

The Personal-Focused Dimension of Students' Self-Fulfillment in the University Education

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Abstract: Effective higher education must ensure the process of self-fulfillment of the individual's personality in the educational and socio-cultural system of the university and encourage an increase of basic abilities of a student in the training process and future professional activities. The study states that significant personal features of students are connected with the circumstances of their self-fulfillment in the course of university training which are as follows: personal involvement in the learning process, fulfillment of students' abilities and social integration into students' community. The study aimed to discover a reflection of features of the students' self-fulfillment through their personal characteristics: needs and motivations, purposes, features of self-attitude and orientations in connection with the purpose of life. As a result of research the connection presence was established between the students' self-fulfillment at the university, their ambition to learn, purposefulness, consistency of their self-attitude and a purpose-oriented way of life.

Key words: Self-fulfillment, student's youth, learning process, higher education system, personal features, sense-motivational characteristics

INTRODUCTION

We carried out this research on the basis of the general provision that self-realization is result of productive socialization (Young, 2013) which is started by the ontological motivation for self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). Acting as the major life intention during university years, the motivation for self-actualization activates the operation of the internal resources and abilities of a person to gain particular experience in order to express and establish themselves in his/her studies, occupation, society and culture (Stipek, 1993). When observing the process of the students' self-fulfillment, we believe that on the one hand, it is the fundamental indicator of their successful establishment as future professionals and on the other hand, it is an internal criterion of effectiveness of university education in general (Tomlinson, 1993). Thus, the process of the students' self-fulfillment is associated with the orientation of academic practice towards the complete sociocultural development of personality as the fundamental purpose and mission of higher education.

Within the research of the modern Russian student youth, we considered self-fulfillment as the process of the establishment of a unique experience of responsible and

full life of the personality (Shutenko, 2013) and a process of self-development and realization of the personal abilities and personally significant attitudes towards the world and themselves at present and within life circumstances (Gewirth, 1998).

Objectives and idea of the study: The main aim of the research was the recognition of the specific personal characteristics and details of the motivationally meaningful aspects of the students connected with the level of their self-realization in their academic studies.

The hypothesis of the research is that the process of students' self-fulfillment in the course of training (other than the capacity to study and beneficial learning conditions) is inevitably connected with the sense-motivational features of a person who projects his/her own trajectory of life and builds the attitudes towards the world.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Organization of the study: For the purposes of supporting the above hypothesis, research was conducted which consisted of two stages.

At the first stage, the main components of the students' self-fulfillment were recognized and the main categories of students were established based on the level of self-fulfillment in their academic studies.

At the second stage, the sense-motivational features of the students of the above categories were analyzed by means of social and psychological methods. One hundred students from both humanitarian and technological university, two hundred students in total, participated in this research. In the course of the investigation, students involved in the research were in their 4th and 5th years of studies.

The students of Belgorod State University majored in Psychology, Romance and Germanic Philology, Sociology and Theology, Municipal Management and Entrepreneurship and Medicine (28 men and 72 women).

The students of Belgorod State Technological University of V.G. Shukhov were in their 4th and 5th years of studies and majored in industrial automation, information technologies, transport, ecological engineering and engineering and construction materials (71 men and 29 women).

Experimental work with the students of both universities was carried out during the 2014-2015 academic year.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content and results of the first stage of the research:

The first stage of the research was filled with the sociological work. A study was piloted for the purposes of establishing the most significant areas of self-fulfillment of the students at the university as well as a purpose-oriented questionnaire to define the levels of self-realization of the students in the process of their academic studies.

During piloting through trial questionnaires, observations, interviews and focus groups, the fundamental elements of the students' self-fulfillment were defined.

As a result, three main elements of self-fulfillment of the students were highlighted which are as follows. Personal involvement of the students into the learning process (interest to learning, desire to study in the chosen university, satisfaction with the studies, pleasure in learning, personal importance of training involvement in the learning process, identification with the tutors and professionals aspiration to express themselves entirely in training, etc).

Realization of abilities in the learning process (development of students' potential, opportunity for a

better self-understanding in the learning process, the usefulness of the training, education as an instrument for the fulfillment of a dream, development of abilities and talents, education as the road to success and professional growth, diverse self-manifestation and complete self-expression in the learning process, stimulation of the efforts to learning, etc.).

Social integration in the course of higher school training (attention to the student's personality, university assistance in resolving personal matters, organization of the students' leisure time activities, common spirit, team spirit and support in the academic environment, friendship values and fortress of friendly relations, atmosphere of trust and respect, etc).

Figure 1 represents the contents of the revealed conditions of students' self-fulfillment in university education. Based on these conditions as a criterion of self-fulfillment, we developed and tested a questionnaire on self-realization in course of higher education.

