Motivational and Conceptual Aspects of Students' Self-fulfillment in University Education

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Abstract

Productive higher education has to ensure the process of self-fulfillment for an individual's personality in the educational system and encourage enhancement of students' basic abilities in the process of training and future professional activities. The paper states that significant personal features of students are associated with circumstances of their self-fulfillment in the course of university training which are as follows: personal involvement in the academic process, fulfillment of students' abilities and social integration into students' community. The research is aimed at discovering the reflection of features of 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 the research, a relation has been determined between the students' self-fulfillment at the university, their ambition to learn, purposefulness, consistency of their self-attitude and a purposeful way of life.

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1. Introduction

We based this research on the general perception on self-fulfillment of the student youth as a productive socialization phenomenon, which is brought by the ontological motivation for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

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Acting as the major life intention during student years, the motivation for self-actualization activates the internal resources and abilities of a person to gain particular experience in order to express and establish themselves in their studies, future profession, society, and culture. When observing the process of the students' self-realization, we believe that, on one hand, it is the fundamental course of their successful establishment as future professionals and on the other hand, it is an internal criterion of efficiency of university education in general (Shutenko, 2013). Thus, the process of the students' self-realization is associated with the orientation of academic practice towards the complete 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 being a personality (not only “de jure”, but also “de facto”, as Z. Bauman (2001) remarked; and a process of self-development and fulfillment of their personal abilities and personally significant attitudes towards the world and themselves in current time (Sitarov, Shutenko & Shutenko).

The novelty of the research is associated with the fact that self-fulfillment of students during the learning period is treated as a sociocultural phenomenon that reflects the process of socializing and depends on the structure and content of the educational process and the actual relationships in the social environment of educational institution.

2. Objectives, research design and methodology

2.1. Purpose of the study

The objective of the study was to discover the features under consideration in the process of the students' realization through their personal characteristics: needs and motivations, purposes, features of self-attitude and orientations in connection with the purpose of life.

The hypothesis of the research is that the process of self-fulfillment during education (other than the capacity to study and beneficial learning conditions) is inevitably connected with the sense-motivational characteristics of a person, who concisely form trajectory of own life and attitudes towards the world. Therefore success of self-fulfillment is defined by existence of certain topmost qualities of the personality (but not deep-biological traits) which are well correlated with the main cultural norms and values.

2.2. Research design

For the purposes of supporting the above hypothesis, research was conducted, which consisted of two stages. At the first stage, the main conditions of the students' self-fulfillment were recognized and the main categories of students were established based on the level of self-fulfillment in education. At the second stage, the sense-motivational features of the students of the above categories were analyzed by means of social-psychological methods.

2.3. Participants

One hundred students from both a humanitarian university and a technological university (Belgorod, Russia), 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 National Research University majored in Psychology, Roman 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).

2.4. Methodology, methods and procedures

This research was conducted on the basis of methodology of the integrated approach providing a combination of sociological and psychological methods.
The research methods: piloting questionnaires, observation, interviews, method of focus groups, sociological surveys (questionnaires), and complex social-psychological tests (use of battery of tests and questionnaires). Statistical methods: analysis of the authenticity of differences (Student’s t-distribution) and correlation method (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient).

The research tools:
- technique of research of self-fulfillment in university education;
- estimation of actual needs by the method of pair comparisons;
- technique “Motive and Sense” by B. A. Sosnovskiy;
- Personal Orientation Inventory by E. Shostrom;
- technique of research of the self-attitude by S. R. Pantyleev;
- life-meaning orientations test by D. A. Leontjev

3. Subjective prerequisites for self-fulfillment of students

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

3.1. The main subjective conditions of self-fulfillment

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

As a result, the three main conditions of self-fulfillment of the students were highlighted, which are as follows:
- personal involvement of the students in the learning process (interest in learning, desire to study in the chosen university, satisfaction with the studies, value of the education, keenness on learning process, identification with the teachers and professionals, desire to express themselves entirely in the course of training, etc.);
- fulfillment of abilities in the learning process (development of students' potential, opportunity for a better self-understanding in the learning process, feeling of real advantage of training, learning as an instrument for the realization of a dream, development of abilities and talents, the university course as the road to success and professional growth, possibility of diverse self-manifestation and complete self-expression in the learning process, encouragement of the students' efforts towards the education, etc.);
- social integration into students community during university education (caring for student's personality, the help from administration in resolving personal matters, organization of the students' leisure time activities, common spirit, team spirit and support in the academic environment, friendship values and strength, atmosphere of trust and respect, etc.).

Based on these conditions, we developed and tested a questionnaire on self-fulfillment of students during the university education (Shutenko & Shutenko).

3.2. Primary characteristics of different groups of students

According to the results of the questionnaires from all the students of both universities (humanities and technological), it was established that the majority of students study with obvious interest and evaluate the university education as the main activity of the current period in their life.

As a result of the data clustering, three groups of students with different levels of self-fulfillment were formed:
- 1st group: students with insufficient self-fulfillment (46 people – 23%);
- 2nd group: students with medium self-fulfillment (78 people – 39%);
- 3rd group: students with progressive self-fulfillment (76 people – 38%).

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 learning process. 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 be useful. 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 training 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 university education more opportunities for diverse and whole expression as a personality.

3.3. Characteristics of students' self-fulfillment conditions and peculiarities

As showed primary data the most of students are convinced that they made the right choice in regards to their major subject, so they are not encumbered by a feeling of pointlessness to attending classes. The collected data on the scale of personal involvement in the learning process has mid to higher-than-mid indicators.

