

Semantic Indicators of Students' Self-fulfillment as Narrative Markers of Their Psychological Well-being in University Training

Indicadores semánticos de la autorrealización de los estudiantes como marcadores narrativos de su bienestar psicológico en la formación universitaria

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ABSTRACT:

The article examines subjectively significant conditions for students' self-fulfillment as factors of their psychological well-being in the process of education in the Russian higher school. Described are the results of study of students' opinions about possibilities of their self-fulfillment in university environment. Based on the method of thesaurus analysis of students' stories, the authors disclose semantic indicators of their self-fulfillment within the framework of three key thesauri: thesaurus of the readiness to self-fulfillment; thesaurus of the self-fulfillment measures and actions; thesaurus of self-fulfillment activators. In accordance with the received data, the following three main narrative dominants of students' self-fulfillment and psychological well-being were determined, such as: ego-inclusion in the learning process, comprehensive deployment of personal capacities, and social acceptance in the university community. Given these narrative dominants as a criteria basis, the authors carry out a special survey of students and reveal the degree of

RESUMEN:

El artículo examina las condiciones subjetivamente significativas para la autorrealización de los estudiantes como factores de su bienestar psicológico en el proceso de educación en la escuela superior rusa. Se describen los resultados del estudio de las opiniones de los estudiantes sobre las posibilidades de su autorrealización en el entorno universitario. Con base en el método de análisis de tesauros de las historias de los estudiantes, los autores revelan indicadores semánticos de su autorrealización en el marco de tres tesauros clave: tesoro de la preparación para la autorrealización; tesoro de las medidas y acciones de autorrealización; tesoro de activadores de autorrealización. De acuerdo con los datos recibidos, se determinaron los tres dominantes narrativos de la autorrealización y el bienestar psicológico de los estudiantes, como: la inclusión del ego en el proceso de aprendizaje, el despliegue integral de las capacidades personales y la aceptación social en la universidad comunidad. Dados estos dominantes narrativos como una base de criterios, los

their self-fulfillment, reflecting the level of their psychological well-being in university training.

Keywords: psychological well-being, higher education, student's self-fulfillment, thesaurus analysis, semantic indicators, narrative dominants of psychological well-being.

autores llevan a cabo una encuesta especial de estudiantes y revelan el grado de su autorrealización, reflejando el nivel de su bienestar psicológico en la formación universitaria.

Palabras clave: bienestar psicológico, educación superior, auto realización del estudiante, análisis de tesauros, indicadores semánticos, dominantes narrativos del bienestar psicológico.

1. Introduction

Today, the humanitarian sciences face the common goal to strengthen the psychological health of modern youth in the context of postmodern transformations of social institutions and challenges for current civilized society, as well as the need to enhance the role of higher education as a sphere for the full development of a viable young generation (Li, 2017). The success of university practice is largely determined by the activation of personal patterns and mechanisms of psychological health of student youth related to the realization of internal potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Psychological health of a person is inextricably linked with self-fulfillment, especially in the period of youth (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). In fact, both of these phenomena reflect the same process of full and productive existence of the individual in certain socio-cultural conditions (Bradburn, 1969).

The meaning of self-fulfillment for a young person is the capacity to be a subject, be creative, active, take responsibility, make decisions, pursue goal-setting, etc. (Gewirth, 1998). In this regard, the content, process and technology of university training should be focused on stimulating student self-fulfillment in the logic of maintaining their psychological well-being, psycho-emotional stability, and overcoming crisis and destabilizing factors.

Recognition of self-fulfillment in the notion of psychological health requires a revision of the harmful standards and values of a mass consumption culture that imposes to youth on the image of a passive user of life as a dependent wasteful consumer, human-object, deprived of the ability to independent thinking and creation (Featherstone, 2007) .

