

VI International Forum on Teacher Education

Methodological Support for Master's Theses on Legal Regulation of Educational Relations

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the topic, the relevance of which is due to the existing contradiction in the system of master's training: between the objective need to form a methodological culture among graduates of the master's program, which allows them to design, implement and evaluate the results of research work competently and in accordance with the requirements, on the one hand, and their lack of readiness for methodological support of research activities, on the other hand.

The purpose of the study: to identify and systematize typical shortcomings in the methodological support of master's studies on the legal regulation of educational relations.

Research objectives: 1) to reveal the essence and content of the concept of "methodological support for master's research"; 2) to identify and systematize the main methodological characteristics of typical shortcomings of master's research on the legal regulation of educational relations.

Research methods: theoretical methods were used in the work: analysis of master's studies on legal regulation of educational relations; study of scientific and pedagogical literature on the problem: systematization, generalization.

The paper shows that despite the recent increase in the attention of researchers and experts to the methodology of pedagogical research, in the actual practice of master's theses, including on the problems of legal regulation of educational relations, there are still certain shortcomings in the methodological support of research of this kind.

The contribution to pedagogical science is to identify and systematize typical shortcomings of master's studies on legal regulation of educational relations, concerning their methodological support (relevance, contradiction, problem, goal, hypothesis, tasks, etc.).

Keywords: methodology, methodological support, master's thesis, legal regulation of educational relations.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2020 (VI International Forum on Teacher Education)

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Introduction

In modern conditions, when the fact of increasing importance of higher education is obvious, the attention of society and the state to the quality of master's theses, including in the field of legal regulation of relations in the field of education, is updated.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to identify the most common shortcomings of methodological support for master's dissertation research in the field of legal regulation of relations in the field of education and to identify ways to overcome them.

Literature review

A lot of work has been carried out by both domestic and foreign scientists in recent years. In terms of methodological support for master's theses, scientists' attention is focused on identifying and clarifying the content of the concept of methodology of science, analyzing methodological characteristics and methods of dissertation research (Belozertsev, 2014; Valeev, 1999; Zagviazinskii, 2010; Sarantsev, 2002; Ivanova, 2013; Kraevskii & Berezhnova, 2006; Novikov, 2002).

The problem of methodology and methods of scientific research in education is also intensively studied by foreign researchers, who pay much attention to the justification and development of mixed research methods. A review of qualitative and quantitative concepts of multi-level research plans, as well as an example of a multi-level mixed-method study aimed at explaining the cultural, behavioral, and neurobiological aspects of literacy, is presented in the study by Headley & Plano Clark (2020). Shannon-Baker (2016) provides a comparative analysis of the four main pragmatic perspectives described in the literature on mixed methods: pragmatism, transformative emancipation, dialectics, and critical realism. Issues of integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods are considered in Mertens' book (2010).

However, despite the scientific potential accumulated in the methodology of pedagogy, the state of quality of master's theses does not always meet the requirements, especially in terms of methodological support for research, where candidates for a degree experience the greatest difficulties.

The discrepancy between the presence of a sufficiently large amount of methodological knowledge in pedagogy and the difficulties faced by candidates for a degree in the process of applying it to the conceptual justification of the research program highlights the problem: what are the composition and content of the main shortcomings in the methodological support of master's theses?

Methodology

Theoretical methods were used in the work: literature study, analysis and synthesis, systematization. The analysis was based on master's theses in the field of legal regulation of relations in the field of education. Publications on the problem of methodological support for dissertation research were also analyzed.

Results

Kraevskii & Berezhnova (2006) identify the concepts of "methodological research" and "methodological support for research activities". The methodological research is aimed at identifying the regularities of the development of law and pedagogy as a science, revealing the principles of improving the efficiency and quality of research, and analyzing the conceptual apparatus and research methods for legal regulation of educational relations. As for methodological support, its task is to provide an answer to the question of how to use methodological knowledge to justify the research program and assess its quality. It follows that the methodological support of master's theses requires the author to develop the methodology of science in depth.

We proceed from the interpretation of the methodology as the doctrine of the organization of activity, which was justified in the works of Novikov (2002). Accordingly, methodological knowledge is knowledge about how to organize research activities in the field of legal regulation of educational relations. Since the time structure of research activities includes three main phases (design, technological and reflection phases), the quality of master's theses will depend on how well all three phases are prepared and implemented.

The initial phase of the master thesis is the design phase, implemented as is known, according to the generally accepted scheme: topic relevance – identification of conflicts – problem definition - goal setting - define the object and subject of research - the construction of scientific hypotheses – defining the research objectives planning the research. This is the part where undergraduates have a lot of difficulties. Therefore, we will focus more on the question of what are the typical shortcomings of methodological support for master's theses that occur in the process of designing a study?