According to the results of the questionnaires from all the students of both universities (humanitarian and technological), it was established that the majority of students study with obvious interest and evaluate the academic studies as the main activity of the current point in their life. The students are convinced that they made the right choice in regards to their major subject, so they are not encumbered by the feeling of pointlessness to attending classes. Thus, the collected data on the scale of personal involvement in the learning process has mid to higher-than-mid indicators.

In regard to the scale of the use of the abilities in the studies, it was learnt that a significant number of students consider themselves as advanced and capable and they underline the benefits of academic studies. At the same time, for many of them, personal capabilities and potential are not fully used in the process of their academic studies.

From the point of view of social integration in the learning process, the majority of students feel the support of the university and the value of their personality in the learning process. However, they tend to believe that their activities relating to the internal and external life are not intensive enough. As the general results of the sociological survey showed, the learning process at the university ensures adequate opportunities for self-fulfillment for the majority of students.

It should be noted that in regard to the gender principle, the students we canvassed were divided into almost two equal halves. The 101 women and 99 men participated in the survey. The results showed that the process of self-fulfillment of young men was of a less problematic nature. They experience less frustration and disappointment in their studies. The research data in

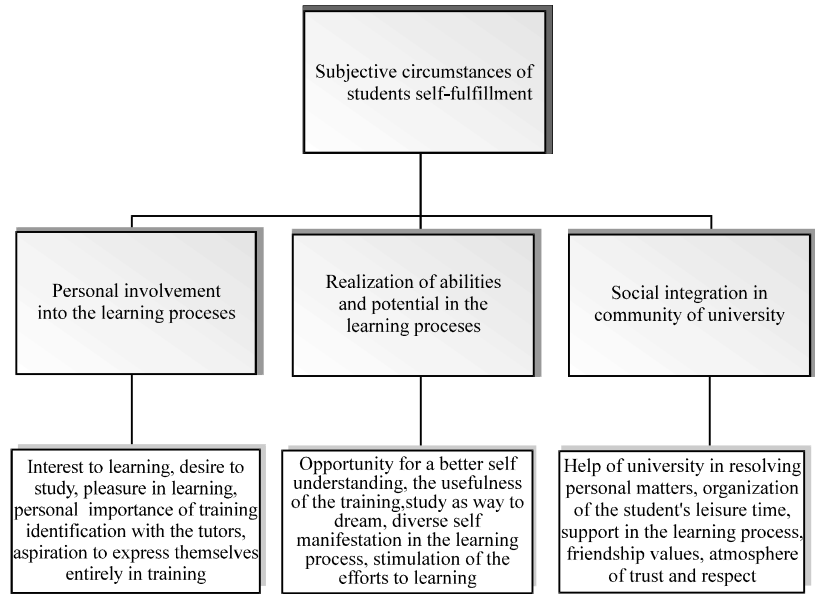


Fig. 1: The contents of subjective circumstances of students' self-fulfillment

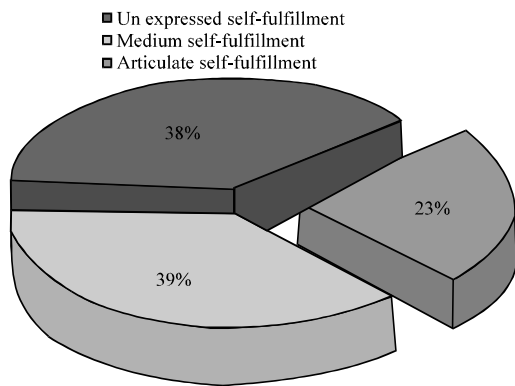


Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of students by level of self-fulfillment in training (n = 200)

- 1st group: students of unexpressed self-fulfillment (46 people-23%)
- 2nd group: students of medium self-fulfillment (76 people-39%) and
- 3rd group: students of articulate self-fulfillment (73 people-38%)

The chart of data placed in Fig. 2 visually reflects a ratio of the allocated categories of students. It must be noted that the first group was the lowest in number which indicates that in general there is a positive tendency to self-fulfillment of the students in the process of their academic studies. According to the reconciliation of the answers given, the students of the higher level of self-fulfillment tend to be more convinced that they made the right choice of university and are able to use their potential to bring significant benefits. They study with a greater interest and consider the studies as an independent and valuable activity but not as a formal requirement or a place to meet with friends. The students with the higher self-fulfillment are more intensively involved in the learning process and see their studies as their most valuable activity which brings closer the realization of their dreams and acts as a source of inspiration and an inner boost. They recognize in their studies more opportunities for diverse and entire expression as a person.

regards to women showed that they have a tendency for questioning and an emotional involvement in the learning process, they are more involved in the activities of the class and the university while both genders showed the same positive indicators of social integration in the learning process.

