



International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research

ISSN: 0972-7302

available at <http://www.serialsjournal.com>

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Volume 15 • Number 12 • 2017

Modern Approaches to the Development of University Students' Social Competence

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ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the problems of formation and development of social competence of future experts in university and allowing them to work effectively in a group, to resolve various real-life situations and to participate in the activities of various social institutions. The authors analyzed modern psychological and pedagogical approaches to the development of social competence of university students using a number of Russian and foreign sources. The following definition of social competence is suggested: it is a set of social knowledge, skills and abilities required to implement social reality, personal and social characteristics. The level of social competence gives the opportunity to direct one's own behavior taking into account the particular social situation and performing his/her social role efficiently. The paper presents the results of the authors' empirical research of the relationship between social competence formation and achievement motivation of students from several Russian universities. Based on research results, the authors concluded that the development of social competence of future experts could be intensified in the system of modern university education, if communicative competence approach is widely used. It can also have a purposeful effect on the students' motivational sphere in order to create a high level of achievement motivation.

JEL Classification: M14, M59, D71, I20, P46.

Keywords: Social competence, personality, university student, achievement motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current socio-economic situation in modern society is causing an increased interest in training qualified professionals who, apart from their field of expertise, possess a high level of creativity, independence,

competitiveness and mobility. They should be experts able to make decisions and take responsibility for them, as well as participate in the activities of social institutions.

By analyzing scientific literature and samples of university curricula, we concluded that the existing traditional system of student vocational training does not properly provide the necessary level of the development of graduates' social competence.

Vocational training in modern universities centers, mainly, around theoretical study of the components of professional activity, with the development of necessary social skills being often neglected. As a result, university graduates often have difficulties in establishing social contacts and interpersonal relationships; many students do not tend to analyze arising problematic situations.

This paper continues the series of publications reflecting the authors' research of personal characteristics and determinants of personal and professional development of future specialists in high school (Baybarodskih et. al., 2016; Eliseeva et. al., 2015; Petukhova, Eliseeva, Mezentsev & Seregina, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to examine modern psychological and pedagogical approaches to the process of formation and development of students' social competence, as well as to study the relationship between students' social competence and level of their achievement motivation, on the basis of the empirical research conducted by the authors.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Nowadays, increasing attention of university academic staff is paid to the process of how general cultural competences of future professionals form and develop. These competences include:

- social competence (responsibility for one's actions, decision-making and implementation, tolerance towards people of different nationalities and religions, a balance between one's own interests and public needs);
- communicative competence (ability to communicate, orally and in writing, in foreign languages, as well as in computer programming languages);
- social and information competence (IT literacy and critical assessment of social information circulating in the media);
- cognitive (or personal) competence (permanent improvement of one's educational level, needs for the realization of personal potential, ability to acquire new knowledge and skills independently, self-development);
- cross-cultural competences and special competence (independent professional activity, evaluation of the results of personal labor) (Baybarodskih et. al., 2016).

Social competence, which ensures a positive impact on interpersonal relationships in society, is also considered to be the main component of this set of competencies.

A lot of research by both foreign and domestic authors has been devoted to the formation and development of social competence.

John Raven treats person's social competence as an acquirement of emotional, cognitive and motor ways of behavior; in various situations they lead to a profitable balance between positive and negative effects (Raven, 2002).

H. Schroeder and M. Vorwerg note that the structure of social competence includes such personality features as commitment to building social relationships, communication skills, ability to persuade and to compel, one's self-concept and influence (Dementieva, 2012).

G.E. Belitskaya treats social competence as the highest level of person's social activity, in other words, it is the implementation and development of social reality; these processes can be achieved through activity and communication. According to V.N. Kunitsina, social competence is understood as a system of knowledge about oneself, about the social reality; it is a system of complex social knowledge and attainments, skills of interaction, ways of behavior in different social situations which help one to adjust, make decisions, and derive maximum benefit from situations (Baybarodskih et. al., 2016).