In the humanities, the problem of self-fulfillment as a factor of person psychological health has been studied in the framework of several leading scientific traditions: phenomenological tradition (E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, A. Schütz, R.D. Lang, M. Merleau-Ponty, etc.); existential tradition (L. Binswanger, C. Cofer, M. Appley, R. May, J. Bugental, K. Jaspers, M. Buber, V. Frankl, A. Längle, etc.); hermeneutical tradition (F. Schleiermacher, H.-G. Gadamer, V. Dilthey, E. Betty, P. Ricker et al.); personological approach (E. Spranger, V. Shtern, H.A. Murray, S. Maddi, H. Marcuse, E. Mounier, P. Teilhard de Chardin et al.); interactionist approach (Ch. Cooley, G.H. Mead, W.I. Thomas, H. Becker, H. Blumer, J.M. Charon, E Goffman, J.P. Hewitt etc.); constructivist approach (J. Piaget, G. Kelly, J. Bruner, E.Glaserfeld, T. Luckmann, P.L. Berger, G. Bateson, P. Watzlawick, etc.).

The growth of research in the sphere of self-fulfillment was largely promoted by the ideas of M. Weber's understanding sociology, humanistic psychology (E. Fromm, G.W. Allport, K. Goldstein, A. Angyal, A. Maslow, G. Murphy, C. Rogers etc.); the theory of autopoiesis (H.R. Maturana, F. Varela); eudaimonic approach (K. Ryff, E.L. Deci, R.M. Ryan etc.); narrative approach (M.White, D. Epston, D.P. McAdams, J.J. Bauer, J.L. Pals etc.); the ecological theory of human development of U. Bronfenbrenner; the field theory and concept of the life space by K. Lewin and others.

In each of these traditions and approaches, self-fulfillment is viewed as the most important ontological condition and attribute of a fully functioning personality.

The process of self-fulfillment underlies the development of viable youth. At the same time, this process requires a certain system of measures and actions from society to organize the appropriate conditions for the growth and development of the personality. At all times, this role was played by education. Today for students' youth higher education should become a school of productive self-fulfillment, in which each student will be able to build his professional, social, cultural image, project his future.

2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptual framework

The present study was carried out taking into account heuristic findings in the field of the psychology of health committed within the framework of positive psychology, and in particular, the *eudaimonic approach* (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Unlike the *hedonistic* tradition, this approach proceeds from the general position that a person gains happiness not through pleasure, but through the realization of his potential in society (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Among the approaches to the study of eudemonia, one can single out the theory of psychological well-being by K. Ryff (Ryff & Singer, 1998) and the theory of self-determination of E.L. Deci and R.M. Ryan (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The efforts made in the field of positive psychology are aimed at identifying personal resources that allow people to lead a better life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The present study develops this line, showing that self-fulfillment resulting from eudaimonic lifestyles can represent such a resource, especially with regard to psychological health.

From our point of view, it seems promising to study psychological well-being in terms of a *narrative approach* (White & Epston, 1990) that views this well-being through human identity as a socially constructed life story (McAdams, D. P., 2008; Bauer, J.J., McAdams, D. P. & Pals, J. L., 2006). The notion of positive identity as a narrative that unites biographical events of a person's life and vital goals and values into a single whole allows overcoming the division into hedonistic (subjectivist) and eudemonic (objectivist) treatment of well-being. In addition, the methods of narrative analysis make it possible to investigate the emotional coloration of individual experiences from the point of view of thematic and structural characteristics of life stories that can be considered as indirect indicators of well-being and happiness.

We carried out our research on the basis of the general provision that psychological well-being, appearing as a correlate of self-realization of the individual (Miquelon & Vallerand, 2006), is result of productive socialization (Young, 1952), which is started by the internal ontological aspiration for *self-actualization* (Maslow, 1987). Being the leading life motivator in the university years, the desire for self-actualization psychologically inspires and mobilizes the young person, activates his abilities and internal resources in order to express himself, to receive a valuable life experience, to prove himself in learning, science, society, business, culture and so on (Stipek, 1993). When we are dealing with the process and the phenomenon of self-fulfillment of students in university education, it is necessary to clearly understand that this gives us the most reliable indicator of their successful personal and professional development, and at the same time acts as a humanitarian criterion for the productivity and effectiveness of the educational process in the university in general (Tomlinson, 1993). In planning our research, we proceeded from the fact that the process of students' self-fulfillment is caused by such a construction of educational practice in the university that ensures the full socio-cultural development of students as capable and competent personalities (Gasset, 1999).

