

Subjective factors and psychological characteristics of students' self-realization as a reflection of their psychological well-being in the process of university learning

Factores subjetivos y características psicológicas de la autorrealización de los estudiantes como reflejo de su bienestar psicológico en el proceso de aprendizaje en la universidad

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this research is to determine psychological conditions and signs of students' self-realization in university training. Psychological survey methods were used in this research. Students' need-motivational features, meaning-setting characteristics, self-attitude properties and purpose-life orientations were scrutinized. As a result the connection between the level of students' self-realization and positive motivation of learning, as well as integrity and meaning consistency of their Self-concept is stated. The conclusion is made on necessity to apply individual-oriented forms of teaching.

Keywords: psychological well-being, students' self-realization, educational process, psychological features of self-realization

RESUMEN:

El propósito del investigación es determinar las condiciones psicológicas y los signos de autorrealización de los estudiantes en formación. Se utilizaron métodos de pruebas psicológicas. Se investigaron las necesidades y las actitudes de los estudiantes, las propiedades de auto actitud y las orientaciones propósito. Como resultado, se establece un vínculo entre el nivel de autorrealización de los estudiantes y la motivación positiva del aprendizaje, un autoconcepto holístico y acordado. Se concluye sobre la necesidad de formas de educación orientadas individualmente.

Palabras clave: bienestar psicológico, autorrealización de los estudiantes, proceso educativo, las particularidades psicológicas de la autorrealización

1. Introduction

The problem of psychological well-being and personal health comes to the fore in the development of modern Russian society. Sustainable development of the country in the context of the growing crisis and systemic transformations of society largely depends on the viability of its members. The education of healthy youth as the future social foundation of society is particularly important. Meanwhile, scientists and specialists note the deterioration of the mental health of modern Russian youth. The authors point out such socio-psychological dysfunctions as the stress of social change, apathy, infantilization, loss of socio-economic self-determination, addiction, irrational consciousness, primitivization of thinking, informational addiction, reduction of social identity, existential stress and others (Dubrovina, 2010; Zhuravlev et al., 2014; Shutenko, 2018).

From a scientific point of view, the problem of psychological health draws the attention of many researchers from various psychological schools and areas (*Schultz*, 1958; *Foreman*, 1966). However, for a long time most of the research has focused around the category of mental health, which was given the status of a complex and multifactor phenomenon that underlies the reproductive and creative capabilities of individuals and social groups in general (*K.S. Schou*, *J. Hewison*, *H. Stam*, *S. Wilkinson*, *D. Marks*, *M. Murray*, *V. Evans*, etc.). The absence of painful manifestations was the main sign of mental health (*A.E. Lichko*, *P.B. Gannushkin*, *G.K. Ushakov*, *Yu.A. Aleksandrovsky*, *S.Yu. Golovin*, etc.).

The progress of research in understanding health was associated with overcoming the negative definition of health (as the absence of illness). Great importance in the development of a positive definition of health was played by the concept of psychological well-being (Psychological Well-Being) (*Bradburn*, 1969; *Ryan & Deci*, 2000; *Deci & Ryan*, 2008). Focusing on the study of positive psychological functioning (positive psychological functioning) (*Ryff & Singer*, 1998; *Ryff et al.*, 1998), this approach has absorbed the achievements of psychoanalytic, humanistic, transpersonal and existential psychology (*K.-G. Jung*, *K. Horney*, *E. Erikson*, *C. Rogers*, *A. Maslow*, *E. Fromm*, *V. Frankl*, etc.).

Heuristic studies of psychological health are also carried out from the standpoint of an anthropological approach (*A.V. Shuvalov*), ecological psychology (*S. D. Derjabo*, *V. A. Yasvin*, etc.), and the eudaimonic approach (*R.M. Ryan*, *E.L. Deci*, *C. Ryff*, *B. Singer*, etc.) valeology, hermeneutic psychology, synergetics and other general scientific and interdisciplinary approaches.

