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USE OF CLUSTERS AND MIND MAPS IN TEACHING THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract
The article discusses innovative methods for visualizing educational information - clusters and mental maps (mind maps) - and analyzes the possibilities of their use in Russian language lessons. It is proven that these techniques contribute to the development of critical and associative thinking, systematization of knowledge and increased motivation of students.

Keywords: Cluster, mental map, mind map, Russian language, visualization, systematization, associative thinking.

Introduction

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ КЛАСТЕРОВ И МЕНТАЛЬНЫХ КАРТ В ОБУЧЕНИИ РУССКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

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Аннотация:
В статье рассматриваются инновационные методы визуализации учебной информации – кластеры и ментальные карты (интеллект-карты) – и анализируются возможности их применения на уроках русского языка. Доказывается, что данные приемы способствуют развитию критического и

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ассоциативного мышления, систематизации знаний и повышению мотивации студентов.

Ключевые слова: кластер, ментальная карта, интеллект-карта, русский язык, визуализация, систематизация, ассоциативное мышление.

Annotasiya:
Maqolada ta'lim ma'lumotlarini vizualizatsiya qilishning innovatsion usullari - klasterlar va aqliy xaritalar (aql xaritalari) ko'rib chiqiladi va rus tili darslarida ulardan foydalanish imkoniyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Ushbu usullar tanqidiy va assotsiativ fikrlashni rivojlantirishga, bilimlarni tizimlashtirishga va talabalarning motivatsiyasini oshirishga yordam berishi isbotlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: klaster, aqliy xarita, aql xaritasi, rus tili, vizualizatsiya, tizimlashtirish, assotsiativ fikrlash.

Introduction

The modern educational process, implemented within the framework of state educational standards, requires the use of technologies that develop students’ cross-disciplinary skills: analysis, synthesis, structuring of information, and working with large amounts of data. These tasks become especially relevant in Russian-language classes, where learners must master complex rules, extensive theoretical material, and numerous exceptions. An effective tool for addressing these challenges is the use of visualization methods, among which clusters and mind maps occupy a leading position.

1. The essence of the concepts “cluster” and “mind map”

Despite their external similarity, these two methods differ in structure and purpose.

A cluster (from the English *cluster* meaning “group, cluster, bunch”) is a graphic technique for systematizing material in the form of a “grape cluster” or a “sun with rays.” The central position is occupied by a key concept (topic), and around

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it are ideas, facts, and examples related to it, which can further branch out. A cluster does not have strict construction rules; it is free-form and reflects the initial, "draft" stage of collecting thoughts. Its main goal is to reveal all possible associations and connections on the topic.

A cluster is a flexible and multifunctional method that can be used at all three stages of a lesson: introducing new material, practicing, revising, and assessing. It is a way of graphically organizing information that allows the visualization of thought processes occurring during immersion in a particular topic. A cluster reflects the nonlinear nature of thinking. Sometimes this method is referred to as a "visual brainstorming session."

A mind map (intellectual map), developed by Tony Buzan, is a more structured and hierarchical form. At the center is the main idea (often depicted as a bright image), from which thick first-level "branches" extend, representing key sections. From these branches, thinner second- and third-level branches extend, and so on. A mind map involves the use of colors, drawings, symbols, and arrows to establish connections, making it not only a tool for structuring information but also a powerful mnemonic device.

2. Practical application in Russian-language lessons

Both the cluster and the mind map can be successfully integrated into various stages of the lesson and different types of activities.

The sequence of actions is simple and logical:

1. At the beginning, write a key word or phrase in the middle of a blank sheet (or on the board, in a Word document, or on a PowerPoint slide), which serves as the "heart" of the idea or topic.
2. Around it, "scatter" words or sentences expressing ideas, facts, images, or associations relevant to the topic.
3. As you continue writing, the emerging words are connected with straight lines to the key concept. Each of these "satellite" words, in turn, can also generate new "satellites," forming additional logical links.

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As a result, a structure appears that visually represents our thought process and outlines the informational field of the topic.