In the course of researching the psychological appearance of student youth in Russian universities we considered self-fulfillment as the process of the of building up a unique experience of responsible and full life of *the personality* (Shutenko, 2015); and a process of self-development and realization of the personal capacities and meaningful attitude towards the world and themselves at present and within life circumstances (Gewirth, 1998).

2.2. Object and hypothesis of the study

The subject matter of our study was the educational environment of higher school from the point of view of achieving psychological well-being and self-fulfillment of students.

The main problem of the study was to determine the subjectively important conditions for self-fulfillment of students as humanitarian criteria for ensuring their psychological well-being in the process of university training.

Our research is based on the hypothesis that the process of self-fulfillment of students in the conditions of university education (apart from personal abilities and learning technologies) depends on the construction of a socio-cultural learning environment. In particular, from the recognition of the values of social support and participation in the development of the personality of students, which strengthen the atmosphere of psychological well-being. In addition, such an environment should help students plan their professional and life path and equip them with all the necessary technologies and resources for personal growth (Shutenko E. & Shutenko A., 2015).

2.3. Scientific approach

The possibility of developing this hypothesis is ensured by applying a sociocultural approach to studying the problem of students' self-fulfillment in higher education, which implies the use of educational technologies as ways to identify and implement the essential forces of students who absorb certain historical forms of sociocultural relations (Shutenko et al., 2017). Presenting the synthesis of knowledge, abilities, skills, talents, etc. driven by interests, strivings, expectations and meanings, these essential forces are formed when an individual acquires the experience of culture through the mechanisms of desobjectivation and objectivation of this experience in social practice (Shutenko, 2015).

2.4. The goal and stages of the research

In our opinion, a current task of studying the phenomenon of psychological health and well-being of young people is to connect the potentials of applying modern education approaches and technologies with the process of students' self-fulfillment in university training. Therefore, the main goal of the research is to define the subjectively expressed indicators of students' self-fulfillment, which reflect of various forms and modalities their psychological health and well-being.

To solve the set goal, we have conducted a research work consisting of three stages.

The first stage was aimed to determining subjectively important conditions for self-fulfillment of students in the domain of university life.

The second stage has involved the generalization of the obtained data about the signs and forms of manifestation of students' self-fulfillment and defined trends of students' psychological well-being in the learning process.

The third stage was centered on the implementation of a special survey of students and reveals the degree of their self-fulfillment, reflecting the level of their psychological well-being in training.

2.5. Participants of the research

Through the tentative pilot questioning conducting, selective interviewing, carrying out focus groups the most important subjective-significant self-fulfillment conditions of students in the modern university emerged.

The study was carried out in 2016-2017 academic year; at different stages it covered 502 students of higher educational institutions from four different Belgorod universities: a technological university, humanitarian and economic universities, and a higher school of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

2.6. Method of thesaurus analysis

In the course of the questioning and interviewing students' different opinions, estimations and answers to following questions were ascertained: «What does the self-fulfillment in the studies and university life mean to you?», «Is it possible to achieve the self-fulfillment in the course of the studying?», «On what does students' self-fulfillment depend?», «What promotes and what prevents your self-fulfillment at the university?», «What is the role of

the university in students' self-fulfillment achievement?», «What is required from yourselves for the self-fulfillment at the university?» etc.

Received answers and opinions undergo the primary content-analysis. From the received units of an array of information with significant content were identified, then summarized, systematized and grouped into specific thematic communities consisting of similar in direction of thought, contextual and sense assessments, which are similar in their narrative and subject line. In this regard we aimed to omit inessential formal, logical, stylistic, discursive, lexical, grammatical and other differences and nuances. In the primary analysis, from the total array of students' answers, we identified nine semantic clumps reflecting different aspects in the topic of their self-fulfillment in learning. Deeper semantic processing and analysis of the thesaurus (Lukov Val. & Lukov Vl., **2004**) categories of obtained content consisted in their clustering on the basis of a more universal combination of related lexical and thematically expressive constructions. This allowed expanding and combining different shades of students' answers into three common semantic clusters, which formed the basis for formulating, respectively, three subjectively significant conditions for student self-fulfillment.

