



Enhancing interest in studying political theory subjects for university students - Current situation and solutions

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Abstract

Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought are the foundation and guideline for all actions of the Party. Currently, political theory subjects are taught at all training and education institutions according to regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training. However, the appeal of these courses is not high, and learners' interest in learning is not really positive and enthusiastic. Based on the analysis of the current situation of students' interest in studying political theory subjects in the following aspects: teaching staff, teaching and learning methods, testing and assessment, forms of teaching and learning of political theory subjects, thereby proposing solutions to increase interest in learning political theory subjects for university students today.

Keywords: Solution, enhance, interest in learning, political theory, students, university...

Introduction

Protecting the Party's ideological foundation and fighting against erroneous and hostile viewpoints is a long-term task that must be carried out regularly and continuously with many measures in many different fields; in which, studying and fostering political theory (PT) for students must be considered one of the top solutions, especially in the current period of integration and development. The requirement to innovate teaching and learning activities of political theory at universities is clearly stated in the Document of the 13th National Congress of Delegates: "Fundamentally innovate the program, content, and methods of political theory education according to the motto of science, practice, creativity, and modernity; bring theoretical training and new knowledge updating to cadres, party members, leaders, and managers at all levels.". At the 13th Congress, when evaluating the work of ideological and political education in Vietnam, the Party stated: "Political theory training and fostering has been innovated in both content and methods; management and discipline in teaching and learning have been strengthened; the quality of training and fostering has been improved; laziness in studying, reluctance to study political theory, and formal teaching and learning has been gradually overcome". In universities, political theory subjects play a particularly important role in orienting and guiding practical activities in all areas of social life. Therefore, studying political theory not only helps students have a deeper, more complete and comprehensive understanding of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought, the Party's guidelines and policies, and the State's legal policies, but also strengthens students' political beliefs and mettle, class consciousness and patriotism; thereby promoting students to be self-aware, voluntary and enthusiastic in actions, and successfully carrying out their learning tasks. In fact, there are still many misconceptions when talking about political theory subjects. For some learners, they have not been yet aware of the importance and practical significance of these subjects, so they often focus on studying professional skills; sometimes their attitude towards studying political theory subjects is not serious, they learn perfunctorily, and they have little interaction with

lecturers. Some students still have the mindset of studying to get enough degrees and qualifications to graduate, so they are not really wholeheartedly devoted to research and study. In class discussions, there is little or no self-study, exchange, or discussion by students. Moreover, the mentality of indifference, along with the prejudice that theory is dry, rigid, difficult to understand, difficult to absorb... All makes students form the habit of learning by rote, learning by heart, learning perfunctorily. Therefore, a part of students has a negligent attitude towards studying and they are not interested in studying political theory subjects.

Contents

1. The Concept of Students' Interest in Learning Political Theory Subjects

Until now, there are many different views on interest. From a psychological perspective, we are most impressed with the concept of interest by author Nguyen Quang Uan: "Interest is a special attitude of an individual towards a certain object, which is both meaningful to life and has the ability to bring pleasure to the individual during the activity" ^[1]. Interest plays an important role in human activities, is the driving force that motivates people to actively participate, be passionate about life activities and bring high results. When people are interested, they feel that work becomes easier and find joy in their work; on the contrary, when they are not interested in a job, they feel forced, the work becomes difficult and the quality of work decreases significantly.

In the spirit of the above concept of interest, we can understand: Interest in learning is a special attitude of the learner towards the subject when the learner feels the meaning and has pleasure in learning the subject. Interest in learning has a direct impact on the learning outcomes of learners. It will stimulate learners' thirst for knowledge, motivate learners to pay attention, focus on perceiving the problem being taught, actively seek out, deeply research to expand knowledge, and actively apply knowledge to solve problems in real life. At this time, learners will feel that learning activities take place smoothly and interestingly; feel the beauty and practicality of subject knowledge.