It was also established that the students of the technological university are more responsible towards their academic duties and extra-curricular tasks which they consider as elements of their professional growth. At the same time, the humanities students are more involved in the learning process and participate more enthusiastically in the activities of the university. As a result of the data clustering, three groups of students with different levels of self-fulfillment were formed:

Content and results of the second stage of the research:

This stage was about conducting sociological and psychological work oriented towards learning about the

different personal characteristics of the students connected with their level of self-fulfillment in the studies. The differences in the psychological features of the students' high and low levels of self-fulfillment were analyzed in regards to the following aspects:

- Needs and motivations
- Disposition and position
- Self-attitude
- Life-sense completeness

Analysis of the aspects of needs and motivations: This aspect was studied by means of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs through the pair group method (Maslow, 1987) and the motive and purpose method (Sosnovsky, 1993). During the use of these methods, the indicators were recognized in regard to the following forms of motivation: material needs; needs for security; needs for recognition; social needs; needs for self-expression (self-actualization) and motivation to achieve, learn, affiliate, dominate and study.

The next step was associated with the benchmark analysis in regards to the data on each indicator among the groups of the students with unexpressed and articulate self-actualization in their academic studies.

As the main statistical method, we use the procedure of statistical significance analysis which allows us to determine the level of significance of differences (or similarities) between the students in regard to the indicators being studied. The main statistical indicator was the t-value, evaluating the difference between the two groups of students. The following interpretation of data is conducted only using t-values from the ones received, i.e., those that have a more significant (t-value) under the sufficient level of the p-value that allows us to determine the insignificant number of possible errors. The p-value as is customary to psychological surveys, must be <0.05 ($p \leq 0.005$).

The results of the comparative analysis of the received data showed that above all the students of unexpressed self-actualization are different in terms of their low indicators on the scale of "attitude to learning" ($t = -7.156$ and $p \leq 0.001$ whereas "t" is the indicator of Student's criterion and "p" is the level of admissible probability, determined for the comparison of the two groups of data).

It was also determined that this group of students is less interested in the subjects they study, they are not prepared for independent systematic work for the sake of the knowledge, they show low indicators on the scales of: "satisfaction by achievements" ($t = -5.34$, $p \leq 0.001$) and

"satisfaction by knowledge" ($t = -2.294$, $p \leq 0.024$). At the same time, they tend to have a greater need for security ($t = 2.262$, $p \leq 0.026$) which may act as a serious internal obstacle in relation to the development of other needs of a higher level of hierarchy (according to Maslow's classification).

In contrast to the above, the successfully realized students showed higher indicators of the need for self-expression ($t = 3.084$, $p = 0.003$), satisfaction by dominance ($t = 2.990$, $p = 0.003$) and the need for achievements ($t = 2.564$, $p = 0.012$). According to the data, generally, successful self-fulfillment of the students is associated with their needs for personal self-determination in life.

Analysis of dispositional and positional characteristics: This area of differences was assessed under the results of the self-actualization questionnaires by Shostrom (1964). It analyzed the initial perceptions of the students of the opportunities for self-actualization in life based on their self-understanding, awareness of their personal qualities, advantages and disadvantages, orientations in life, etc (Shostrom, 1974).

The results of this method showed that the indicators of self-respect of students with articulate self-fulfillment in the studies are high ($t = 2.767$, $p = 0.007$) and the indicators of time management ($t = 2.319$, $p = 0.022$) and the need for self-actualization in life ($t = 2.180$, $p = 0.031$) are higher as well. According to the data, the successful students tend to go through personality formation in the past, present and future but at the same time, they live more in the present and are less caught up in the past. They tend to have more characteristics of a self-established personality which means they can organize life in accordance with their beliefs and views. The acquired data showed a more positive plan of life goals among students with the high level of self-fulfillment in the learning process.

Analysis of self-attitudes: This area was studied by means of a personal attitudes questionnaire (Pantileyev, 1993). In this area, a subjective sign of emotional activity towards "I" was recognized, resulting in some general feeling "for" or "against" themselves (Olson and Fazio, 2001). This aspect was considered an emotional component of the students self-awareness and perceived as significant in the context of their self-fulfillment in the studies (Goleman, 1998).

The benchmark study on the acquired data showed that more positive attitudes towards "I" were held by the students with articulate self-fulfillment in the

studies. They believe that they (qualities and features of their personalities) are able to generate respect, affection and approval by others.

Students with unexpressed self-fulfillment in learning tend to be more closeness in their attitudes ($t = 2.932$, $p = 0.0004$), indicate lower levels of self-confidence ($t = -2.617$, $p = 0.010$) and higher levels of inner contradiction ($t = 1.987$, $p \leq 0.049$). This analysis allowed us to affirm the presence among the students of this group of particular emotional barriers of self-awareness which stand in the way of their full and rich fulfillment in the studies and postpone personal growth causing teenage struggle.