3. Results

3.1. Subjective thesauri and semantic indicators of students' self-fulfillment

The first group of answers contains opinions, connotations, and judgments that reflect the respondents' direct attitude to learning activity, to the training process at the university, and the significance of this activity in their life were included. The answers of the students included in this group raised mainly the subjective significance of the learning process and the high motivation for learning in general. Table 1 reflects the most common semantic indicators of students' statements that were included in the first thesaurus cluster of their perceptions of subjective conditions from the standpoint of readiness for self-fulfillment in university education are outlined in percentage terms (at the rate of 100 % mentions per every indicator). The list of indicators is displayed in the order of the ranking: on the top lines are those that are more often found in students' answers, and the less common ones are located in the lower ranks.

Table 1
The structure of thesaurus of the readiness to self-fulfillment in education

No	Semantic indicators	The frequency of usage (%)
1.	Interest in education presence	69
2.	Desire to study at the chosen university	65
3.	Satisfaction by education	64
4.	Personal significance and value of education	57
5.	Immersion into training and academic enthusiasm	54
6.	Desire to resemble teachers and to take a pattern by them	47
7.	Tendency to know and master the future profession deeper	42
8.	Continuous submergence into the education process	38

9.	Other things	33
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The prevalence of the above semantic connotations pointed to the significance of the personal immersion and involvement of the student in the educational process. We have identified the received spectrum of opinions reflecting this circumstance of students' self-fulfillment in terms of *personal participation* in the educational process.

The second group of opinions was formed by selecting the statements and judgments of students, which reflected the degree and expressiveness of their personal manifestation in the process of university training (orientations, individual properties, qualities, abilities, experience, talents, etc.). Table 2 lists relevant semantic indicators, showing the importance of disclosing and implementation of internal resources of students as a trigger for their self-fulfillment. These indicators were selected in a separate semantic cluster in the general array of student responses.

Table 2
The structure of thesaurus of the self-fulfillment measures and actions

No	Semantic indicators	The frequency of usage (%)
1.	Students' inner potential activation, their abilities and talents development	73
2.	Intensive self-knowledge and perfection in the course of studying at the university	68
3.	Increase of the university training subjective-significant utility	63
4.	Approach to the goals, senses and dream achievement in the course of training	60
5.	Performing the duty of a social lift by the university	57
6.	Stimulation of successes in studying, strengths activation in the course of training	55
7.	Multi-faceted self-expression and self-manifestation in the university	52
8.	Support of students' efforts in training	47
9.	Other things	35

Table 3
The structure of thesaurus of self-fulfillment activators

No	Semantic indicators	The frequency of usage (%)
1.	Presence of the intensive transpersonal interaction in the university life	74
2.	Manifestation of mutual assistance and support in the student environment	70
3.	Presence of the social proximity and solidarity in the student environment	67

4.	Manifestation of concern and care from the university side	62
5.	University help in the students' problems resolving	59
6.	Presence of the confidence and respect atmosphere	56
7.	Intensity and strength of friendly connections	55
8.	Full-fledged functioning of student groups and communities in university	44
9.	Good provision of leisure and everyday life for students	42
10.	Other things	34

The general meaning of the connotations reflected in Table 3 represents the acmeological aspect of students' self-fulfillment as an aspiration to opportunities for self-improvement, achieving high rates of personal and professional growth. Thus, the indicators contained in this semantic cluster showed the importance of the availability of conditions for *realizing the abilities* of students in university training.

In the structure of the third group of opinions, we selected assessments and judgments, indicating the importance of permanent contacts and social integration in the process of university education. According to students, to realize themselves as a person is possible in an atmosphere of intense, trusting, friendly communication and shared experience.

In the answers of students, it is noted the importance of the presence of a certain social atmosphere as a nutritious soil and environment for versatile self-knowledge and self-expression. The role of such an environment is played by the sphere of constant communication, collective life, social recognition and predisposition, cooperation and mutual assistance in the process of education.