From the above analysis, we draw the concept: Students' interest in studying political theory subjects is the enthusiastic and interested attitude of students when studying political theory subjects, along with positive actions to acquire knowledge of the subject, because students are aware of the position, role and practical significance of political theory subjects, as well as the ability to bring pleasure to students themselves in the process of studying these subjects.

2. Signs of Students' Interest in Learning Political Theory Subjects

Signs of students' interest in learning political theory subjects are expressed through students' attitudes both in class and outside of class; expressed through students' viewpoints and ways of handling problems that appear due to the influence of their interest in studying. When students are interested in learning political theory subjects, their attitudes during class are expressed as: comply with all classroom rules, attend class on time, attend all classes; listen attentively to the lectures; actively participate in expressing opinions on lesson, discuss and solve problems when the lecturer raises them; discuss with the lecturer when questions arise during the learning process; apply subject knowledge to solve problems that arise during the learning process in class as well as in the students' real life ... Outside of class, if students are interested in studying political theory subjects, their attitudes are expressed as follows: actively complete the self-study part at home assigned by the lecturer; actively seek and research documents to expand and deepen knowledge of the lesson; contact lecturers outside of class hours to discuss and ask for answers to questions; popularize and encourage other students about studying, about the position, role and significance of political theory subjects; actively participate in movements and competitions related to knowledge of political theory subjects organized by the School and organizations .

3. The Importance and Reality of Students' Interest in Studying Political Theory Subjects

First, interest in learning and the role of interest in learning for students. Interest is "a special human attitude towards a certain object, which is both meaningful to the individual and brings the individual pleasure during the activity" [2]. Interest gives rise to creativity, the desire to explore new things, and increases individual performance. Thanks to interest, despite many difficulties, individuals still "feel pleasure in working because they see it as a physical and intellectual game". For students, interest in learning is their special attitude towards learning and is associated with learning activities, creates excitement, pleasure and urges students to actively acquire knowledge. Students' interest in learning is formed and developed gradually through each lesson, when the lecturer arouses students' self-awareness and positivity, thereby making them think, explore and create together in the learning process. Students' interest in learning is a factor that strongly affects outcomes, both a condition and a result of students' learning activities. Interest in learning, on the one hand, is directly affected by the learning process of students; on the other hand, it is indirectly affected by other factors such as learning needs, learning motivation, psychology, health, talent... of the students themselves. As a condition, interest in learning will

make students more enthusiastic and active in activities related to their professional training field, investing more effort in learning activities. When studying with interest and passion, students will not be stressed, but become active, flexible and have many new innovations in learning. This improves the learning efficiency of students.

Second, the importance of learning interest for students when studying political theory subjects. In the university training program, Political Theory subjects belong to the general education section, and are compulsory subjects for students of all training majors. According to Official Dispatch No. 3056/BGDĐT-GD&H dated July 19, 2019 of the Ministry of Education and Training on guidelines for implementing programs and textbooks of Political Theory subjects applicable to undergraduate training programs at the specialized and non-specialized levels in political theory, from the 2019-2020 school year, higher education institutions will lecture political theory subjects including: Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Marxist-Leninist political economy, Scientific socialism, History of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh thought. Although each subject has its own research subjects, methods and contents, the common goal of Political Theory subjects is to equip students with an advanced scientific theoretical system, bearing the nature of the working class, so that students have a certain level of awareness of political theory. On that basis, belief in Marxism-Leninism theory, Ho Chi Minh Thought, especially belief in our country's path to socialism, is formed. Studying political theory subjects helps students develop their theoretical thinking ability, form a revolutionary and scientific worldview and methodology, and contribute to building a communist outlook on life. This creates in each student revolutionary optimism, firm belief in the renovation process, and the victory of socialism, helping them overcome challenges and difficulties, boldly and resolutely fight against wrong views to protect the Party's ideological foundation. Additionally, these subjects also help students have the right methodology in studying and scientific research, train students in the skills to apply theoretical knowledge to solve practical problems. It not only provides students with the ability to perceive the world, but also gives them the ability to participate in improving the world by contributing to the formation of scientific thinking and positive attitudes in students' practical activities after graduation. In studying political theory subjects, interest in learning plays an important role. Political theory is a theoretical subject, highly general and abstract, so many students are afraid of studying and lack interest and passion for these subjects. Interest in learning creates the main motivation and drive to help students effectively carry out learning activities in political theory subjects, stimulates the desire to expand and deepen thinking about the knowledge of the subject that students have acquired and applied it to the practice of the profession they are studying. At the same time, interest in learning actively activates students' psychological processes such as perception, thinking, imagination, memory..., thereby enhancing and developing students' cognitive and learning abilities for the subject.