The students with articulate self-fulfillment in the studies have much greater indicators on the scale of self-management ($t = 4.335$, $p \leq 0.001$) and of reflected self-attitude ($t = 3.183$, $p = 0.002$) and self-esteem ($t = 2.956$, $p = 0.0041$).

Analysis of the life-sense orientation: For research in this area, a life-sense orientations test was used (Leontyev, 1992) which assesses the topmost layer of psychological characteristics of a personality, specifically, self-perception of the course of life in terms of its target and sense definiteness.

According to received data of the comparative analysis, the students of successful self-fulfillment achieve higher rates of life productivity ($t = 3.838$, $p \leq 0.001$), internal locus of control ($t = 4.502$, $p \leq 0.001$), emotional intensity in life ($t = 3.799$, $p = 0.001$) and life management ($t = 4.074$, $p \leq 0.001$).

The analysis showed that the differences in the indicators of the sense component of the students at different levels of self-fulfillment are well established in regard to all the characteristics. Especially highlighted are the indicators of the locus of control and expediency of life pointing out certain features of the successful students, who tend to consider themselves as the masters of their lives able to make independent plans according to a specific purpose.

It was established that in general, the sense component of the personality features of the students (in contrast to other phenomena in question) is closer associated with the course and results of self-fulfillment in the academic studies.

The generalized data of the comparative analysis of results of the conducted researches are reflected in Table 1. The central columns reflect data of t-criterion which belong to that group of students who showed higher rates on the studied indicators.

Analysis of the connection between the personality characteristics of the students and the level of their self-fulfillment:

As the statistical method for the establishment of this connection, we used the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Spearman, 1904). Under this method, the most obvious connection is between the attitude towards the studies indicator with the desire to attend classes at the university ($r = 0.51$) with the understanding of their value and usefulness ($r = 0.50$) with the absence of the disappointment in the chosen university ($r = 0.48$) with informal attitude towards classes

Table 1: Data of the comparative analysis of personal characteristics of students with the different level of self-fulfillment in training (by t-criterion of student)

Personal characteristics	Students of unexpressed articulate self-fulfillment	Students of self-fulfillment	p-values
Needs and motivations			
Attitude to learning		7.16	0.001
Satisfaction by achievements		5.34	0.001
Satisfaction by knowledge		2.29	0.024
Need for security	2.26		0.026
Need for self-expression		3.08	0.003
Satisfaction by dominance		2.99	0.003
Need for achievements		2.56	0.012
Dispositional characteristics			
Self-respect		2.77	0.007
Time management		2.32	
Need for self-actualization		2.18	0.031
Self-attitudes			
Closeness	2.93		0.001
Self-confidence		2.62	0.010
Inner contradiction	1.99		0.049
Self-management		4.34	0.001
Reflected self-attitude		3.18	0.002
Self-esteem		2.96	0.004
Life-sense orientation			
Life productivity		3.84	0.001
Internal locus of control		4.50	0.001
Emotional intensity in life		3.80	0.001
Life management		4.07	0.001

($r = 0.48$) and with psychological involvement in the learning process ($r = 0.46$). There is also a visible connection between the indicators of the satisfaction generated by studies with such aspects of self-fulfillment in the learning process as: achievement of a better self-understanding ($r = 0.50$) and realization of the inner potential ($r = 0.50$).

In regard to self-attitudes, we can distinguish the connection between the indicators on the scale of self-management with the achievement of a better self-understanding ($r = 0.47$) and fulfillment of inner potential ($r = 0.46$) and between the scale of self-esteem and self-understanding ($r = 0.41$).

In the resolution area, the indicators of the internal and external locus of control positively affect the awareness of the university choice ($r = 0.43$ and $r = 0.44$ accordingly), the absence of disappointment in the studies at the chosen university ($r = 0.41$), achievement of a better self-understanding ($r = 0.41$) and personal involvement in the activities of the university ($r = 0.40$). Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact of the presence of a positive connection between the indicators of life productivity and the ability of the students to express themselves in the learning process ($r = 0.43$).

CONCLUSION

The acquired results generally allow us to affirm the presence of the connection between the articulate self-fulfillment of the students and the positive motivational attitude towards studying and learning and the completeness and consistency of their inner concepts at the expense of the greater agreement with the standard requirements towards the studies. This connection is shown especially clearly by the life resolutions area, self-perception of a person capable of making decisions, taking on responsibilities, productively and actively organizing their lives, effectively studying the world and interacting with others.

The benchmark analysis showed that the students of a higher self-fulfillment experience a greater need for the achievements have better self-respect, positive attitudes, remarkable self-management, a sense of good outcomes and an emotional intensity of life. The students with the low self-fulfillment experience a greater need for security,

they tend to be closed to new ideas, possess inner contradictions and emotional barriers to self-perception.

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