E.V. Koblyanskaya sees social competence as an ability to understand the relationship between oneself and the society, the ability to choose the right social guidelines in one's activity. According to V.V. Tsvetkova, social competence should be considered from the perspective of social role theory: "Social competence is a social and pedagogical category referring to the personal integrative quality which helps an individual to interact actively with society, to carry out various social roles, to make contacts with the various groups and individuals, to participate in socially important projects". G.I. Sivkova understands social competence as having a "rigid" behavior, which is realized by automatic skills that help the individual to adjust his/her behavior flexibly depending on the situation (Dementieva, 2012).

In the works by V.G. Romek, social competence includes the ability to change a person's behavior strategy flexibly taking into account a broader context of activity (social conditions and norms) and a more limited one (peculiarities of a social situation).

Social competence consists of three components. They are the following:

1. Social and personal competence.
2. Social activity competence.
3. Social and professional competence (Romek, 2000).

After analyzing the studies by the authors mentioned above, we formulated the following understanding of social competence: social competence is a set of social knowledge, skills and abilities required to implement social reality, personal and social characteristics. The level to which it is formed gives one the opportunity to construct his/her behavior taking into account the particular social situation and performing one's social role efficiently.

The development of social competence of students is a multifaceted process that includes both pedagogical (education and self-education) and social (objective living conditions and social institutions) effects. These effects are complementary and make an impact on student's personality. In our view, this process can be intensified in the system of modern university education, on condition that communicative competency approach should be widely used. Such an approach was offered in the work by K.U. Porpeev (Pospeev, 2007).

The research includes the verification of the assumption that social competence is formed and developed in close connection with the person's motivational sphere. Therefore, we have also analyzed a number of works by domestic and foreign scientists devoted to the problems of achievement motivation. Achievement motivation is a type of motivation that determines person's creative and pro-active attitude. It also affects both person's character and the quality of his or her work.

The problem of achievement motivation is reflected in a large number of scientific studies, both in foreign and in domestic psychology (J. Atkinson, D. McClelland, R. Weiner, D. Rotter, K. Levin; N.V. Afanasyev, I.A. Baturin, V.A. Belyh, M.S. Mogamed-Eminov, V.I. Stepansky, S.A. Shapkin, etc.) (Vasiliev & Magomed-Emin, 1986; Dementieva, 2012; Atkinson, 1958; McClelland, 1953; Weiner, 1970; Weiner, 1972).

H. Murrey was the first to classify achievement motivation as a stable personal characteristic. He understood it as a stable need to achieve certain results, as a desire to do things quickly and well, to reach a certain level in any work. (Murrey, 1951).

H. Murrey was the first who classified achievement motivation as a stable personal characteristic. He understood the considered category as a stable aspiration to achieve certain results; as desire to do things quickly and well, to reach a certain level in any work. This aspiration is generalized and makes itself evident in any situation, regardless of its particular features.

According to H. Murrey, the need to succeed is characterized by the following concepts: to perform something difficult; to manage, manipulate and organize with regard to physical objects, people, or ideas; to do it as quickly and independently as possible; to overcome obstacles and achieve high results; to improve oneself; to compete and keep ahead of others; to pursue talents and to improve self-esteem with it (Murrey, 1951).

The first formalized model of achievement motivation was offered by J. Atkinson. It was the basis for all further models in this area and helped to develop motivation as an interaction between personality and situation. Atkinson's model of risk-taking was developed on the basis of Lewin's field theory. K. Lewin explains determination of behavior on the ground of the interaction between personality and environment during actual current situation. Within Lewin's field theory, the first expectancy-value model was created. This model had an impact on the development of Atkinson's and other models (Romek, 2000; Atkinson, 1958).

Let us consider the basic assumptions of Atkinson's risk-taking model. In a study by J. Atkinson, achievement motivation is an integration system, in which two motivational tendencies are identified: the tendency to achieve success and the tendency to avoid failure. Motivational tendencies are complex in terms of composition. They consist of permanent personal dispositions (motives), immediate situational determinants of behavior (expectancies or probability) and subjective incentive value of future success or failure.

Accordingly, there are three main determinants of achievement motivation in this model. They are motive, expectancy and incentive value.