Contemporary researches of Russian scientists on the problem of psychological health outgrow the medical-psychiatric tradition and address directly the personal dimension of this problem (*E.A. Sergienko*, *I.V. Dubrovina*, *B.S. Bratus*, etc.). As noted by *E.A. Sergienko*, in recent decades the scientific reflection of nature and the essence of health have seriously changed. The dominant understanding of health as somatic functioning has been replaced by a broader interpretation, including the concepts of mental and psychological health (*Sergienko*, 2017). However, the two health concepts, although closely interrelated, are not identical. Thus, the concept of mental health focuses more on aspects of maintaining a person's mental normal status (absence of deviant and delinquent behaviours, mental disorders, addictions, etc.) and risk factors for the development of various mental health problems. While the concept of psychological health "... relies largely on the internal psychological aspects of the adaptation of a person's personality to environmental factors, social, cultural, which not only allows you to maintain psychological balance, but also ensures self-actualization and self-development of each person" (*Sergienko*, 2017: 100).

Psychological well-being and the health of the individual are inextricably linked with self-realization, especially in the period of youth (*Gewirth*, 1998; *Miquelon & Vallerand*, 2006). Pertinently, both of these phenomena reflect the same process of the holistic and productive existence of an individual in certain social-cultural conditions. In the existential dimension, self-realization can be viewed as a function and a sign of the existence of a psychologically healthy person living a full and active life, feeling its inseparable connection with the world and with himself (*Shutenko*, 2014). In the ontological sense, self-realization is a natural and

characteristic way of being a person as a creative and spontaneously-developing subject, i.e. as a healthy person (Rubinstein, 2012).

Many modern authors and scientists see the solution to the problem of the psychological well-being of young people in ensuring full-fledged self-realization. These studies were mostly formed under the influence of humanistic psychology (A. Maslow, G. Allport, E. Fromm, V. Frankl, R. May, E. Erikson, etc.). In this regard, the basic components of psychological health are considered the harmony of the personality, its maturity and self-realization (Allport, 1950; Rogers, 1961; May, 1961; Assagioli, 1961; Maslow, 1962).

According to studies of humanistic psychology, self-realization is interpreted as the most important ontological state and modality of a fully functioning person (Rogers, 1963). According to its genesis, self-realization is the result of productive socialization of the personality (Jung, 1952) and is generated by some kind of internal existential desire for self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). The desire for self-actualization as a leading motivator in the adolescent period of life (Leontyev, 2002), psychologically inspires and mobilizes a young man, activates his abilities and internal resources to express himself, to gain valuable life experience, to express himself in learning, science, society, business, culture, etc. (Stipek, 1993).

Representatives of the eudemonic approach come to similar conclusions (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001). They believe that productive self-realization and self-determination of the personality are of great importance in maintaining psychological well-being. It is important to note that these and other approaches point out the crucial role of social and cultural conditions in the development and upbringing of a healthy personality. In this regard, the importance of the education system and, above all, higher education in the process of forming a psychologically healthy viable generation of students is highlighted (Peters, 1961; Li, 2017; Shutenko et al. 2018). For the healthy development of the personality in the educational system, a complex of different conditions and measures to maintain psychologically safe and life-affirming standards and practices of social and cultural growth are needed, setting positive dominants of consciousness, behaviour and social relations (Danakin & Shutenko, 2014). Among the leading psychological mechanisms for ensuring the psychological health of students, in our opinion, is the existence of a sustainable and productive experience of their self-realization in the educational process.

2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptual framework

In our study, we proceeded from the conceptual position about the social and cultural determination of today's youth psychological well-being (Rogers, 1961; Rubinstein, 2012; Leontyev, 2002). According to this provision, for healthy development of students, a holistic educational process is needed, which is aimed at creating the conditions for their full-fledged self-realization in the educational and upcoming professional activities as capable persons (Peters, 1961; Stipek, 1993; Shutenko, 2014; Li, 2017). This approach corresponds to the fundamental psychological research carried out within the framework of various scientific schools and approaches.

In the psychological dimension, the need for self-realization as the leading life intention of students implies a fundamental and more extensive phenomenological state associated with the processes of self-determination and self-fulfillment (Gewirth, 1998; Selezneva, 2015). During the course of study at the university, such educational practice plays a crucial role in the process of students' self-realization, which is aimed at the full development of the individual as the most important task and value of occupational attainment.

In our study, we also relied on a person-centered approach, according to which the university training process should cultivate personality-oriented technologies and forms of training future specialists for the development of students' internal forces, their creative and intellectual resources (Combs, 1962; Shutenko, 2018). This means that a successful

university should support and promote student initiatives in training, developing their proposals for interesting and promising research works and projects (*Doroshenko et al.*, 2016).