Table 3 shows semantic indicators of students' answers, reflecting the importance of various forms of social support and assistance for full self-fulfillment in the university level. These semantic indicators entered the third thesaurus cluster of student descriptions of the conditions for their self-fulfillment at the university life.

In general, the subjectively significant concepts of student youth about self-fulfillment, obtained by the method of thesaurus analysis, make it possible to single out the corresponding problems of university education. First, it is the discovery and development of internal universal abilities of students; it is the cultivation of meaningful activities of students, their purposeful and sensible actions in stimulating learning activity; thirdly, it is ensuring of this activity realization wide social context playing the role of the social filter and, at the same time, catalyst of this activity.

3.2. The narrative dominants of students' psychological well-being

As a result of the *narrative monitoring* (McAdams, 2008) of the presented semantic clusters, we identified three leading *narrative dominants* of students' understanding of the conditions for their self-fulfillment as markers of their psychological well-being in learning:

- ego-inclusion in the learning process;
- comprehensive deployment of personal capacities;
- social acceptance in the university community.

Figure 1 schematically reflects the content of the dominants of psychological well-being, which was obtained on the basis of the analysis of the students opinions who participated in research.

The first dominant – ego-inclusion in the process of university education – means attitudes toward learning and working at the university as a leading occupation in the current segment of life. This dominant implies the interest and satisfaction of students from the learning process at the university, points to the belief in the value of the chosen profession, to a strong desire to master the profession and achieve success in their work, as well as a high psychological involvement in education. The high personal immersion of students into the training process are also related to their desire to be similar to teachers and representatives of the chosen profession, with a aspiration to master the profession and to express and manifest themselves in educational, scientific and extracurricular sphere of activity (Shutenko, 2015).

Judging by the narrative explications of students, the first dominant reflects the activity aspect of their self-fulfillment, interest in learning, the level of immersion in the education in whole, and the level of the subjective value of the learning activity itself.

The second dominant – comprehensive deployment of personal capacities - means development of personal potential of students, their opportunities for self-expression and self-knowledge in the learning activities, the realization of the abilities and talents. For a full-fledged self-fulfillment of students, first of all, it is necessary to widely disclose internal forces and resources, to understand themselves as successful and capable subjects, it is necessary the presence incentives to support their efforts in learning and research, their awareness of the obvious usefulness of education at the university and the possibility of better self-discovery and self-affirmation as productive people (Tomlinson, 1993).

This dominant point to the personal factor of students' self-fulfillment and represents a central and key role in their professional, research and motivational development, as its content opens up a plan of internal sources of self-development in the profession.

The third dominant of the students' self-fulfillment – social acceptance in the university community - means the existence of care and attention to the student; availability of assistance from the university in the solving of not only educational, but also personal problems; a sense of community and acceptance in the corporate environment, the presence of an atmosphere of trust, mutual revenue and support, the existence of strong friendships, respect, etc. (Shutenko, 2015).

The social aspect of students' self-fulfillment is reflected in the content of this dominant. This aspect implies the importance of developing diverse social relations and interactions of students not only in the educational process, but also in the social, leisure and cultural spheres. To achieve self-fulfillment, students should be included in the maximum possible number of social ties and groups of different levels and interests (Conley, 2005).

In general, if universities accept the aforementioned dominants as conditions for building an educational process, this will significantly increase the motivational resource and attractiveness of educational activities among students, as well as improve their psychological well-being and health.

3.3. Experimental implementation

Data on self-fulfillment and psychological well-being of students

Based on these narrative dominants as subjective criteria of psychological health of students, we developed and tested a questionnaire on self-fulfillment in course of higher education.

According to the results of surveys of students of humanitarian and technological universities, it was found that most students learn with obvious interest and evaluate the academic living as the main activity of the current period 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. The obtained data show that by the criterion of *ego-inclusion in the learning process*, the average and higher indicators than the average were established.

