

# PERSONAL – SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHER SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

*Liudmyla Serdiuk*

*Open International University of  
Human Development 'Ukraine', the Ukraine*

## **Abstract**

The article deals with the problem of motivation of studying and professional activities at the university that is urgent for the student's age and the modern psychology. The motivation of studying and professional development is determined by an invariant set of personal properties that reflects self-relation as an integral quality of the individual. The influence of these properties (self-esteem, self-interest, self-confidence, self-acceptance, auto sympathy, self-understanding, expectation for the positive attitude of others) is mediated with the estimate value of training of the future specialist on the level of studying motivation.

The necessity of purposeful work on the development of future specialists' motivation of studying and professional activities is shown.

**Keywords:** *personal-semantic factors of motivation, studying and professional motivation, meaningful characteristics of motivation, the terms of motivation development.*

## **Introduction**

The problem of studying motivation of students is one of the most important among the psychological and educational ones. Despite the fact that the motives are the leading ones in the motivational structure of students that is related to self-determination and self-improvement, a conscious pursuit of self-actualization is formed, life position is defined, self-esteem is stabilized. However, as to the results of research (Бадмаева, 2004) the studying is often formal for the majority of contemporary students from the former Soviet Union area. It is focused not on learning new knowledge but the successful passing of term's exams and getting degree.

It is known that the effectiveness of motivation largely depends on the ratio of its effective and procedural aspects, i.e. how a goal is given, the necessary result of work meets the procedural moment of motivation.

Procedural motivation is understood as the interest in the process of activity, human need to disclose his/her potentials in the activity under the conditions of aspiration to gain

the maximum result, and in this sense the concept of procedural motivation approaches to the concept of internal motivation that involves the development of positive emotional coloring of sense of activity for person, high ability to work and psychological well-being at work.

Хекхаузен (2003) describes the main criterion of internal motivation as the content uniformity of action and its purpose. Internally motivated behavior is based on the experience and skill competence, interest in activities, regardless of external influences (rewards, reinforcements, etc.), the perception of a reason for person's actions. Internal demands for competence and self-determination constantly motivates people to strive for achieving the objectives of the optimal level (Deci, Ryan, 1985). While in the process of training activities the learners' basic dominant needs are not satisfied and all sorts of discontent, crisis, neurosis, stress can be provoked. They might be the barriers to mental and psychological adaptation and compensation and give rise to the "motivational vacuum" situation (when the old motivational settings do not work but the new ones have not yet formed (Лушин, 2000; 2003). In contrast to the existential vacuum with the feeling of the life sense loss and semantic vacuum associated with the loss of meaning of certain vital reference, motivational vacuum is related mostly to the loss of meaning of a particular activity.

Thus, if the motive occupies a significant place in the attitudes of the individual to reality, and if the whole system of motifs, expressing the attitude of the individual, is blocked, the tendency to disintegration of the whole motivational and semantic system of personality appears, which is essentially about "crisis of motive realization" (Файзуллаев, 1985).

Occurrence of such a crisis as a motivational vacuum is, in fact, inevitable because the crisis itself (in terms of dialectical logic) is an element of any development. However, the representatives of various psychological schools (Bandura, 2000; Братусь, 1988; Леонтьев, 1984; Роджерс, 2002; Чирков, 1996 etc.) are unanimous that the ability to survive the crisis constructively is an essential condition for becoming healthy and developed personality. Reevaluation values and reorientation meanings is a natural process of development including motivational character. In particular, Братусь (1988) calls such things "transitional – motivational needed states" that is inherent uncertainty and non-structured desires of the subject, non-clarity and vagueness of one's intentions and plans. When one experiences such crises, the "problem of meaning" appears (Леонтьев, 1984).

**The aim of the research:** is to identify student-learning semantic determinants of motivation and study their impact on content learning and level of motivation of university students.

**Object of research** – studying the motivation of university students.

*The subject* of research is personal-semantic determinants of studying motivation of university students.

#### **The methods and organization studies**

The changes occurring in higher professional education in connection with the Ukraine's accession to the Bologna Declaration cause the need to identify new criteria in evaluating the quality of vocational training. Accordingly, an important place in education belongs to the student who strives for self-development and self-realization in the future, motivated to obtain professional knowledge, development of professional competencies.

Being carried out within post-non-classical paradigm, psychological research can permit to consider a person in socio-historical and cultural context. Thus personality is treated as a creator, the author of his/her own life and active self-determined subject with his/her own internal sense and the ability to interact with the environment that helps to reveal this

content.

Post-non-classical psychology insists on the impossibility of studying human in isolation from the context of his/her vital activity. It considers that the most urgent problems of modern psychology are vital activity, lifestyle, life strategies, objectives and purpose of life of personality.