2.2. Hypothesis and object of the study

When planning and constructing the research, we relied on the **hypothesis** that the process of students' self-realization was due to the personalization of educational theory and practice at the university, ensuring the development of the internal potential of students as capable and competent individuals.

As **subject matter** of our research we considered the self-realization of students' youth as an indicator of their psychologically successful development in higher education.

The main **problem** of the research was the determination of subjective important circumstances and signs for students' self-realization in the educational space as factors for ensuring and maintaining the full development of the personality.

2.3. Participants

To collect objective quantitative information, it was organized a survey of students from two universities in Belgorod (Russia). In total, the study covered 220 students, of whom 110 were enrolled in the humanitarian faculties of the national university and 110 received technical education at the technological university. During the study, senior, 4th and 5th year students were interviewed.

The purpose of the survey were to determine the conditions and psychological characteristics of self-realization of students in university education.

Experimental work with the students of both universities was carried out during the 2017-2018 academic year.

2.4. Empirical methods

As the main methods of collecting and obtaining statistical data, we used a complex of psychological survey methods. To provide a psychological survey of students, we used the following test methods:

- Method "self-realization in learning" (Shutenko A. & Shutenko E., 2008);
- Method of the pair comparisons the Maslow's needs hierarchy (Maslow, 1987);
- Method "Motive and Purpose" (Sosnovsky, 1993);
- Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1963);
- Research method of self-attitude (Pantileyev, 1993);
- Life-sense orientations test (Leontyev, 1992).

2.5. Data processing methods

The study used such methods of counting and representation of data as: analysis method of difference's significance (Student's *t*-criterion), cluster analysis of data, and the method of rank correlation of Ch. Spearman.

As the main statistical method, Student's *t*-test was used, operating with differences in arithmetic mean values in two samples of students. The subsequent interpretation of the data was carried out only on statistically significant *t*-test data from those obtained, i.e. for those that were above the critically tabular with a sufficient level of confidence probability of the coefficient "p", which allows to judge about the number of probable errors. This coefficient, as is customary in psychological studies, must be no higher than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.005$) (Student, 1908).

2.6. The logic of experimental work

The research work consisted of two phases.

The **first stage** was devoted to identifying the features of students' self-realization through a survey method "self-realization in learning" (Shutenko A. & Shutenko E., 2008). According to the results, the main categories of students were established according to the level of self-realization in university education.

The **second stage** of the work consisted in the study of students' personal characteristics of different levels of self-realization through monitoring measurements and differentiated analysis of their psychological measurements data (motivation, personal orientations, self-attitude, life-sense features, etc.).

3. Results

3.1. Subjectively significant factors of students' self-realization in university education

To ensure the psychological well-being of students, a modern university should promote and expand the possibilities for their self-realization in the preparation process. It is obvious that there are general, basic conditions for ensuring such self-realization, which must be taken into account and respected in the construction of educational practices.

As a result of a series of sociological surveys, we identified the following three leading conditions for the self-realization of students:

1. *Personal involvement* of the students into the learning process (interest to learning, desire to study in the chosen university, satisfaction with the studies, pleasure in learning, personal importance of training involvement in the learning process, identification with the tutors and professionals, aspiration to express themselves entirely in training, etc.).

