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PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES ABOUT THINKING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract
This article analyzes the main psychological theories that explain the development of thinking in preschool children. Based on the views of Piaget, Vygotsky and other scientists, children's logical thinking, imagination and problem-solving abilities are gradually revealed. The theories are compared and their practical significance is highlighted.

Keywords: Thinking, preschool age, cognitive development, Piaget's theory, Vygotsky, sociocultural approach, child psychology, play, speech, communication.

Introduction

Human thinking is a complex mental activity aimed at understanding the environment, processing information, and solving problems. It represents the highest level of human consciousness and begins to develop from early childhood. The preschool period (ages 3 to 7) is considered a particularly crucial stage in a child's psychological development. During this time, alongside cognitive processes such as perception, memory, and attention, the development of thinking becomes especially active. The child strives to comprehend the surrounding world and seeks relationships between objects and events. Initially, a child's thinking is primarily emotional-imaginative and practical in nature, but with age, it gradually transforms into more complex and logical thinking.

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Psychological theories interpret the development of preschool children's thinking in different ways. The increasing cognitive activity of children at this age is often manifested through play, storytelling, and their growing interest in answering questions. Therefore, in today's preschool education system, it is of great importance to study the development of thinking in-depth, analyze various theoretical perspectives, and apply them in practice.

This article discusses the main psychological approaches to the development of thinking in preschool children, highlighting their specific features and practical significance.

Literature Review and Methods

Analyzing psychological theories of thinking development in preschool-aged children allows for identifying differences and commonalities in their understanding of a child's mental growth.

Foremost, Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasizes the stage-by-stage nature of children's thinking evolution. According to Piaget, children acquire new cognitive skills at each developmental stage. Preschool children understand the world through imagination and mental imagery. Their thinking is primarily based on concrete representations and lacks readiness for abstract logical reasoning. The significance of Piaget's theory lies in its explanation of biologically determined stages of mental development.

On the other hand, Vygotsky's sociocultural approach underscores the influence of the social environment and language on the development of children's thinking. Vygotsky closely links cognitive processes to the culture children are raised in. He argues that children develop their thinking through social interactions with others. In this framework, speech is considered a key tool for developing thinking in preschool children. Vygotsky explains this through the concept of the "zone of proximal development," where adult or teacher assistance in problem-solving accelerates cognitive growth.

Additionally, in the works of Elkonin and Zaporozhets, play, communication, and activity are identified as central elements in the development of thinking in children. They emphasize that play is the primary medium through which preschool children develop cognitive abilities. Play creates opportunities for

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solving problems, acquiring new knowledge, and gaining experience. Through play, children not only enhance their thinking skills but also learn to adapt to their social environment and interact with others.

Each theory of cognitive development contributes valuable insights for child psychology, pedagogy, and educational practice. At the same time, several psychological factors must be considered when fostering thinking in young children. Regular communication with the child, engaging them with various games and tasks, and establishing strong social connections all significantly contribute to the development of thinking.

Understanding the development of thinking in preschoolers necessitates the study of psychological theories. Piaget's cognitive development theory reveals the fundamental stages of mental formation but does not sufficiently account for social and cultural factors. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, by contrast, explains cognitive growth in a social context, emphasizing interaction and learning grounded in the child's cultural background. The theories of Elkonin and Zaporozhets, meanwhile, highlight the crucial role of play and activity in cognitive development.

In the works of Elkonin and Zaporozhets, play, communication, and activity are identified as the main elements in the development of children's thinking. They emphasize that play is the primary tool for cognitive development in preschool-aged children. Play creates opportunities for solving problems, acquiring new knowledge, and gaining experience. Through play, children not only develop their thinking abilities but also learn to adapt to the social environment and to communicate with others.

Each theoretical approach to the development of thinking has its own significance and provides valuable practical insights for child psychology, pedagogy, and educational processes. At the same time, it is necessary to consider several psychological factors that influence the development of thinking in children. For instance, regular communication with the child, providing them with various games and tasks to stimulate learning, and establishing strong social interactions all play a critical role in enhancing cognitive development.

Understanding the development of thinking in preschool children requires a comprehensive study of psychological theories. Piaget's theory of cognitive

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development reveals the fundamental stages in the formation of thinking but does not sufficiently address social and cultural factors. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, by contrast, interprets thinking within a social context, emphasizing communication and culturally grounded learning processes. The theories of Elkonin and Zaporozhets, meanwhile, highlight the importance of play and activity in cognitive growth.

In the second stage of the research, a comparative (contrastive) analysis method was employed to identify similarities and differences among the selected theories. This approach allowed for the examination of the unique features, theoretical foundations, and scientific relevance of each framework. Particular attention was paid to the distinctions between individual and social interpretations of thinking development.

In the selection of sources, criteria of reliability and scientific validity were strictly observed. Only reputable academic literature, internationally recognized scientific articles, psychological monographs, and papers from trusted electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ResearchGate were utilized. The selected sources include both the works of prominent theorists from the 20th century and recent studies published in the past few years.

During the analysis phase, the content analysis method was also applied. This facilitated the extraction and classification of core concepts, definitions, and conceptual approaches found in each theoretical source. These elements were systematized to reflect their scientific foundations. The use of content analysis ensured the theoretical depth and academic rigor of the research.