According to the referred standards of psychological research, this study covered a wide range of problems of modern specialist training. It was based on the principles of system-synergetic approach and included the use of complex psycho diagnostic methods for the detection of the features and value-semantic relationships, personal and motivational spheres of future experts in the integrated and non-integrated educational environment.

The first-year students of the Open International University of Human Development "Ukraine" took part in the investigation, where the training was organized in the integrated groups (students of different social status: with disabilities, orphans, poor and ordinary students). The students of National Technical University of Ukraine "KPI" also took part in the investigation, where the training was organized in the non-integrated groups.

This empirical study aims at identifying the kinds of motives for studying, the dominance of types of motivation in educational activity, personal characteristics and self-relation of students.

Being in the particular value environment the personality of student is determined. In view of the fact the present study was carried out in various educational environments – integrated and non-integrated. They are considered as the models of the value environment.

**Extent of the research:** The investigation involved 436 students including 136 students with disabilities, 155 students without disabilities from the integrated group and 145 non-disabled students from the non-integrated groups.

The study of motivation of educational activity of students (Якунин, 1994) and Motivation of study in higher school (Ильин, 2000), Pending sentence version (Солнцева, 1997) and self-determination psycho-diagnostic methods were used in the investigation (Столин, Пантилеев, 1988).

The obtained results were processed with the statistical program SPSS Statistics, version 19. The methods of descriptive statistics (definition of average values, standard deviations), correlation analysis (Pearson's correlation coefficient), a comparison of the average characteristics of the samples using student T-test have been used. The study is stating the nature.

### Analysis of results

According to *Motivation for success and fear of failure* questionnaire (Reana, 1994, cited in Якунин, 1994) it was found that the vast majority of the respondents (88%) were expressively motivated to succeed. During the training the level of motivation to success is increasing, but there are no significant changes that characterize the stable personality traits.

On the analysis of the data, obtained with Ильин's (Ильин, 2000) method (Table 1), the students with disabilities expressed the greatest desire to acquire knowledge

(GPA 7.8). That is also true to their desire to master the professional knowledge and form important professional skills (GPA 6.2), while the healthy students expressed their desire only to get a degree successfully.

Analyzing the variation of these indicators that depends on the year of studying, it was found that the majority first-year students (65%) are motivated to acquire knowledge and master the profession, while the senior ones have lost their interest. Only 36% of senior students strive for obtaining knowledge and only 22% of them strive to master the chosen profession. Students in the integrated group are characterized with the predominance of

internal motivation, especially students with disabilities. Although with every passing years of studying these data are reducing. This general trend, known in the literature as a “crisis of motivational vacuum”, indicates that the modern overall organization of the academic process and content of education do not provide students’ interest in mastering either core or non-core subjects. In some cases it is a result of incorrect choice of profession.

**Table 1.** Correlation of motivational orientation in the groups of different organization

		Year of studying	Acquiring knowledge		Mastering profession		Getting Degree	
			$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$
Integrated groups	Students with disabilities	1 <sup>st</sup> year	8.8	2.1	8.2	2.3	5.8	1.9
		4, 5 – year	7.9	2.4	7.1	2.5	6.3	2.1
	healthy students	1 <sup>st</sup> year	7.6	2.6	6.8	1.9	6.9	1.3
		4, 5 – year	6.1	2.2	5.7	1.8	6.1	2.8
Non-integrated groups	1 <sup>st</sup> year	6.6	1.8	4.7	2.1	7.8	1.7	
	4, 5 – year	5.4	2.1	3.9	2.1	8.1	1.8	

$\bar{X}$  – average value;  $S_x$  – standard deviation.

The study of motivational orientation of the individual on *Pending sentence* method (data in Table 2) involved identifying the nature of stimuli associated with the dominant components of the motivational sphere. This study showed that students of all groups who recognize the importance and necessity of training mainly recognize the right choice of speciality.

The main motivation for students is personal development, interest, desire to become a qualified specialist, but they do not oppose all sorts of incentives. However, students enrolled in the integrated group are more aware of the importance and necessity of education and also express a need for new knowledge. Especially the need in novelty of students with disabilities is expressed. Regarding the latter, somewhat alarming figure is a perspective that may indicate a lack of confidence in themselves and their future.

Generally students’ training perspectives are expected as the possibility of self-development, self-realization, and expansion of outlook, success, autonomy and independence. The importance and usefulness of studies significantly correlated ( $r=0.61$ ) with the prospect of novelty. Thus the importance and usefulness of information are combined with curiosity, enthusiasm, interest, and sometimes with mystery and romance. As to the evaluation of situational adaptation of students with disabilities and healthy students the first ones are more persistent in achieving their goals (4.6), try to do better than others what they have to do unlike healthy students (2.7). That is quite indirectly related to getting success. Average values are significantly different at a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ .

Considering the motivation of students in a dynamic perspective certain peculiarities have also been revealed. Within the first year of training all students are mainly supported by self-satisfaction, increased self-esteem, awareness of the necessity, and good reinforcement with praise. The indicators of this are expressions of motivation support as the “goals”, “hard work”, “persistence”, “lack of obstacles”. The significance of the “praise” is not reduced within the next years of training. And as a means of support and motivation the holidays, gifts and even money are outlined.

**Table 2.** Correlation of components of motivation sphere in the groups of different organization

		Importance of studying		Perspectives		Encouragement		Novelty	
		$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$
Integrated groups	Students with disabilities	3.5	0.1	2.3	0.2	3.4	1.4	3.5	1.5
	Ordinary students	3.2	0.1	2.8	0.3	3.8	0.9	2.2	0.7
Non-integrated groups		3.1	0.2	2.4	0.4	3.7	1.1	1.8	0.6

$\bar{X}$ – average value;  $S_x$  – standard deviation.

Analyzing the most typical ways of maintaining motivation for students using the possibility of action frustrated and other negative psychogenic factors some intergroup differences have been revealed that in some way correlated with indicators of situational adaptation.

The first year of training is remarkable with artificial goal-setting, combined with high rates of life goals and a positive attitude to the future of students. That is assessed by students as not sufficiently defined, but good and bright, and life goals are happiness, success, work, self-development and money. This group is characterized with a positive attitude towards peers and teachers, rejecting criticism, willingness to accept a different role and moderate search for positive incentives. The second year is also marked with an artificial goal-setting, but combined with simplification of behavior and an active search for positive incentives. The future is assessed less positively. It is assessed as excellent, good, happy, but sometimes vague and indefinite. Happiness, independence, fame, recognition and power are considered as life goals. Attitude to peers and teachers is less positive. At the undergraduate period the artificial goal-setting indicators are significantly reducing. The active search for positive incentives, taking attitudes to peers and teachers also become less positive and thus the need and value of friendship is increasing. The future is characterized as defined, good and interesting. Life goals of students have their own significance. The students want to be recognized, useful to people and have material well-being.

Some differences in the sources of anxiety of students have also been revealed, which is connected with the indicator of their own evaluation abilities using the feedback. The first year students are afraid of speaking publicly, of their own incompetence. Especially the case is for students with disabilities. They are often afraid of the future, worthlessness, aimless life. Second-year students mostly fear the lack of attention, loneliness, non-realization.

Undergraduate students fear of failure, errors, general rejection. Differences in the sources of anxiety are associated with various psychological defence mechanisms. The mechanisms of fantasy and sublimation are dominating in the first year of training, sublimation and rationalization are in the second, and displacement is in the fourth one. The high need of students with disabilities in helping from the environment is observed. It is concerned with the life tasks building and receiving feedback on the life process and its expectations.

The source of the differences and motivating factors of students with disabilities and healthy students were accented property of personality. The most evident difference was on the scales of schizoid (5.46) and hypochondria (4.76), resulting in some difficulties in communication and emotional sensitivity, and inadequate in relation to their health through excessive fear for it. The resulting differences were valid at  $p < 0.001$  significance level.

The motivation of individual for getting success is known to contribute to his/her productive activity. To determine the role of self-attitude (Table 3) in the formation of motivation for success and type of motivation of studying, the interrelations of these parameters have been found.

**Table 3.** The expression of self-attitude as a percentage

		Level	Year of studying	S	S <sub>I</sub>	S <sub>II</sub>	S <sub>III</sub>	S <sub>IV</sub>
Integrated groups	Students with disabilities	high	I	49	45	43	56	49
			IV,V	55	47	44	52	51
		middle	I	24	27	21	19	27
			IV,V	23	29	23	20	24
		low	I	27	28	36	25	24
			IV,V	22	24	33	28	25
	Healthy students	high	I	53	42	29	14	35
			IV,V	55	47	34	25	44
		middle	I	32	31	32	34	30
			IV,V	35	34	36	49	33
		low	I	15	27	39	54	35
			IV,V	10	19	30	26	23
Non-integrated groups	high	I	57	42	29	14	35	
		IV,V	67	44	38	14	54	
	middle	I	29	29	25	32	29	
		IV,V	21	25	33	40	19	
	low	I	14	29	46	54	36	
		IV,V	12	31	29	46	27	

S – global self-attitude, S<sub>I</sub> – self-esteem, S<sub>II</sub> – auto-sympathy, S<sub>III</sub> – expectations of the positive attitude of others, S<sub>IV</sub> – self-interest