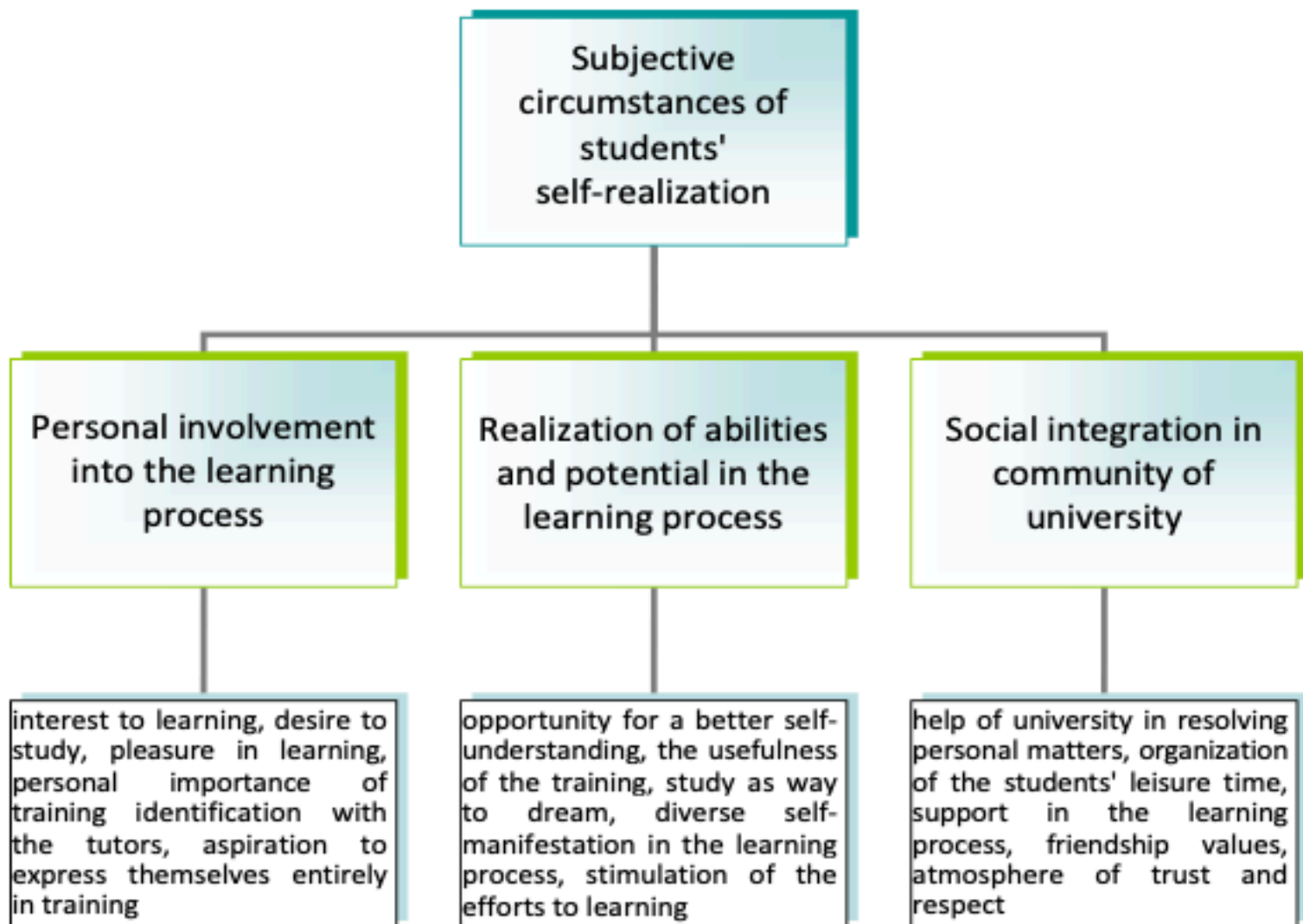
2. *Realization of abilities* in the learning process (development of students' potential, opportunity for a better self-understanding in the learning process, the usefulness of the training, education as an instrument for the realization of a dream, development of abilities and talents, education as the road to success and professional growth, diverse self-manifestation and complete self-expression in the learning process, stimulation of the efforts to learning, etc.).

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

Figure 1. represents the contents of the revealed conditions of students' self-realization

Figure 1

The contents of subjective circumstances of students' self-realization



Based on these conditions as a criterion of self-realization, we developed and tested a questionnaire – method "self-realization in learning" (Shutenko A. & Shutenko E., 2008).

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

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

From the point of view of *social integration* in the learning process, the majority of students feel maintenance from the university; feel the value of their personality in the learning process. Nevertheless, they believe that their life at the university could be active and rich.

In general, most of the students show the positive impact of the learning process at the university in terms of providing opportunities for their self-realization.

3.2. Differential characteristics of students' self-realization

As noted above, the second stage of the work consisted in the personal characteristics study of students of different levels of self-realization at the university.