In regards to the scale of abilities fulfillment in the education, it was revealed that a significant number of students consider themselves as advanced and capable; and they underline the benefits of university education. At the same time, for many of them, personal capabilities and potential are not fully used in the learning process.

From the point of view of social integration in the learning process, the majority of the 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 the students.

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

3.4. Design of the main part of research

The second stage of research was about conducting psychological work oriented towards study of the different personal characteristics of the students connected with their level of self-fulfillment in the university education. The differences in the psychological features of the students' high and low levels of self-realization were analyzed in regards to the following aspects:

- needs and motivations;
- self-actualizing orientations;
- self-attitude features;
- life-meaning completeness.

4. Discussion of the research outcomes

4.1. Motivational aspects of students’ self-fulfillment

These aspects were studied by means of the Maslow's hierarchy (1970) of needs through the method of pair comparisons and the method “Need and Purpose” of B.A. 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 need achievement, need of learning, need of affiliation, need of domination 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 progressive self-realization in the course of education.

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 (Student criterion), evaluating the difference between the two groups of students. The following interpretation of the 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 less than 0.05 (p ≤ 0.005).

The results of the analysis of the acquired data showed that above all the students of insufficient self-fulfillment are different in terms of their low indicators on the “attitude towards their studies” scale (t= -7.156 and p≤ 0.001, whereas “t” is the value of the received student's criterion and p is the level of significance, 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≤ 0.001) and “satisfaction by knowledge” (t=2.294, p=0.024). At the same time, they tend to have a greater need for security (t=2.262, p=0.026), which may act as a serious internal obstacle in relation to the development of other needs of a higher level (on Maslow’s hierarchy) (Maslow, 1970).

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 intensive self-affirmation in life.

4.2. Self-actualizing orientations of students

This area of differences was assessed under the results of the self-actualization questionnaires by E. 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.

The results of this method showed that the indicators of self-respect of students with progressive 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 current time and are less caught up in the past. They tend to have more characteristics of a self-actualizing personality which means they can organize life in accordance with their beliefs and views. The acquired data showed a more positive plan of life orientations among students with the high level of self-fulfillment in the learning process.

4.3. Self-attitude features of students with various degree of self-fulfillment

These features were studied by means of a personal attitudes questionnaire of S.R. Pantileyev (1993). In this study, a subjective sign of students' emotional attitude towards themselves was recognized, which is resulted in the general feeling of “pro” or “contra” themselves. This aspect was considered an emotional component of the self-awareness of the students and perceived as significant in the context of their self-fulfillment in the course of training.

The comparative study on the acquired data showed that more positive attitudes towards “I” were held by the students with progressive self-fulfillment in education. 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 the university course tend to be more private in their attitudes
(t=2.932, p=0.0004), indicate lower levels of self-esteem (t=-2.617, p=0.010) and higher levels of inner contradiction (t=1.987, p=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 realization in educational process and postpone personal growth.

The students with high self-actualization in education have much greater indicators on the scale of self-management (t=4.335, p≤0.001) and of reflected self-attitude (t=3.183, p=0.002) and self-esteem (t=2.956, p=0.0041).

4.4. Life-meaning completeness

For research in this area, a sense-vital orientations test of D.A. Leontyev (1992) was used. This method assesses the topmost mental characteristics of a personality, especially such as self-perception of the course of life in terms of its purpose-oriented status.

It was as a result established that the students with successful self-fulfillment achieve higher indicators of “life productivity” (t=3.838, p≤0.001), “internal locus of control” (t=4.502, p≤0.001), “emotional intensity of life” (t=3.799, p≤0.001) and “ability to manage the life” (t=4.074, p≤0.001).

The analysis showed that the differences in the indicators of the life-meaning 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 “life purpose” 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 personally significant purpose.

It was established that, in general, the life-meaning 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 education process.

4.5. 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's Rho) (Spearman, 1904). Under this method, the most obvious connection was between the indicator of “attitude towards the learning” (in motivational range) and such features as: the desire to attend classes at the university (r = 0.51), the understanding of their value and usefulness (r = 0.50), the absence of the disappointment in the chosen university (r = 0.48), informal approach towards classes (r = 0.48), and psychological involvement in the learning process (r = 0.46). There is also a noticeable connection the indicators of the “satisfaction of desire to know” with such aspects of students self-fulfillment as: achievement of a better self-understanding (r = 0.50) and realization of the inner potential (r = 0.50).

In regards to self-attitudes, we found connection between the indicators of “self-management” and the achievement of a better self-understanding (r = 0.47), realization of inner potential (r = 0.46); and between the indicators of “self-esteem” and degree of self-understanding (r = 0.41).

In the life-meaning area, the indicators of the internal and external locus of control positively correlate with the awareness of the university choice (r = 0.43 and r = 0.44 accordingly), with the absence of disappointment in the studies at the chosen university (r = 0.41), with achievement of a better self-understanding (r = 0.41) and aspiration to participate in university affairs (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).

5. Conclusions

On balance, the results obtained allow us to state the presence of a relation between progressive students' self-fulfillment and a positive motivational attitude toward knowledge and learning, as well as completeness and consistency of their self-concept at the expense of greater accordance of personal aspirations with standard academic requirements. This relation is found especially clearly in the life-meaning sphere of students, in their perception of
themselves as ones capable of making decisions, undertaking responsibilities, able to organize their own life in a productive and active manner, to efficiently study the world and interact with others.

The comparative analysis has demonstrated that students having greater self-fulfillment experience a greater need for achievements, possess better self-respect, positive attitudes, remarkable self-management, a sense of good outcomes and an emotional intensity of life. The students having lower 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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