As you know, the main goal of the stage of substantiating the relevance of the research topic is to show the relevance of the topic in question from the point of view of: a) social and industry order; b) the needs of the practice of legal regulation of relations in the field of education; C) the state of the theory. The presence of a need from the point of view of all these three aspects (social, practical and theoretical) allows us to speak about the relevance of the research topic.

However, the analysis showed that in most master's theses (about 80%) there are such shortcomings as: unclear wording of social and industry orders, expressed in the absence of references to normative documents that define and regulate the system of higher education; analysis of the actual practice of preparing future masters is given speculatively (in the form of General phrases such as: the practice is experiencing difficulties in..., the situation in practice does not correspond to the social order, etc.), without references to statistical data and the results of expert evaluation; evaluation of the issue in the scientific literature is often reduced to a list of completed studies without their critical analysis; often there are situations when the analysis is subjected to works that do not have or have a very remote relationship to the topic being performed; in one row, the classics of science and unknown modern researchers are mentioned, etc..

Relevance can be considered justified if the analysis identifies objective, significant contradictions. In the social Sciences and Humanities, a contradiction is understood as an inconsistency, a mismatch between some opposites, a mismatch between the desirable (for example, from the point of view of normative practice or theory) and the actual (existing in practice, in theory). It is important to keep in mind that the opposite sides of each contradiction relate to a particular aspect of practice or theory.

Among the typical shortcomings in the formulation of contradictions can be distinguished: the inconclusive (or no) justification for the contradictions, manifested in the fact that it does not follow logically from the preceding analysis; the violation of the requirements of the assignment of contrasts to a single object (either in practice or in theory), the discrepancy of the wording of the contradictions of science, which runs the master's thesis; no meaningful Association conflict with the purpose, objectives, hypothesis of the research work (Zagviazinskii, 2010).

In this regard, we note that some authors are in favor of abandoning "contradictions" altogether, since there is a tradition of inventing them in master's theses, which is a vestige of "dialectical scholasticism" (Shchadrikov, 2002). Indeed, in a number of master's theses there are situations of "inventing contradictions", but this is not a reason for rejecting this methodological characteristic. Contradictions in many master's theses are not invented, but based on the analysis of real pedagogical practice and pedagogical theory. So the question is to correctly identify and formulate the contradictions underlying the problem.

At the same time, let us pay attention to the fact that Russian science has traditionally relied on the thesis of dialectical materialism that the driving force of development is the contradiction as the interaction of opposite sides and tendencies, mutually exclusive, but at the same time, being in internal unity. However, at the present stage of social development, the philosophical basis is not only dialectics, but also other philosophical teachings (existentialism, practicalism, neotomism, positivism, neopositivism, behaviorism, etc.), which actualizes the question of the place and role of contradiction as a methodological characteristic of master's theses. It is thought that the question of contradictions in dissertation research on pedagogy requires special attention, and because this methodologically significant point of research often turns into an artificial invention of inconsistencies that work on the topic of research.

The key methodological characteristic of the master's thesis is the research hypothesis, which is a model of future scientific knowledge, it lays new connections and relationships, which in the case of experimental confirmation, acquire the status of new scientific knowledge.

How to formulate a hypothesis? For this, it is necessary to comply with the requirements for a scientific hypothesis, distinguishing it from an arbitrary assumption or guess. These requirements include the following.

1. The validity of the hypothesis put forward. Very often, a hypothesis is understood as any assumption. However, the hypothesis can only be the assumption, which is expressed in the form of judgments based on already proven previous knowledge. A hypothesis is a reasonable assumption, therefore, its nomination should be "prepared" in such a way that the logic of thought development would lead the undergraduate to precisely those positions that will be the main elements of the hypothesis.

Note that one of the most common shortcomings of the hypotheses formulated is precisely the fact that the assumptions put forward in them do not follow from the previous arguments of the researcher, from the previous text. Such a hypothesis arises "suddenly" and the supervisor or reviewer begins to doubt the validity of the hypothesis of the master's thesis.

2. "Hypothetical" hypothesis. This means that the hypothesis should not be trivial, obvious (as is often observed in master's theses). It should include only provisions or alleged connections that objectively need proof.

3. Compactness and simplicity: the hypothesis does not have to be too large, it is undesirable to include many positions in it that require proof. In the case where the hypothesis contains many positions, at least two questions arise: about optimality and about the possibility of proving all the assumptions made.

The requirement of simplicity of the hypothesis lies not in its ease and accessibility, but in its ability, on the basis of a single basis, to explain, if possible, a wider range of various phenomena, processes, without resorting to artificial constructions and arbitrary assumptions, without making new ones case of all new hypotheses.