Expectancy is viewed as anticipation of the fact that some actions will lead to certain consequences. Motive names (for example, the achievement motive, etc.) are actually the names of impulse classes

that produce, in fact, the same type of satisfaction: self-pride in case of success, for example (Vasiliev & Magomed-Emin, 1986; Dementieva, 2012).

The tendency to achieve success is viewed as the force generating the individual's actions, which, as he or she expects, will lead to success. This tendency appears in the direction, intensity and persistence of activity. It is created under the following factors: personal factor, which is a motive (or a need) to achieve, and two situational factors, which are the expectancy (or subjective probability of success) and subjective incentive value of success.

The tendency to avoid failure is seen as the force suppressing the individual's actions, which, as he or she expects, will lead to failure. The tendency to avoid failure manifests itself by the fact that a person tends to get out of the situation, which contains probability of failure. This tendency is created with a personal factor, which is a motive to avoid, and a situational factor, which is the expectancy (or subjective probability of failure).

In this model, achievement motivation is determined by three variables. Firstly, it is a motive to achieve success, which is viewed as the ability to experience satisfaction and self-pride in case of success; secondly, it is a subjective probability of success (or the expectancy that the action will lead to success and achievement of a specified goal; this concept shows the degree of confidence that some actions will lead to certain consequences); thirdly, it is incentive value of success in this particular activity.

Atkinson's risk-taking model was mainly aimed at description and prediction of the results of the motivational process rather than its interpretation.

Atkinson's model of achievement motivation later underwent further modifications. J. Fieter tried to take into account how a person perceives his or her own responsibility for the outcome. R. Reiner developed the model that takes into account visions for the future, while B. Weiner et. al., offered the attribution theory of motivation. (Vasiliev & Magomed-Emin, 1986; Weiner, 1970; Weiner, 1972).

The model by H. Heckhausen is one of modern cognitive models that claim to summarize various phenomena in the area of achievement motivation. This model is closer to the formal decision theory and gives priority to the cognitive processes of decision-making (Hekhausen, 2001).

Heckhausen's model is an expectancy-value model, thus the concept of "expectancy" (subjective probability) and the concept of "incentive value" are key variables. As for the concepts of motive and motivation, the author generally leans on the Atkinson's views on the motive as an integral, generalized disposition and motivation; as a condition that occurs when a motive interacts with relevant aspects of the situation.

H. Heckhausen and his colleges consider motivational process as an interaction between personal dispositions (motives) and peculiarities of the situation. At the same time, the achievement motive appears as a feature or quality of the individual and provides stability of achievements with regard to external (situational) effects. The achievement motive is not a static attribute. It is a dynamic system that can be changed not only as a result of natural development, but also purposefully (Hekhausen, 2001).

Thus, we have elicited the progress of research on motivation based on K. Lewin's theory. His research gave significant impetus to the study of motivation problems, but at the same time, it also imposed a number of restrictions. There are some obvious difficulties in adequate representation and description of the impact that complex cognitive structures provide on behavior dynamics.

Expectancy-value model aims to predict the result of setting a goal and action decision rather than to explain this process. From the psychological point, the main aspect is to explain the process and setting a goal. However, some important conditions of forming goals and actions are singled out in these models. First, they are value and expectancy. Value and expectancy are described as cognitive determinants. The point seems that by means of cognitive processes, a person weighs value and expectancy of alternatives for goals or actions, and then selects the one with the highest expected value.

In recent time, the expectancy-value model of motivation has been developed through attempts to find additional conditions that affect the choice of purposes and actions.

Heckhausen's general cognitive model in fact is a model of weighing various alternatives in terms of expected value results and its consequences. It is unlikely that such a model can be useful for explaining the personal initiative.

In all of these models, the basic position on the individual cognitive weighing of alternatives for goals and actions is not questioned. In this case, the person is considered out of the context of his or her life and is set in an artificial situation of choosing the alternatives.

Russian psychologists develop a fundamentally different approach, according to which a person operates in the system of certain social relations and in interaction with other people.

