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CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL THINKING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the pedagogical and diagnostic system for developing historical thinking among university students and determining the levels of its formation. Moving away from traditional assessment methods based primarily on memorization and reproduction of factual information, the study substantiates four structural criteria that allow for an objective assessment of students' intellectual development: motivational-value, cognitive-gnostic, operational-activity, and axiological-reflective criteria, together with their respective indicators.

The article also classifies students' cognitive potential into three levels: low (reproductive), medium (interpretative-analytical), and high (creative-transformative), and describes the specific qualitative characteristics of each level. In addition, methodological recommendations are proposed for modernizing the educational process in higher education through problem-based case studies and historical source analysis, as well as for identifying and overcoming students' intellectual barriers.

Keywords: historical thinking, higher education, assessment criteria, diagnostic indicators, cognitive development, source analysis, critical thinking, analytical level, creative-transformative approach.

Introduction

The development of historical thinking among university students and the determination of its level are among the most important tasks of contemporary pedagogy. Today, the education system is gradually moving away from traditional approaches based on the mechanical memorization of isolated facts and chronological dates and is increasingly focusing on the development of students' critical, analytical, and systemic thinking skills.

Historical thinking should not be regarded merely as a repository of information about the past. Rather, it represents the ability to independently analyze primary sources, identify multifactorial cause-and-effect relationships underlying historical events, critically evaluate competing interpretations, and establish objective connections between the experience of the past and the problems of the present.

Since historical thinking is a complex cognitive and intellectual process, its objective assessment requires the introduction of clearly defined criteria and indicators into higher education practice. Such a diagnostic framework makes it possible not only to determine the current level of students' historical thinking but also to identify the areas that require further pedagogical development.

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Motivational-Value Criterion

The first important criterion for identifying the level of historical thinking among students is the **motivational-value criterion**. This criterion evaluates students' internal interest in historical reality, cultural heritage, and the process of historical inquiry.

If a student studies history only because of external requirements, such as obtaining a grade, passing an examination, or receiving a diploma, genuine historical consciousness and an independent historical worldview are unlikely to develop.

The main indicators of the motivational-value criterion include:

- students' willingness to conduct independent research beyond classroom requirements;
- active participation in discussions and debates concerning historical problems;
- sustained interest in historical and cultural issues;
- appreciation of cultural heritage sites as living evidence of human civilization and social development;
- awareness of the importance of preserving national and universal cultural heritage.

Thus, the motivational-value criterion reflects not only students' interest in historical knowledge but also their personal attitude toward history and cultural heritage.

Cognitive-Gnostic Criterion

The next important component is the cognitive-gnostic criterion, which reflects the depth, systematic nature, flexibility, and integration of students' historical knowledge.

In this context, assessment should not focus merely on fragmented factual information. Instead, attention should be given to the student's ability to integrate knowledge from different disciplines into a coherent historical picture.

The major indicators of this criterion include:

- appropriate use of historical concepts and specialized terminology;
- knowledge of the principles and patterns of historical periodization;
- understanding of major historical processes and events;
- ability to establish interdisciplinary connections;
- capacity to perceive regional historical events as integral components of broader national and global historical development;
- ability to identify relationships between political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual processes.

A student with a well-developed cognitive-gnostic component does not merely remember historical facts but understands their meaning, context, and interrelationships.

Operational-Activity Criterion

The transformation of theoretical knowledge into analytical and practical intellectual activity is assessed through the operational-activity criterion.

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This criterion measures students' practical skills in working with historical documents, written sources, visual materials, cultural objects, and material artifacts.

Its key indicators include:

- ability to identify explicit and implicit meanings in historical texts;
- ability to recognize the author's subjective position and ideological orientation;
- comparison of contradictory historical sources;
- critical assessment of the reliability of historical evidence;
- ability to distinguish between fact, interpretation, and opinion;
- transformation of historical evidence into scientifically grounded arguments;
- formulation of independent conclusions on the basis of multiple sources.

Students who demonstrate a high level of operational competence are able to work with historical information critically rather than accepting ready-made interpretations without analysis.

Axiological-Reflective Criterion

The axiological-reflective criterion represents one of the highest manifestations of developed historical consciousness. It assesses students' ability to evaluate historical events and processes from moral, social, civic, and cultural perspectives.

A student with advanced reflective skills does not perceive history merely as a collection of events that occurred in the past. Instead, such a student is able to draw meaningful conclusions from historical successes and failures and apply these lessons to contemporary social and civic realities.

The main indicators of this criterion include:

- ability to evaluate historical events from moral and ethical perspectives;
- capacity to connect historical experience with contemporary social problems;
- ability to formulate an informed civic position;
- critical awareness of one's own assumptions and cognitive biases;
- ability to revise one's position when confronted with reliable evidence;
- understanding of the value-based dimensions of historical processes.

Axiological reflection also enables students to examine their own thinking and recognize possible errors in historical interpretation.