4. Connection with the problem, subject and purpose of the study.

Of the presented requirements for the hypothesis, the first (validity) and the second (hypothetical) are not often observed in master's dissertations (in about 80% of works).

It should also be said about the structure of the hypothesis, which can be two-member and three-member. The two-term hypothesis is a descriptive hypothesis containing an assumption of some form of connection between the observed phenomena and processes (if ..., then ...). It does not contain any justification explicitly. The three-term hypothesis is an explanatory hypothesis, acting as an assumption about the relationship between the observed phenomena, processes and their internal basis. It includes a statement, an assumption and a scientific justification (if ..., then ..., since ...). In the vast majority of master's theses (over 90%), two-term hypotheses dominate and three-term hypotheses are much less common.

As for the following methodological characteristic - research tasks, typical drawbacks in their formulation are: the use in formulations of expressions that indicate the process and not the result: "analyze ...", "conduct an analysis ..." (about 50%), etc. .; the formulation of a separate task sometimes completely coincides with the purpose of the study (approximately 45%); lack of correlation with the goal and the hypothesis, or, conversely, duplication of the hypothesis (50%).

Discussions

The analysis shows that in recent years the content of the section of the master's thesis "methodological foundations" lists approaches (holistic, systemic, personality-activity, cultural, competency-based, integrative, system-functional, synergistic, cybernetic, etc.); philosophical provisions on: the dialectical relationship of fundamental and applied in education; general, special and single; unity of theory and practice; basic principles; theoretical and methodological and psychological-pedagogical foundations of a competency-based approach in education; moral and cultural aspect of the formation of the personality of a specialist; modeling as a general scientific research method, etc.

Such a variety of positions, being generally a positive phenomenon, leads, however, to the appearance of the following inaccuracies.

Firstly, there is a mixture of methodological and theoretical foundations. For example, often theories include psychological theories (psychological theories of activity, personal growth, subjectivity, theoretical foundations of integration, etc.). Sometimes the same approach can be attributed either to methodological or to theoretical foundations; either one approach is indicated both in methodological and theoretical foundations. In some works, along with methodological foundations, conceptual foundations that substantively duplicate each other are distinguished.

Secondly, there is formalism, a lack of concreteness. For example, in a number of dissertations there is a statement that the methodological basis of the research is: “the methodology of modern legal and pedagogical science”, from which it is not clear what is behind this statement. The enumeration of numerous authors - methodologists of the modern legal, pedagogical and other sciences - puts the reader in a difficult position, because he is forced to think out and clarify what exactly is meant by this or that methodology.

Thirdly, the declaration of methodological approaches does not translate into the use of reliable research methods. Regarding research methods, it should be said that the dissenters use a fairly wide range of research methods - both theoretical and empirical, as well as mathematical statistics (Ibragimov, 2010; Samoilova, 2017; Ibragimov, 2017).

Among the theoretical methods are listed: analysis, synthesis, modeling, concretization, comparison, generalization, analogy method, design, induction, deduction, formalization, content analysis. It is noteworthy that different types of analysis are used: theoretical, comparative, systemic, conceptual and terminological, interdisciplinary, retrospective, historical and genetic, etc. There is rarely an indication of the use of such methods as: classification, systematization, forecasting, comparison, extrapolation, etc. In general, in one master's thesis, two to eight methods of theoretical research are mentioned.

As for empirical methods, there are questionnaires, testing, interviews, expert assessments, analysis of the results of current and final control. In one master's thesis, three to seven methods of empirical research are used. In this case, the most commonly used questionnaires, testing, which are found in each dissertation. Only in 10% of dissertations do the methods of conversation and interviews, group discussions, which, meanwhile, have great potential, be used.

Conclusion

Thus, the study identifies typical shortcomings in the methodological support of master's thesis studies in the field of legal regulation of relations in the field of education. They are systematized according to the main methodological characteristics of the study (relevance, contradiction, problem, goal, hypothesis, tasks, methodological foundations). We see the sources of these shortcomings primarily in the fact that undergraduates carry out the research design phase rather formally, without attaching great importance to its thorough preparation.

To remove most of the identified shortcomings in pedagogy, a sufficient supply of methodological knowledge has been accumulated. However, the extent to which it will be mastered and used in the process of research depends largely on the undergraduate, his awareness of the role of methodological knowledge, his desire to understand and delve into the substantive essence of the methodological support of the dissertation research.

The conclusions made by the authors contribute to the development of the methodology of master's thesis research. The results of the study can be used by undergraduates, as well as their supervisors, to improve the methodological support of master's thesis research.

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