Since the mid-70s, the problem of achievement motivation has been rapidly developed in Russian psychology. However, the first attempts (by R.S. Weissman, 1973; R.S. Nemov, 1973; A.B. Orlov, 1974; V.I. Stepanky, 1981, etc.) dealt with only certain aspects of achievement motivation. Achievement motivation, as well as the closely related topic of the level of pretensions, was investigated by M.S. Magomed-Eminov, T.V. Kornilova, I.M. Paley, and others (Vasiliev & Magomed-Emin, 1986).

M.S. Magomed-Eminov was the first among domestic psychologists to study the structure and functioning of achievement motivation. He considered motivation to be "a complex multifaceted functional system, in which affective and cognitive processes are integrated together". It allows us to overcome one-sided and unbalanced interpretation of the motive to achieve, which is typical for foreign researchers. According to them, it is either a dynamic system or a cognitive one. Magomed-Eminov's variant also allows us to consider motivation as the mental process that regulates the activity of a specific subject in the current situation and oppose this view to the treatment of motivation as a hypothetical intermediate process (Vasiliev & Magomed-Emin, 1986).

According to M.S. Magomed-Eminov, one of the main mechanisms of actualizing achievement motivation is motivational-emotional situation analysis which consists of two aspects: the first one is the motivational assessment of the situation significance and the second one is the assessment of overall competence in achievement situation.

Achievement motivation is studied in the socio-psychological aspect. Thus, M.L. Kubishkina tried to review the motive to achieve as a desire for social success in a broader social context. M.L. Kubishkina identified and analyzed the main aspects the motives of social success. They are the desire to achieve high results in significant activities and to achieve authority and respect associated with it; the desire to receive a high social status, prestige and influence on others; the desire for rivalry, confrontation, competition (Romek, 2000).

In summary, nowadays the research of achievement motivation has gained a strong position in Russian psychology and attracts a growing number of domestic scientists; we can see accumulation of empirical material, as well as reflection on and critical analysis of foreign colleagues' experience.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Based on theoretical analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature on the concerned topic, our hypothesis was defined: the achievement motivation is a determinant of students' social competence.

To test this hypothesis, an empirical study was undertaken. One hundred and thirty-five test subjects (university students of Bryansk, Russia) participated.

The following techniques were used in the study ("Practical Psychodiagnostics. Procedures and Tests", 1988):

- Communicative and social competence diagnostics (CSC);
- V.G. Romek's self-confidence test;
- K. Rogers' and R. Dymond's social and psychological adaptation questionnaire;
- Mehrabian Achieving Tendency Scale (MATS) developed by Albert Mehrabian and modified by M.H. Magomed-Eminov;
- T. Ehler's achievement motivation diagnostics.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During the first phase of the study, we employed the method "Communicative and social competence diagnostics" (CSC) and analyzed the variables on 7 factors: sociability (A), logical thinking (B), emotional stability (C), optimism (D), realistic outlook (K), independence (M), self-control (H).

Table 1
The diagnostic test in the experimental group of students and yielded the following results

| <i>Intensity</i> | <i>Factors</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>K</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>H</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| High, % of test subjects | | 54,3 | 40,0 | 34,3 | 31,4 | 48,6 | 8,6 | 25,7 |
| Average, % of test subjects | | 22,9 | 57,1 | 62,9 | 60,0 | 25,7 | 37,1 | 71,4 |
| Low, % of test subjects | | 22,9 | 2,9 | 2,9 | 8,6 | 25,7 | 54,3 | 2,9 |

Table 2
In the second phase of the study, we used the "V. G. Romek's self-confidence test" in the group of test subjects

| <i>Intensity</i> | <i>Factors</i> | <i>Self-confidence</i> | <i>Social courage</i> | <i>Initiative in social relations</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| High, % of test subjects | | 31,4 | 22,9 | 31,4 |
| Average, % of test subjects | | 68,6 | 62,9 | 60,0 |
| Low, % of test subjects | | 0 | 14,3 | 8,6 |