Levels of Historical Thinking Development

Based on the criteria and indicators described above, the development of historical thinking among students can be classified into three major levels: low, medium, and high.

Low Level: Reproductive Thinking

At the low level, students predominantly demonstrate reproductive or imitative thinking. Their motivation is usually dependent on external incentives such as grades, examinations, or diploma requirements.

Such students tend to reproduce information directly from textbooks, lecture notes, or presentation slides without critically analyzing its content. They often experience difficulty in

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identifying the deeper causes of historical events and are unable to independently resolve contradictions found in different historical sources.

The main characteristics of this level include:

- mechanical memorization of factual information;
- weak internal motivation toward historical study;
- inability to critically compare sources;
- limited understanding of cause-and-effect relationships;
- dependence on the teacher's explanations;
- inability to formulate independent historical judgments.

At this level, historical knowledge remains largely fragmented and reproductive.

Medium Level: Interpretative-Analytical Thinking

At the medium level, interpretative-analytical thinking becomes dominant.

Students at this level possess relatively stable historical knowledge and can correctly explain clear, linear cause-and-effect relationships underlying historical events and processes. When analyzing cultural monuments, literary works, or other historical materials, they attempt to go beyond surface meanings and identify the social, cultural, and ideological messages of the relevant period.

They are also able to participate in logical discussions and defend their views using evidence.

However, when confronted with completely new historical problems or complex interdisciplinary tasks, these students may still rely on the teacher's guiding models or previously learned analytical schemes.

The main characteristics of the medium level include:

- systematic historical knowledge;
- ability to explain historical processes;
- basic critical analysis of sources;
- interpretation of cultural and ideological meanings;
- participation in evidence-based discussions;
- partial independence in analytical activity.

Thus, students at this level demonstrate considerable analytical capacity but do not yet consistently display independent research-oriented thinking.

High Level: Creative-Transformative Thinking

The high level is characterized by creative-transformative historical thinking and represents the main educational goal of developing historical consciousness.

Students at this level behave as independent researchers. They do not simply accept established historical narratives but critically examine their reliability and validity.

They are able to:

- critically evaluate the reliability of historical sources;
- compare and contrast different interpretations;

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- use interdisciplinary methods;
- synthesize evidence from different types of sources;
- formulate original historical hypotheses;
- propose non-standard solutions in open-ended project tasks;
- relate historical dilemmas to contemporary global transformations;
- draw reasoned conclusions and make projections relevant to the future.

Such students demonstrate intellectual independence, analytical flexibility, creativity, and a mature historical worldview.

The creative-transformative level therefore reflects a student's ability not only to understand history but also to reinterpret historical knowledge and apply it in new intellectual and social contexts.

Pedagogical Application of the Diagnostic Framework

The implementation of this diagnostic framework in higher education requires significant modernization of the teaching process.

Traditional lectures and reproduction-based assessment methods alone are not sufficient to identify students' actual level of historical thinking. Instead, students should be provided with problem-based case studies, contradictory historical documents, primary sources, visual materials, cultural artifacts, and open-ended research assignments.

For example, students may be asked to compare several historical sources describing the same event from different perspectives. In this case, they should identify contradictions between the sources, analyze the authors' positions, assess the reliability of evidence, and formulate an independent conclusion.

Such assignments provide a much more accurate picture of the level of students' historical thinking than conventional tests focused on memorized factual information.

Problem-based learning can also be used to encourage students to investigate historical dilemmas and establish connections between historical events and contemporary social processes.

Importance of the Assessment System

The proposed assessment system should not be regarded merely as an instrument for assigning grades.

Its main purpose is diagnostic and developmental. It enables teachers to identify the intellectual difficulties of each student and to determine which components of historical thinking require further development.

For example, a student may possess a high level of factual knowledge but demonstrate weak skills in source criticism. Another student may be capable of critical analysis but show insufficient motivation for independent research.

By using the proposed criteria, the teacher can identify these individual differences and select appropriate pedagogical strategies.

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In this sense, the assessment system serves as a comprehensive pedagogical map that enables educators to guide students gradually from the reproductive level toward the interpretative-analytical and ultimately the creative-transformative level of historical thinking.

Conclusion

The development of historical thinking among university students is a multidimensional pedagogical process that cannot be adequately evaluated through traditional knowledge-based assessment alone.

An effective diagnostic system should include motivational, cognitive, operational, value-based, and reflective dimensions.

The proposed motivational-value, cognitive-gnostic, operational-activity, and axiological-reflective criteria provide an integrated framework for assessing the formation of historical thinking among university students.

The classification of students into reproductive, interpretative-analytical, and creative-transformative levels makes it possible to identify not only their current intellectual state but also the direction of their further development.

The introduction of problem-based tasks, historical source analysis, interdisciplinary research activities, and reflective assessment methods into higher education can significantly contribute to the formation of students who are capable of critically interpreting the past, understanding the present, and making reasoned conclusions for the future.

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