When working with clusters, it is important to follow several rules:

- Do not be afraid to write down everything that comes to mind.
- Allow imagination and intuition to guide the process.
- Continue working until time runs out or ideas are exhausted.
- Do not follow a pre-determined plan.

This technique can be used at the *evocation* stage, when organizing information received before working with the main source (text) in the form of questions or headings of semantic blocks. Depending on the goal, the teacher may organize either individual independent work or collective activity in the form of group discussion. The content area is unlimited: clusters can be used when studying almost any topic.

There are various types of clusters:

- classical cluster
- paper-based cluster
- cluster with numbered words for composing a narrative
- cluster using separate or situational pictures instead of words
- group clusters where each group works with different fragments of the same topic to create a collective narrative
- reverse cluster
- grammatical cluster

Классический кластер. В начале занятия учитель записывает в центре доски тему (ключевое слово) и просит студентов сделать запись в тетради, подумать и записать вокруг данного слова все, что приходит на ум в связи с этой темой. Через несколько минут можно предложить студентам обменяться своими идеями в парах, затем поделиться ими со всей группой и записать их на доске. Дополнительные категории учитель дает либо сам, либо помогает студентам наводящими вопросами, помогает студентам сформулировать их самостоятельно.

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A paper-based cluster. This type can serve as a tool for developing not only writing skills but also reading skills. In this case, students receive cards with individual words, sentences, or even short texts on a given topic. They read them, arrange them, and, if necessary, glue them onto a sheet in a specific order around the key word. Afterwards, the clusters are checked, discussed, and evaluated at the teacher's discretion. Preparing a paper-based cluster does not necessarily have to be the teacher's task. This activity can become an excellent homework assignment for students. Let one group of students prepare at home a sheet with the key word and corresponding cards for another group, and vice versa. In the first case, the teacher can check and assess the homework; in the second, the correctness of cluster construction can be evaluated in class based on work done by the other group. Both groups will thoroughly work through the lesson topic.

Cluster with numbered words. This type of cluster is useful when it is necessary to determine the sequence of events while composing a narrative or delivering an oral presentation. This method is particularly suitable for learners of Russian as a foreign language, as determining the order of sentences in a text—where to begin, how to develop the narrative, and how to conclude it—often poses the greatest difficulty.

A cluster with numbered words is created collectively as follows: the topic (key word) is written in the center of the board, then students name all the words and phrases that come to mind regarding the topic. Once all the lexical items proposed by the students are written on the board, the class begins discussing the sequence of events for the narrative. The teacher assists with guiding questions and, together with the students, assigns numbers indicating the order next to the words on the board: number 1 for words to be used in the first sentence, number 2 for the second sentence, and so on.

Recommendation: to help students navigate the cluster more easily and avoid skipping words when composing the narrative, the teacher may write the numbers using colored chalk— all number 1s in one color, number 2s in another, etc.

Art cluster (cluster with pictures). A cluster that uses visual images instead of written words is an effective method for studying a broad topic. The construction principle remains the same. In the center of the sheet, an image illustrating the

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chosen topic is placed, and around it students attach or draw its components. The images may depict a single object (an item, a living creature, a color, etc.) or an entire scene (natural phenomena, human activities, etc.).

Object-based art cluster. For example, the topic "Vegetable Salad." In the center of the sheet, a bowl of salad is drawn or pasted. Students must choose from the provided cards the vegetables suitable for the topic and paste (or draw) them around the central image. Afterward, students describe what their salad consists of using the cluster. In Russian language lessons, a similar cluster may be created for the topic "Adjective."

Story-based art cluster. For example, the topic "People's activities during different seasons." In the center, four people are shown, each dressed according to a season. Around them, four seasonal symbols are placed: a snowflake, rain, a snowdrop, and the sun. Behind them are several images showing children sledding or skiing, swimming and sunbathing, harvesting vegetables in the field, etc. There should be two or three images for each season. In history lessons, this type of cluster can be used to study people's occupations during different historical periods.