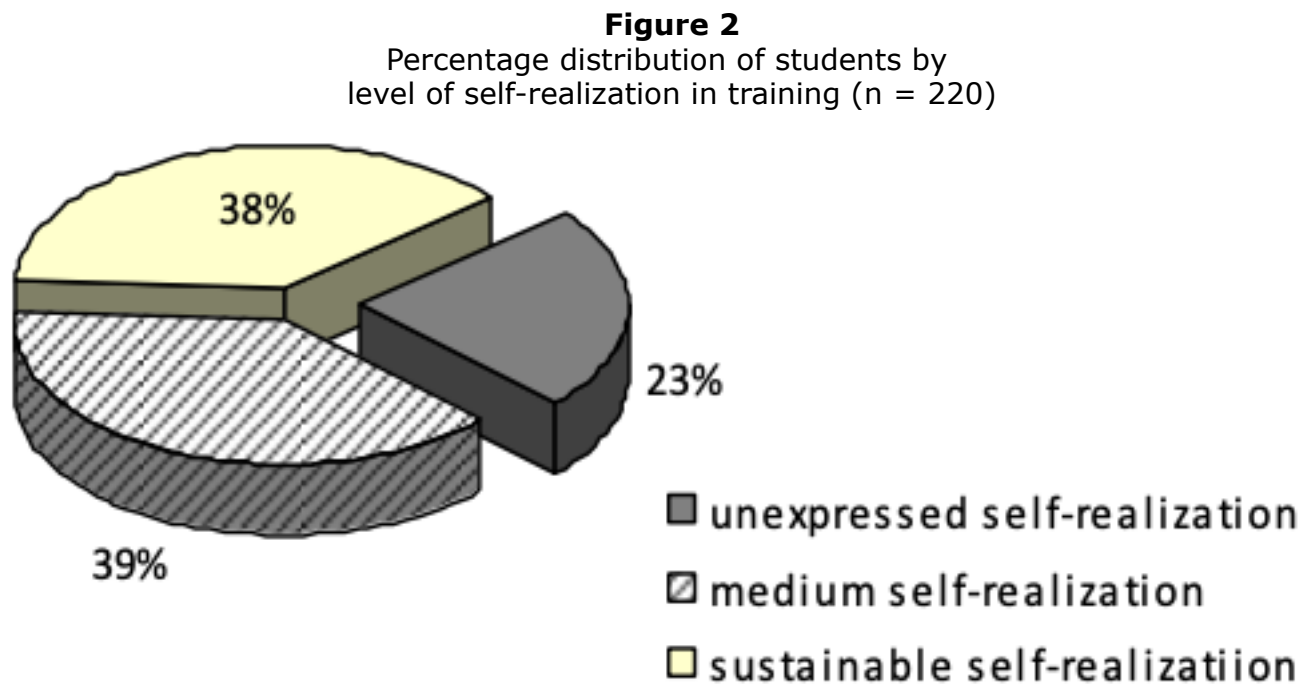
The processing of data on the basis of gender allowed us to state that young men, to a lesser extent, are experiencing serious difficulties in terms of self-realization in university preparation. They are less frustrated or dissatisfied with learning. However, they are not as active as girls take part in the life of the university. As for girls, they are more critical of their studies at the university, since they are more emotionally involved in the learning process. Meanwhile, both boys and girls have expressed social integration and commonality in the space of university education.

In professional terms, it was found that students of a technological university have a more responsible approach to the performance of their university duties, which they directly regard as a stage in their professional growth. At the same time, humanities students experience a more complete inclusion in the learning process, are more involved in the social and leisure spheres of university life.

According to the results of data cluster analysis, three groups of students with different levels of self-realization were formed:

- 1st group: students of unexpressed self-realization (51 people – 23%);
- 2nd group: students of medium self-realization (85 people – 39%); and
- 3rd group: students with sustainable self-realization (84 people – 38%).

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



It must be noted that the first group was the lowest in number, which indicates that in general there is a positive tendency to self-realization of the students in the process of their academic studies. According to the reconciliation of the answers given, the students of the higher level of self-realization tend to be more convinced that they made the right choice of university and are able to use their potential to bring significant benefits. They study with great interest, and they consider learning themselves not only as a formal necessity or a meeting place with comrades, but as a serious and important matter.