Third, the current situation of students' interest in learning political theory subjects. In university, Political Theory subjects are the compulsory subjects because it plays a particularly important role in forming good qualities in students, equipping students with the correct methodology

in learning and scientific research - that is the dialectical method. At the same time, it builds students with good moral qualities, strong beliefs, ideals and awareness of law compliance. This subject plays an important role in educating awareness and behavior, contributing to the formation and development of necessary qualities and abilities of students, training new workers with both scientific knowledge, ethics, practical working capacity, political qualities, and a sense of responsibility towards the community, family and themselves. However, in reality, there have been still many students who think that this is a theoretical subject, the knowledge is academic, abstract and highly general, very difficult and unnecessary, because it will not be used after graduation, so they are afraid to study, not interested in the subject, study it perfunctorily, as long as they do not have to retake the exam or retake the course; Students have been still confused about the method of studying the subject, especially the self-study method, self-study skills, and self-organization of the learning process. Many students do not clearly realize the necessity of self-discipline in studying and practicing subjects, do not know how to organize their own learning activities right from the planning stage, and do not allocate time for learning activities and rest reasonably, both in class and when studying on their own... It is these problems that make students often feel difficult and confused in carrying out learning tasks. They gradually lose confidence, and consequently also lose interest and enthusiasm for learning the subject.

4. Solutions to Increase Interest in Learning Political Theory Subjects for University Students Today

Firstly, strengthening orientation education, make students change their perception, clearly see the position, role and meaning of studying political theory subjects. Right perception leads to right action. If students change their perception, clearly see the position, role and significance of political theory subjects, they will have a positive attitude towards studying these subjects; they will be thirsty for knowledge, pro-actively seek and research to expand their knowledge, actively apply knowledge to solve related problems in real life; and feel the beauty, interest and practicality of this subject. Therefore, right from the first lesson of the subject, lecturers should attach importance and spend a certain amount of time on orientation education to help students clearly perceive the position, role and significance of studying political theory subjects. Specifically, students must clearly understand the position of political theory subjects in the training programs of schools in the general education knowledge volume and are compulsory subjects; clearly understand the regulations on graduation conditions as follows: The cumulative grade point average (GPA) of the entire course is from 2.0 or higher (on a 4-point scale), which means achieving a grade of C (5.5 to 5.9 on a 10-point scale) or higher, if the student sets the goal of "studying moderately, just needing to pass the subject" (grade D: 4.0 to 4.9, or grade D+: 5.0 to 5.4), then the minimum cumulative grade point average is not reached to be considered for graduation; clearly recognize the role of political theory subjects in contributing to the comprehensive personality development of students.

Second, innovating the teaching methods towards promoting students' positivity, initiative and creativity; linking lesson theory with practice; diversifying teaching forms.