These methodological principles enabled the researcher to conduct a balanced and coherent theoretical analysis, while also forming an effective scholarly approach for addressing the topicality and relevance of the subject matter.

Results and Discussion

Several key psychological theories regarding the formation and development of thinking in preschool children were analyzed in depth. The analysis revealed that each theory approaches the concept of thinking from a different perspective and carries distinct scientific and practical value. The development of thinking is a

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complex process that is closely intertwined with biological maturation, social environment, language, play activities, and didactic influences.

The research results indicate that each psychological approach highlights certain aspects of cognitive development. However, their integrated application can yield the most effective outcomes within the preschool education system. These theories can serve as a crucial theoretical foundation for educators, psychologists, and methodologists. In particular, the development of play-based learning strategies, communication techniques, and instructional materials should take into account the insights provided by these theoretical approaches.

Thinking is a higher-order cognitive activity of the human mind. It involves logical reasoning, identifying relationships between concepts, solving problems, and acquiring new knowledge. The preschool period is regarded as one of the most active and intense stages in the development of thinking. During this phase, the child begins to internalize the surrounding environment through imagination, perception, language, and social interaction—laying a natural foundation for the formation of cognitive structures.

The psychological theories analyzed in this study reveal several critical aspects of cognitive development:

According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the period between ages 2 and 7 is referred to as the preoperational stage. During this stage, the child is not yet capable of performing formal logical operations, but characteristics such as symbolic thinking, egocentrism, and animism are prominently expressed. Piaget views biological maturation and individual experience as the main determinants of development, thereby interpreting thinking from the standpoint of ontogenesis. However, this theory does not sufficiently address the influence of social and cultural factors such as communication and cultural context.

Lev Vygotsky, in contrast, interprets the formation of thinking through a sociocultural approach. He asserts that thinking is not primarily an individual process, but a social construct that develops through interactions with adults and peers. Vygotsky's concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) emphasizes that a child's cognitive development can be accelerated not only through independent activity but also through external support and guidance. This

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theory is especially relevant for educational practice, as it demonstrates that cognitive development can be facilitated through instruction.

Jerome Bruner's model of staged cognitive development explains thinking through three main representational modes: enactive (action-based), iconic (image-based), and symbolic (language-based). Unlike Piaget, Bruner suggests that knowledge does not necessarily develop in a strict hierarchy but rather evolves depending on context and activity. This approach aligns well with modern constructivist pedagogy and is widely applied in promoting cognitive engagement and active learning in children.

Based on the theoretical frameworks discussed above, it can be concluded that the development of thinking is not a unilateral process, but rather a multifactorial and complex phenomenon. Biological, psychological, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors all interact and contribute jointly to this developmental process. Therefore, it is more effective to analyze theories of cognitive development not in isolation but through an integrative and interdisciplinary lens.

Contemporary psychology has seen the emergence of numerous new conceptualizations of thinking. For instance, R. Sternberg's theory of "successful intelligence" proposes that thinking should be studied through analytical, practical, and creative dimensions. Similarly, H. Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" argues that cognition does not develop solely through logical or analytical reasoning but also through musical, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, and interpersonal modalities. These approaches underscore the necessity of implementing differentiated instruction in preschool education.

To ensure the effective development of thinking in preschool institutions, pedagogical methods must be systematically designed and implemented based on these theoretical approaches. This includes integrating play-based activities, problem-solving tasks, and language-rich learning environments. If the core ideas of each theory are carefully applied in educational practice, the development of thinking in children can be guided and enhanced more effectively and systematically.

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Conclusion

The development of thinking in preschool-aged children is not limited to biological factors alone; it is also significantly influenced by social, cultural, and educational activities. Active interaction between adults, teachers, and parents with children, teaching through play, and the development of speech all play a critical role in enhancing cognitive processes. From this perspective, psychological theories provide the necessary scientific foundation for understanding and applying approaches to children's thinking development in educational practice.

For future studies, there is a clear need to implement modern pedagogical and psychological methods to further investigate the development of thinking in preschoolers. This, in turn, will help make early education more effective and promote the formation of strong cognitive skills in children.

Several leading psychological theories related to the development of thinking in preschool children have been examined. The works of J. Piaget, L.S. Vygotsky, J. Bruner, and other contemporary psychologists shed light on different aspects of cognitive development.

While Piaget explained thinking through the lens of biological maturation and cognitive stages, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social environment, language, and communication. Bruner, on the other hand, described the development of thinking as a sequential process through enactive, iconic, and symbolic modes.

In summary, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

- Thinking development is a multifactorial process influenced by biological, psychological, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors working in combination.
- Each theory possesses its own strengths and can be effectively applied in an integrated manner within educational and upbringing processes.
- In the preschool education system, promoting thinking development requires age-appropriate play activities, guided conversations, visual learning tasks, problem-solving situations, and the harmonious development of language and thinking.

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• A thorough understanding of psychological theories enables educators and psychologists to accurately assess children's cognitive potential and choose methodological approaches tailored to their individual developmental needs.

These conclusions serve as an important theoretical foundation for effectively organizing thinking development in preschool institutions, improving methodological practices, and designing programs based on contemporary educational approaches.

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