The correlation analysis shows that motivation of success is related by significant positive correlations with indicators of global self-attitude (0.35,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-esteem (0.29,  $p < 0.05$ ), expectations of a positive attitude of others (0.31,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-interest (0.34,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-confidence (0.29), self-acceptance (0.35,  $p < 0.001$ ). Motivation of professional development is related to global self-attitude (0.34,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-esteem (0.38,  $p < 0.05$ ), auto-sympathy (0.29,  $p < 0.05$ ), self-confidence (0.35,  $p < 0.05$ ), self-acceptance (0.25,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-understanding (0.29,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Thus, it can be seen that the indicators of motivation of success and professional development are correlated with self-relation of personality. As meaningful education self-relation is of great value for the subject in the development of personality in general and vocational education, in particular. The processes of self-development, self-education, self-formation are increasingly occupying with the person's growing up. Respectively a larger proportion belongs to the internal conditions through which all external causes, effects and others are operated.

From this analysis it is clear that the person's motivation for studying as the system assimilates the potential of *personality* meta-system, which is ontologically included. Genesis of the motives for studying runs not only from the need sphere, but also the personality structures, formations, processes, etc. The mechanism of formation of behavior and purely personal motives of activity is incorporated in coordination with the motivational sphere

as a system and its *personality* meta-system. Personality as a whole and the components of personality acquire the ability to perform the functions of motives that is the basis of the personality's self-determination, self-realization and self-actualization.

### Conclusions

1. Motivation of studying is characterized by a complex structure; one of the forms is the internal structure (for the process and outcome) and external (for reward, avoidance) motivation.
2. An important psychological condition for the formation of future professional is motivation related to the higher order needs of realization which become the sense building and the driving one to creative activity.
3. Motivation of studying and professional development is determined by complex invariant personal characteristics. The influence of these properties (self-esteem, self-interest, self-confidence, self-acceptance, auto-sympathy, self-understanding, expectations of a positive attitude, etc.) on the level of motivation for studying is mediated by values of future specialist's education.
4. Self-attitude is in relation to personal harassment, plans for own future and is a specific mechanism of anticipatory regulation of vital activity, has a motivational effect and provides a benchmark for changes in life. So it should be an ongoing subject of correctional work programs of psychological support for students in universities.
5. The process of development of motivation of studying and professional activities of specialists should include a part of spontaneous as well as purposeful formation that contributes towards the goal of education.

### References

1. Bandura, A. (2000). *Theory of Social Learning*. Moscow
2. Deci, E.L., Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. University of Rochester, Rochester, New York: Plenum Press..
3. Бадмаева, Н.Ц. (2004). Влияние мотивационного фактора на развитие умственных способностей. In *Режим доступа*. Internet access: <<http://mexus.ru/vliyanie-motivacionn>>
4. Братусь, Б. С. (1988). *Аномалии личности*. Москва: Мысль.
5. Ильин, Е. П. (2000). *Мотивация и мотивы*. СПб: Питер.
6. Леонтьев, А.Н. (1984). Потребности, мотивы и эмоции . In В.К. Вилюнас, Ю.Б. Гиппенрейтер (Eds.), *Психология эмоций. Тексты* (p. 162-171). Москва.
7. Лушин, П.В. (2000). Особистісна зміна в педагогічному контексті. In *Розвиток ідей Г.С. Костюка в сучасних психологічних дослідженнях. Наукові записки*, 2, 46-53.
8. Лушин, П.В. (2003). “Мотиваційний вакуум” як можливість розвитку: екопсихологічна перспектива. In *Актуальні проблеми психології. Зб. наук. праць Інституту психології ім. Г.С. Костюка АПН України*, 7, 1(р. 244-251). К.: Міленіум.
9. Роджерс, К. (2002). *Свобода учиться*. Москва: Смысл.
10. Солнцева, Л.С. (1997). Метод исследования личности учащегося. Москва: Институт Психологии РАН.
11. Столин, В.В., Пантеев, С.Р. (1988). Опросник самоотношения. In *Практикум по психодиагностике: Психодиагностические материалы* (p. 123-130). Москва.
12. Файзуллаев, А.А. (1985). Принятие мотива личностью. *Психологический журнал*, 6, 4, 87-96.
13. Хекхаузен, Х. (2003). *Мотивация и деятельность*. СПб.: Питер; Москва: Смысл.
14. Чирков, В.И. (1996). Самодетерминация и внутренняя мотивация поведения человека. *Вопросы психологи*, 3, 116-132.
15. Якунин, В.А. (1994). *Психология учебной деятельности студентов: Учебное пособие*. Москва: Исследовательский центр проблем качества подготовки специалистов, Изд. Корпорация “Логос”.