On innovating the teaching methods towards promoting students' positivity, pro-activeness and creativity: The first requirement for a lecturer is to be truly dedicated to the profession and have a broad knowledge base. However, to have a good and effective lecture, it is not only necessary to have good professional qualifications but also requires appropriate and attractive methods, creating interest and excitement for students while studying. To enhance the interest in studying political theory subjects of university students today, it requires the teaching staff to actively innovate teaching methods in the direction of promoting the positivity, initiative, and creativity of learners, taking learners as the center. To do so, lecturers must know how to overcome the limitations of the traditional presentation method which is one-way monologue transmission, knowledge cramming, and imposition. Instead, use flexible methods such as: use innovative and creative presentation methods by combining questions and answers, raising open-ended questions, creating situations... for learners to participate; use group discussion methods, group presentations, storytelling methods, role-playing methods... By combining traditional teaching methods with modern methods like that, and being flexible with each part of the lesson, it will attract learners to think together, participate in solving problems together, promote the positivity, initiative, and creativity of learners, help learners understand the lesson easily, grasp the nature of the problem, know how to apply theory into practice; the lecture will become attractive, appealing to learners and especially make them understand the meaning, value, and usefulness of the subject, from which they love the subject. Along with the innovation of teaching methods, lecturers are required to have a certain level of computer skills, exploit well and use proficiently modern technical means and advanced information technology to serve and support the teaching process in a lively way, replacing the form of "teaching without aids, learning without aids". However, it should also be added that modern means and advanced technology are very important, but cannot replace the role of the lecturer. Therefore, we should not overuse them, especially we should not equate the use of modern teaching aids with modern teaching methods.

On linking lesson theory with practice: Teaching political theory subjects must strengthen connections with practice, link theory with practice, because after all, theory is formed from practice and returns to serve practice. Combining theory with practice in lecturing will reduce boredom, monotony, and empty theory; help learners understand the lesson easily, see the role of theory in practice and the relationship between them, and familiarize with combining theory with practice while still in school. That is also the way to combine learning with practice, overcoming the situation of "learn but not practice" or applying theories in a dogmatic, stereotyped, and mechanical way. After all, knowing how to apply theory into practice is the highest goal and true value of learning, and is one of the important criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of educational and training activities. To combine theory with practice in teaching, lecturers must have a wide and rich practical

knowledge, a firm grasp of the Party and State's guidelines and policies, and must be knowledgeable about the country's and the world's economic, political, and social issues, especially the practical aspects of the field the students are studying. This requires lecturers to update information from practice accurately and timely by using many different means and measures. However, lecturers must know how to properly and accurately combine theory with practice, in a reasonable and selective "dosage"; avoid using trivial, unpopular practices or abusing them, getting carried away with practice, turning class time into a talk about current events, telling gossip, and neglecting the provision of necessary and sufficient theoretical knowledge for learners.

On diversifying the teaching methods: In order to create a rich learning space, reduce boredom and dryness of knowledge, and create interest in learning for students, lecturers can diversify the forms of teaching political theory subjects such as: direct teaching, online teaching, teaching through organizing competitions in the hall; through organizing practical study tours. Lessons with abstract and difficult knowledge require teachers to teach directly in class. Lessons that are suitable for students' self-study ability are transferred to the form of teaching through the online Learning Management System (LMS), also known as E-Learning online education. In this form of learning, after being guided and prompted by the lecturer, students follow the self-study process through the LMS system with the following steps: first is to read the textbook yourself; second is to watch the lecture videos and PowerPoints that have been uploaded by the lecturer to the LMS system; third is to do exercises on the LMS system to reinforce the lesson knowledge. Besides, it is possible to organize exams in the form of Road to Olympia between groups and classes with the same lecturer instead of in-class lessons or review sessions. Furthermore, when teaching political theory subjects, lecturers choose appropriate lessons and organize field trips for students to study in practice. Through the practical study tour, a comfortable, interesting and meaningful learning space will be created; students will be able to vividly visualize what is presented in the curriculum and books; and listen to the presentations which are very profound and inspiring, helping students easily absorb the lessons and deepen their knowledge.