Table 3
The results of “K. Rogers’ and R. Dymond’s social and psychological adaptation questionnaire”

| <i>Factors</i> | <i>Intensity</i> | | | |
|--|------------------|----------------|------------|--|
| | <i>High</i> | <i>Average</i> | <i>Low</i> | |
| Adaptability, % of test subjects | 54,3 | 45,7 | 0 | |
| Inadaptability, % of test subjects | 0 | 74,3 | 25,7 | |
| Deception, % of test subjects | 0 | 20 | 80 | |
| Escapism, % of test subjects | 0 | 94,3 | 5,7 | |
| Self-acceptance, % of test subjects | 62,9 | 37,1 | 0 | |
| Self-rejection, % of test subjects | 0 | 57,1 | 42,9 | |
| Acceptance of others, % of test subjects | 48,6 | 51,4 | 0 | |
| Rejection of others, % of test subjects | 0 | 57,1 | 42,9 | |
| Emotional comfort, % of test subjects | 20 | 77,1 | 2,9 | |
| Emotional discomfort, % of test subjects | 2,9 | 80 | 17,1 | |
| Internal control, % of test subjects | 71,4 | 28,6 | 0 | |
| External control, % of test subjects | 0 | 56,1 | 43,9 | |
| Dominance, % of test subjects | 5,7 | 60 | 34,3 | |
| Suggestibility, % of test subjects | 2,9 | 62,7 | 34,4 | |

During the next phase of the study, we used Mehrabian Achieving Tendency Scale (MATS).

Summarized results of research: 31.4% of the subjects – the motive to achieve is dominant; 68.6% of the subjects – the motive to avoid failure is dominant.

The study of the experimental group by means of the method “T. Ehler’s achievement motivation diagnostics” showed the following results: very high level of achievement motivation – 31,4% of test subjects, high level of achievement motivation – 8,6% of test subjects, average level of achievement motivation – 31,4% of test subjects and low level of achievement motivation – 28,6% of test subjects. The results showed that students who are moderately and strongly focused on success prefer average risk. Those who are afraid of failure prefer low risk or, alternatively, extremely high risk. At the same time, achievement motivation affects the hope for success: with a high achievement motivation hopes for success are usually lower than with a low achievement motivation.

In the final phase of the study we attempted to determine the relationship between social competence and achievement motivation of the university students, therefore we used Pearson’s correlation analysis to correlate the results obtained during the testing with all methods.

The correlation analysis of the research results revealed the following correlations:

1. Direct correlation dependence between achievement motivation and sociability ($r = 0,629$ if $p < 0,01$), optimism ($r = 0,398$ if $p < 0,05$), realistic view ($r = 0,398$ if $p < 0,01$), self-confidence ($r = 0,570$ if $p < 0,01$), social courage ($r = 0,464$ if $p < 0,01$), adaptability ($r = 0,612$ if $p < 0,01$), self-acceptance ($r = 0,955$ if $p < 0,01$), acceptance of others ($r = 0,727$ if $p < 0,01$), emotional comfort ($r = 0,560$ if $p < 0,01$), dominance ($r = 0,560$ if $p < 0,01$).
2. Inverse correlation dependence between achievement motivation and emotional stability ($r = -0,391$ if $p < 0,05$), independence ($r = -0,450$ if $p < 0,01$), self-control ($r = -0,335$ if $p < 0,01$),

inadaptability ($r = -0,610$ if $p < 0,01$), self-rejection ($r = -0,619$ if $p < 0,01$), rejection of others ($r = -0,652$ if $p < 0,01$), emotional discomfort ($r = -0,482$ if $p < 0,01$), external control, ($r = -0,645$ if $p < 0,01$).

5. CONCLUSION

1. Based on the analysis of the research results, it was found out that the majority of students from the experimental group had average or high level of studied characteristics of social competence.
2. It is proved that there exists a correlation between social competence and achievement motivation of the university students. In particular, the higher the level of achievement motivation and desire to succeed, the more sociability, optimism, realistic views, self-confidence, social courage, adaptability, self-acceptance, acceptance of others, emotional comfort and dominance (in other words, the formation level of student's social competence) is.
3. The correlation between escapism (avoidance of problems) and components of social competence (except inadaptability) showed that they are not related. Therefore, we can claim that escapism is not a part of social competence students.
4. To improve the quality of the training of future specialists in university and the development of their social competence, it is necessary to widely use the communicative competence approach, and purposefully influence student's motivational sphere in order to create a high level of achievement motivation.

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