For students with a high level of self-realization, it is also typical to feel their personal involvement with the education process, to see in learning the most important activity that leads them to the goal, helps bring the realization of the dream closer and acts as a source of inspiration and emotional lift. The students of this group actively use the opportunities offered by the university to develop their potential and show their abilities in various spheres of life.

3.3. Psychological characteristics of self-realization process in learning

The **need-motivational sphere** was studied by means of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs through the pair group method (Maslow, 1987) and the Motive and Purpose method (Sosnovsky, 1993). During the use of these methods, the indicators were recognized in regard to the following forms of motivation: material needs; needs for security; needs for recognition; social needs; needs for self-expression (self-actualization); and motivation to achieve, learn, affiliate, dominate and study.

The next step was associated with the benchmark analysis in regards to the data on each indicator among the groups of the students the main *statistical method*, we use the

procedure of statistical significance analysis, which allows us to determine the level of significance of differences (or similarities) between the students in regard to the indicators being studied. The main statistical indicator was the *t*-value, evaluating the difference between the two groups of students (Student, 1908). The following interpretation of data is conducted only using *t*-values from the ones received, i.e. those that have a more significant (*t*-value) under the sufficient level of the *p*-value that allows us to determine the insignificant number of possible errors ($p \leq 0.005$).

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

It was also revealed that this part of students is less interested in academic subjects, they are not prepared for independent systematic work for the sake of the knowledge, they show low indicators on the scales of: "*satisfaction by achievements*" ($t = -5.34$, $p \leq 0.001$) and "*satisfaction by knowledge*" ($t = -2.294$, $p = 0.024$). 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 of hierarchy (according to Maslow's classification).

In contrast to the above, the successfully realized students showed higher indicators of the *need for self-expression* ($t = 3.084$, $p = 0.003$), *satisfaction by dominance* ($t = 2.990$, $p = 0.003$), and the *need for achievements* ($t = 2.564$, $p = 0.012$).

According to the data, generally, successful self-realization of the students is associated with their needs for personal self-determination in life.

The sphere of **personal orientations** was studied under the results of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1963). It analyzed the initial perceptions of the students of the opportunities for self-actualization in life based on their self-understanding, awareness of their personal qualities, advantages and disadvantages, orientations in life, etc. (Shostrom, 1974).

The results of this method showed that the indicators of *self-respect* of students with articulate self-realization 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. Thus, students who successfully realize themselves have a consciousness of the unity of their lives in the past, present and future, they do not tend to postpone life for tomorrow, they are not fixed on the past. They tend to have more characteristics of a self-established personality which means they can organize life in accordance with their beliefs and views. The acquired data showed a more positive plan of life goals among students with the high level of self-realization in the learning process.

The **sphere of self-attitudes** was studied by means of a personal attitudes questionnaire (Pantileev, 1993). In this area, a subjective sign of emotional activity towards "I" was recognized, resulting in some general feeling "for" or "against" themselves. This aspect was considered an emotional component of the students' self-awareness and perceived as significant in the context of their self-realization in the studies.

The benchmark study on the acquired data showed that more positive attitudes towards "I" were held by the students with articulate self-realization in the studies. They expect that their personality (the qualities and capacities) can cause respect, favor and approval from others.

Students with unexpressed self-realization in learning tend to be more *closeness* in their attitudes ($t = 2.932$, $p = 0.0004$), indicate lower levels of *self-confidence* ($t = -2.617$, $p = 0.010$) and higher levels of *inner contradiction* ($t = 1.987$, $p = 0.049$). Such data allowed us to confirm that the students of this group have emotional barriers of adequate self-consciousness, which stand in the way of their full and rich realization in the studies and postpone personal growth causing teenage struggle.

The students with articulate self-realization in the studies have much greater indicators on

the scale of *self-management* ($t=4.335, p\leq 0.001$) and of *reflected self-attitude* ($t=3.183, p=0.002$) and *self-esteem* ($t=2.956, p=0.0041$).

For research the **sphere of students' purpose orientations** a Life-sense orientations test was used (Leontyev, 1992), which assesses the topmost layer of psychological characteristics of a personality, specifically, self-perception of the course of life in terms of its target and sense definiteness.

According to received data of the comparative analysis, the students of successful self-realization achieve higher rates of *life productivity* ($t=3.838, p\leq 0,001$), *internal locus of control* ($t=4.502, p\leq 0,001$), *emotional intensity in life* ($t=3.799, p\leq 0,001$) and *life management* ($t=4.074, p\leq 0,001$).