Group cluster. A group cluster involves distributing fragments of a single topic among several groups, followed by creating a collective narrative. For example, students compose a story on the topic "Profession." One group creates a cluster titled "Professions in the field of education," the second group works on "Activities of teachers," and the third group develops "Moral qualities of future teachers." The completed clusters, prepared on large sheets, are placed around the central theme. Each group presents its part of the narrative using its cluster (or another group's cluster—at the teacher's discretion). Other students may add comments or provide support. Afterwards, each student writes an individual essay about teachers, using the clusters displayed on the board.

Reverse cluster. This type of cluster is used at the *evocation* stage to spark students' interest, activate their thinking, and help determine the lesson topic. It may also be used at other stages for vocabulary work or as a way to identify the main idea, the essence of the content (at the reflection stage— for summarizing and drawing conclusions). It is constructed as follows: additional categories or

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major components are written first, and in the center a question mark is placed, or an empty frame is left for identifying and writing the key word, the main topic, or the subject of discussion.

1. Studying a new topic and activating prior knowledge.

Topic: "The Noun."

Cluster: In the center — "Noun." Students individually or in groups fill in the cluster by recalling everything they know: part of speech, meaning, questions it answers, constant and variable grammatical features, syntactic role, examples. This allows the teacher to assess students' initial level of knowledge.

Mind map: After studying the topic, a detailed map can be created. Center — an image of an object.

First-level branches: "What does it denote?", "Morphological features" (constant: gender, declension, common/proper, animate/inanimate; variable: case, number).

Second-level branches: "Syntactic role," "Examples."

Each branch is further elaborated.

2. Systematization and generalization of knowledge.

Topic: "Types of complex sentences."

A mind map is ideal for creating a clear visual scheme. Center — "Complex sentence."

First-level branches: "With conjunctions" and "Without conjunctions."

"With conjunctions" divides into "Compound sentences" (conjunctions, examples) and "Complex sentences" (conjunctions/conjunctive words, types of subordinate clauses).

"Without conjunctions" branches according to meaning (enumeration, cause, condition, etc.) and punctuation rules.

3. Speech development (preparation for composition or retelling).

Topic: "Essay-argumentation."

A cluster is used at the brainstorming stage to collect ideas, arguments, and examples from texts and personal experience related to the chosen problem.

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A mind map helps build a clear composition: center — "Thesis."
First-level branches: "Argument 1" (with evidence), "Argument 2" (with evidence), "Conclusion."

4. Explaining spelling and punctuation rules.
Topic: "Spelling of prefixes ПРЕ-/ПРИ-."
A mind map can be created with branches representing meanings: "ПРИ-" (approach, attachment, proximity, incompleteness of action) and "ПРЕ-" (= "very," = "PERE-"), each illustrated with examples.
Psychological and pedagogical advantages of these methods:

- Activation of both hemispheres of the brain:
- The logical left hemisphere works with text and structure, while the right hemisphere works with images, colors, and spatial relationships.
- Development of associative thinking:
- Helps identify non-obvious connections and understand the material more deeply.
- Increased motivation:
- Working with colored pencils, markers, and creating personal "masterpieces" transforms routine tasks into a creative process.
- Effective memorization:
- Visual and structured information is remembered better than continuous text.
- Formation of information-processing skills:
- Students learn to identify key ideas, structure information, and condense material.

Thus, the use of clusters and mind maps in Russian-language lessons fully aligns with the requirements of modern education. These methods do not merely diversify the lesson but turn it into a research and creative laboratory. They help students not only master rules and exceptions more deeply but also develop universal learning skills necessary for successful adaptation in a rapidly changing world. From a chaotic idea-cluster to a well-organized and visually appealing mind-map summary—this is the path that makes knowledge of the Russian language systematic, solid, and easily applicable in practice.

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It is fitting to conclude with the words of the great educator V. A. Sukhomlinsky: "In the intellectual work of students, memorization and rote learning do not come first; rather, the student's own reflection—living creativity, the perception of objects, things, and phenomena of the surrounding world through the word, and, in connection with this, the perception of the finest shades of the word itself—stands above all."

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