Third, innovating the way of testing, examining and evaluating students' learning outcomes. Testing and assessment are key steps in the teaching and learning process. Innovation in testing and assessment methods is an objective necessity associated with innovation in teaching methods. Based on the current situation of testing and assessing the learning outcomes of political theory subjects at universities in recent times, from the innovation of teaching methods, we propose a number of solutions to innovate testing and evaluation methods in the direction of eliminating the form of "closed-question, memorization" exams; reducing pressure on students in testing and exams of political theory subjects; enhancing creativity, the ability to connect and apply learned knowledge to solve practical problems in Vietnam, in the locality where they live and in students' cognitive and practical activities. Specifically, the regular test score increased from 20% of the total score to 30%; and only 2 score columns are required for all political theory subjects, regardless of whether the subject had 2 or 3 credits, including the attendance score column through the roll call results and the average score column of the

homework score after each self-study lesson on the LMS system, or taking the score of the practical study tour report, or taking the score of the group presentation. The midterm exam score has been reduced from 30% of the total course score to 20%; the midterm exam is organized by the faculty for all classes at the same time, in the form of "open essay", the exam of the class taught by the lecturer will be graded by that lecturer. The final exam score accounts for 50% of the total score; the final exam is organized by the faculty for all classes at the same time, in the form of multiple choice and graded by machine.

Fourth, equipping classrooms with facilities and teaching equipment that are not adequate; reduce class sizes accordingly. It can be affirmed that the quality of education determines the sustainable development of any school. In addition to the training program, learning path and teaching staff, facilities also play an important role and are one of the factors that directly affect the quality of education of schools. Therefore, along with innovation in teaching methods, it is necessary to go hand in hand with innovation in facilities, auxiliary equipment, and classroom organization and arrangement. The necessary factor to conduct teaching with active methods is to ensure facilities and equipment for teaching such as projectors, sound; clean and airy classroom space; along with a reasonable number of students in a classroom... Based on the current situation of facilities, teaching equipment and class size of political theory subjects at universities in recent times, the author proposes some solutions as follows: On facilities and teaching equipment, install additional air conditioners to cool large classrooms with many students; replace damaged or substandard electric fans to create a cool classroom space. Install large, clear projectors to ensure that students can see clearly when lecturers present PowerPoint lectures, videos, illustrations, etc. Replace old, unreliable sound systems that require a lot of effort to produce sound loud enough for a classroom full of students to hear. Check and replace loose or improperly positioned electrical outlets. The staff of the Administration Department must further promote their role and responsibility in regularly checking, pro-actively and promptly supporting the handling of problems with equipment in the classroom. On classroom hygiene, the staff of the Service Department must further promote their role and responsibility in cleaning classrooms and lecture halls; promote the implementation of the "5S Movement" right in classrooms and lecture halls, especially the blackboard area and lecturer's desk, and blackboard cleaning cloth. On class size, for political theory classes, the class size should be reduced, maintaining a class size of 60 to 80 students; avoiding the situation of combining classes, merging classes, and combining two specialized classes into one political theory class, with a number of up to 160 students. With modern and guaranteed facilities and teaching equipment; clean, airy classrooms with resounding sound; reasonable class size will be one of the very important factors contributing to helping lecturers improve teaching quality, helping students improve their ability to absorb lesson knowledge, creating excitement for teaching and learning for both lecturers and students.

Conclusion

Political theory is a field of knowledge that is highly general and abstract, somewhat dry, difficult to absorb, and can easily cause drowsiness during the learning process. In

general, when referring to political theory subjects, a number of students do not properly perceive its position, role and practical significance; leading to an indifferent attitude, even contempt, and lack of enthusiasm or interest in studying these subjects, especially students in the fields of natural sciences and engineering technology. That reality leads to a situation where students feel bored, tired, and pressured; they study perfunctorily, only aiming to pass the subject; the quality of teaching political theory subjects is not high, or high but not really and sustainably. How to teach well, learn well and effectively, as well as create interest for students when studying political theory subjects is still a problem that worries and concerns many generations of cadres and political theory lecturers. The author hopes that, through this paper, she will contribute a small part of her experience to improving the interest in studying political theory subjects for students at universities today.

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