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

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

The generalized data of the comparative analysis of results of all the measurements carried out are shown in Table 1. For the convenience of reading the data cited, the T-criteria are located only in the column that applies to students who showed higher rates on the studied characteristics.

Table 1

Data of the comparative analysis of personal characteristics of students with the different level of self-realization in training (by *t*-criterion of Student)

personal characteristics	students of unexpressed self-realization	students of articulate self-realization	<i>p</i>
needs and motivations			
attitude to learning		7.16	0.001
satisfaction by achievements		5.34	0.001
satisfaction by knowledge		2.29	0.024
need for security	2.26		0.026
need for self-expression		3.08	0.003
satisfaction by dominance		2.99	0.003
need for achievements		2.56	0.012
personal orientations			
self-respect		2.77	0.007

time management		2.32	0.022
need for self-actualization		2.18	0.031
self-attitudes			
closeness	2.93		0.001
self- confidence		2.62	0.010
inner contradiction	1.99		0.049
self-management		4.34	0.001
reflected self-attitude		3.18	0.002
self-esteem		2.96	0.004
life-sense orientations			
life productivity		3.84	0,001
internal locus of control		4.50	0,001
emotional intensity in life		3.80	0,001
life management		4.07	0,001

3.4. Analysis of the connection between the personality characteristics of the students and the level of their self-realization

As the statistical method for the establishment of this connection, we used the Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (Spearman, 1904). Under this method, the most obvious connection is between the attitude towards the studies indicator with the desire to attend classes at the university ($r = 0.51$), with the understanding of their value and usefulness ($r = 0.50$), with the absence of the disappointment in the chosen university ($r = 0.48$), with informal attitude towards classes ($r = 0.48$), and with psychological involvement in the learning process ($r = 0,46$). There is also a visible connection between the indicators of the satisfaction generated by studies with such aspects of self-realization in the learning process as: achievement of a better self-knowledge ($r = 0.50$) and realization of the personal potential ($r = 0.50$).

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

In the resolution area, the indicators of the internal and external locus of control positively affect the awareness of the university choice ($r = 0.43$ and $r = 0.44$ accordingly), the absence of disappointment in the studies at the chosen university ($r = 0.41$), achievement of a better self-understanding ($r = 0.41$) and personal involvement in the activities of the university ($r = 0.40$). In addition, it is essential to note the fact that there is a positive connection between the life productivity indicator and the students' ability to express

4. Conclusions

In general, the results obtained in our study suggest that there is a relationship between the level of self-realization of students and the positive motivational sphere of university education, as well as the integrity and consistency of the Self-concept of students due to the congruence of their internal aspirations to regulatory learning requirements. Especially clearly this connection appears in the life sense sphere, in their awareness of themselves as strong personalities, capable of making responsible decisions, building a productive and rich life, aimed at creative interaction with the world and with oneself in it.

As the data summarized in the study showed, the psychological well-being of students is a dynamic complex aggregate of internal processes and productive harmonious relationships with the world, with themselves in the process of learning in high school. At the personal level, psychological well-being acts as a cumulative effect and result of the productive socialization of the individual, the formation of an adequate picture of the world, positive self-awareness and constructive patterns of life activity. Psychological well-being of students in the process of studying at a university is closely related to their successful and sustainable self-realization in the preparation process, which depends on the following conditions: personal involvement in the learning process; Realization of abilities in the education process; social integration into the university community.

The work carried out has shown the fruitfulness of sociocultural determination in the study of the problems of contemporary students, because in the context of this determination we can find a universal mechanism for its self-realization. At the level of the individual, this mechanism consists in the realization of culture in itself, and not of itself in culture. It is a question of the young man's realization of his potential and essential forces, which are initially revealed not so much in the internal plan as in the socio-cultural sphere, in the constant devotion of oneself to something more significant than one's own personality (studies, profession, science, country, society, culture, etc.). Such an approach to the problem of self-realization, in our opinion, can serve as a heuristic basis for its scientific and humanitarian reflection, in which the field of education and, in particular, higher school is a kind of field for self-realization, a social and cultural space for the search for meanings and ways of developing the essential forces of students.

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