As for the criterion of *comprehensive deployment of personal capacities*, it turned out that a

significant number of students consider themselves as advanced and capable; and they underline the benefits of academic life. At the same time, for many of them, personal talents and potential are not fully used in the process of their academic classes.

As shown by students' assessments of their *social acceptance in the university community*, most students feel the support from the university and the value of their personality in the learning practice. Nevertheless, they are forced to conclude that their activities related to social external life are not sufficiently intensive.

The generalized results of the survey made it possible to conclude that the process of university training provides sufficient opportunities and conditions for self-fulfillment of the majority of interviewed students.

Gender differences

It should be noted that with regard to the gender principle, the students we interviewed were divided into almost two equal halves. 201 women and 199 men took part in the survey. The results showed that the process of self-fulfillment of young men is less problematic. They experience less disappointment and disappointment in their studies. Research data on girls showed that they tend to have more emotional involvement in the learning process, they are more participated in class and university activities, while both sexes show similar positive indicators of social integration in the learning process.

Professional differences

It was also found that students of the technological university are more responsible for their academic duties and extra-curricular tasks, which they consider to be elements of their professional growth. Meanwhile, students of the humanities are more actively involved in the learning process and are more enthusiastic in the university's activities.

Summary data

We clustered the data and, as a result, identified three groups of students with different levels of self-fulfillment:

- 1st group: students with unexpressed self-fulfillment (23%);
- 2nd group: students with medium self-fulfillment (39%); and
- 3rd group: students with articulate self-fulfillment (38%).

The chart of data placed in figure 2 visually reflects a ratio of the allocated categories of students.

It should be emphasized that the first group was the most minor, which indicates that, on the whole, there is a positive tendency toward self-fulfillment of students in the course of their academic studies. Based on a comparative analysis of answers, students of a higher level of self-fulfillment tend to be more convinced that they have made the right choice of a university and can use their potential to give significant advantages. They study with obvious interest and consider the studies at the university as an independent and valuable activity, but not as a formal commitment or a place of meeting with friends. Students with higher self-fulfillment are more actively involved in the learning process and view their studies as their most valuable activity that brings their dreams closer and acts as a source of inspiration and inner improvement. They recognize in their classes more opportunities for diverse and complete expression as a personality.

4. Conclusions

Within the framework of the research carried us, we proceeded from the assumption that the process of education should provide human significant conditions for the development of the internal forces of students, their creative and intellectual resources. The results of our study convinced us that the students' self-fulfillment process in the university education represents, on the one hand, as the main growth line of the future specialist personality, one's successful development and self-determination. On the other hand, it can serve as an internal indicator of the effectiveness of university education and, at the same time, a

humanitarian criterion for the psychological well-being of students in the process of university training.

The presented research was carried out on the basis of thesaurus analysis method, aimed at revealing the sense constructs of students' self-fulfillment and well-being in the learning process. This method assumes more advanced semantic processing of the received answers, opinions and estimations of students about the self-fulfillment in training. The essence of the method is the semantic clustering of answers based on a more universal combination of related lexical and thematically expressive constructions. The semantic indicators of self-fulfillment obtained during the application of this method were grouped in three thesaurus modalities - in the cluster of readiness for self-fulfillment, in the cluster of measures and actions for self-fulfillment, and also in the cluster of activators of self-fulfillment in university training.

The research results allow establishing that there are following subjective-significant conditions of students' self-fulfillment and psychological well-being in the university education. Firstly, it is ego-inclusion in the learning process, which appears in students' interest to education presence, a desire to study at the chosen university, satisfaction by education, submergence into the education process, positive identification with professors and specialists in the chosen qualification, aspiration for complete self-development in education. Secondly, this is a complete deployment of personal abilities, which implies the development of the students' personal potential, their better self-knowledge in education and in later life, the disclosure of their capacities and talents, the orientation to future success and professional growth, their multifaceted self-manifestation in education, the facilitation of their efforts in learning, and so on. Thirdly, it is a factor of social acceptance in the university community, which appears in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement and mutual help in the student environment, in the presence of friendly ties, in a sense of trust and respect, in strength friendly connections.

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