stages. Initially, at the diagnostic stage, students' current level of conceptual thinking is identified. At the subsequent developmental stage, learning activities aimed at developing thinking are carried out on the basis of conceptual tasks and interactive methods. At the final control and assessment stage, the achieved results are analyzed and the effectiveness of the mechanism is evaluated.

The research results show that introducing the proposed pedagogical mechanism into the educational process significantly develops students' skills of deeply understanding concepts, analyzing problem situations, and making independent decisions. This, in turn, creates a foundation for enhancing their professional competence and for achieving success in their future professional activity.

In conclusion, developing students' conceptual thinking in higher education institutions is one of the key factors for improving the quality of education. The proposed pedagogical mechanism serves to develop students' intellectual potential and to ensure systematic and conscious mastery of knowledge. In the future, implementing this mechanism in practice and expanding experimental and pilot work are among the promising directions for further increasing its effectiveness.

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