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PEDAGOGICAL MECHANISMS FOR DEVELOPING THE MORAL AND ETHICAL COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. This article examines the pedagogical foundations, content, and effective mechanisms for developing the moral and ethical competence of students in higher education institutions. It also analyzes the development of respect for national and universal values, social responsibility, patriotism, tolerance, honesty, and independent ethical decision-making skills among students. Furthermore, the article proposes pedagogical mechanisms for fostering moral and ethical competence through the educational process in higher education institutions, tutoring activities, spiritual and educational events, and support for student initiatives.

Keywords: higher education, students, spirituality, morality, competence, pedagogical mechanism, national values, upbringing, social responsibility, patriotism.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and the rapid development of information technologies, shaping the spiritual worldview of younger generations and establishing a strong moral position among them are considered among the priority objectives of the education system. In particular, higher education institutions are responsible not only for training highly qualified specialists but also for educating spiritually mature and socially responsible individuals who can make a meaningful contribution to societal development and think independently.

The moral and ethical development of students plays an important role in their professional activities, social relationships, family life, and civic engagement. From this perspective, there is an increasing need to move beyond traditional educational events and organize moral and ethical education as a consistent and integrated pedagogical system within higher education.

Moral and ethical competence refers to an individual's ability to regulate their behavior based on values such as kindness, honesty, justice, responsibility, patriotism, and humanism, make appropriate decisions in social relationships, and critically evaluate their own actions from an ethical perspective.

MAIN BODY

The Content and Structural Components of Moral and Ethical Competence

Moral and ethical competence is a complex personal quality manifested through the interaction of knowledge, attitudes, values, and practical behavior. In the process of developing this competence, students should not only acquire knowledge of moral principles but also be able to apply these principles in their everyday lives.

Its structure can be explained through the following components:

1. Cognitive component. This component encompasses students' knowledge of national and universal values, moral principles, legal culture, civic duties, and social responsibility.

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2. Motivational and value-based component. It develops an individual's inner motivation and positive attitude towards values such as striving for goodness, respecting human dignity, loyalty to the Motherland, honesty, justice, and tolerance.

3. Activity-based component. This component reflects students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge and beliefs in practical activities, participate in community initiatives, show social initiative, and comply with ethical standards.

4. Reflexive component. It involves students' ability to analyze their own behavior, critically evaluate their activities, recognize their mistakes, and strive for continuous moral self-improvement.

The integration of these components ensures the holistic development of moral and ethical competence.

Pedagogical Mechanisms for Developing Moral and Ethical Competence

The development of moral and ethical competence in higher education institutions should not be limited to individual events. Rather, it should encompass education, upbringing, social engagement, and personal development.

The following pedagogical mechanisms are particularly important in this process.

The first mechanism – a value-oriented educational process. It is essential to integrate national and universal values, ethical issues, professional ethics, and social responsibility into the content of academic courses. In this process, students should participate as active subjects who independently analyze problematic situations rather than simply accept ready-made conclusions.

The second mechanism – the use of interactive pedagogical methods. Discussions, debates, analysis of problematic situations, role-playing activities, case studies, and reflective sessions contribute to the development of students' ethical thinking. For example, discussing situations related to academic integrity, plagiarism, collective responsibility, and professional ethics helps students develop independent ethical decision-making skills.

The third mechanism – utilizing the educational potential of tutoring activities. Tutors should maintain regular communication with students and study their interests, social engagement, challenges, and individual needs. Individual consultations, small-group meetings, and collaborative projects can contribute to the personal development of each student.

The fourth mechanism – promoting social projects and volunteering activities. Involving students in charitable initiatives, environmental campaigns, social assistance projects, reading initiatives, and community-based activities strengthens their sense of humanism, solidarity, and social responsibility.

The fifth mechanism – creating a digital spiritual and educational environment. Modern information technologies can be used to develop educational materials, electronic libraries, video lessons, podcasts, virtual discussion platforms, and online projects. This contributes to the development of students' conscious use of information resources and media literacy.

An Improved Pedagogical Model for Developing Moral and Ethical Competence

Within the framework of this study, the following systematic model for developing students' moral and ethical competence is proposed:

1. **Target-oriented stage:** defining the objectives of developing high moral and ethical qualities among students.
2. **Content-based stage:** determining the content of national and universal values, moral principles, civic responsibility, and professional ethics.

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3. **Organizational and activity-based stage:** implementing interactive classes, tutoring activities, social projects, and spiritual and educational events.
4. **Assessment and reflection stage:** evaluating students' knowledge, attitudes towards values, practical activities, and self-reflection skills.

The effectiveness of this model depends on cooperation among the academic staff, tutors, student leaders, and public organizations within the educational institution.

Criteria for Assessing the Effectiveness of Moral and Ethical Competence Development

Moral and ethical competence should not be assessed solely on the basis of the number of events attended by students. Instead, qualitative changes in their personal development should serve as the main assessment criteria.

The following criteria are considered appropriate:

- the level of students' knowledge of values and ethical principles;
- the development of social responsibility and civic engagement;
- the presence of communication and cooperation skills;
- the ability to make independent ethical decisions;
- participation in social initiatives and volunteering activities;
- the ability to analyze and evaluate one's own behavior.

Based on these criteria, students' levels of development can be classified as high, intermediate, and basic. Interviews, observation, questionnaires, portfolios, and analysis of practical activities are recommended as assessment methods.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, developing the moral and ethical competence of students in higher education institutions is a continuous, systematic, and personality-oriented pedagogical process. The integration of educational content, upbringing activities, tutoring systems, social projects, and digital opportunities plays an important role in this process.

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations have been developed:

- systematically integrate moral and ethical education into the annual activity plans of faculties;
- improve educational approaches by considering each student's interests and individual characteristics;
- actively involve students in social projects and volunteering activities;
- make purposeful use of digital spiritual and educational resources;
- assess the effectiveness of educational activities not merely by the number of events organized but also by actual positive changes in students' behavior and personal development.

Thus, implementing comprehensive pedagogical mechanisms aimed at developing moral and ethical competence contributes to preparing well-rounded, responsible specialists with an active civic position in higher education institutions.

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