

Emotional Stability as a Condition of Students' Adaptation to Studying in a Higher Educational Institution

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ABSTRACT

Background/Objectives: The objective of the paper is analysis and description of findings of an empiric study on the issue of social and psychological adaptation of first year students to studying in a higher educational institution. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** Using the methods of theoretical analysis the paper's authors plan and carry out an experimental study, which made it possible to relate personality's social-psychological adaptation to personality's emotional stability as well as to prove the need for developing programs of psychological content that optimize personality's adaptive processes. **Findings:** Based on the findings of scientists in the area of social-psychological adaptation, we understand this phenomenon as a process of interaction between a personality and social environment that results in adaptiveness, which means effective accustoming to social environment by a personality through accepting of its standards of interaction, system of values and forms of domain-specific activity as well. We consider the level of development of emotional stability as personal formation the base of social-psychological adaptation. According to stated base theoretical provisions, we included the following methods into the program of the empiric study: Rogers' and Dymond's Social and Psychological Adaptation of Personality, Self-Esteem of Psychological Adaptiveness, H. Eysenck's Diagnostics of Self-Esteem of Mental States. **Application/Improvements:** The low level of social-psychological adaptation is typical for 50% of respondents that took part in the study representing the need for developing and goal-oriented implementation of a program of psychological aid aimed at optimizing the process of social-psychological adaptation by means of optimizing the development of first year students' emotional sphere.

KEYWORDS

Adaptation, personality, personality's social-psychological adaptation, personality's emotional stability

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 March 2016
Revised 30 May 2016
Accepted 20 June 2016

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Introduction

Problem statement

The today's situation of our society' development, which is characterized by a great number of various political, economic and social transformations, makes scientists (primarily – psychologists) to address the issue of personality's adaptation to ever-changing conditions of its life activity.

The present is marked by numerous negative effects on a personality, which are based on the global economic crisis, a number of social changes in the Ukrainian society, environmental degradation. The severization of requirements to the citizen of our state as an active subject of life activities, to the growth of intensity of information load and personal liability for carried out activities, a decrease in social security – that's not nearly a complete list of factors, which cause difficult life situations – part and parcel of dynamic development of society.

According to modern researchers, emotional stability is one of the main individual and psychological characteristics that determines the personality's stability to stress-producing effects of difficult life situations. It is emotional stability that has a leading role when it comes to achieving good results in educational, sport and professional fields. The question is not only the ability to adapt to difficult emotive situations but, above all, the ability to resist to their stress-producing nature pursuing the efficient implementation of a set task.

State of knowledge in literature

Year after year a growing number of scientists address the problem of studying the phenomenon of emotional stability as a factor that influences success of human activity under difficult stress conditions. The academic interest is largely focused on the search for correlates of emotional stability to various personal characteristics (Trukhmanova, 2004), analysis of features of emotional stability formation under difficult conditions of professional activity (Volkov & Okonskaya, 1975), studying psychological-pedagogical conditions of emotional stability development and maintaining (Maklakov, 2001). Both national and foreign researchers often indirectly indicate stress-protective and adaptive potential of the phenomenon in question. The last decade was marked by a number of psychological researches aimed at studying stress-protective and adaptive potential of emotional stability.

The issue of personal determinants, which largely determined success of personality's activity in difficult life circumstances, is not new to the national psychological science. Today studying the phenomenon of emotional stability takes on new perspectives due to abandoning studies of extreme conditions of professional activities in favour of analysis of difficult life situations of certain categories of population. Mainly personality's individual-psychological characteristics in stress-producing situations of educational and work activities, in the area of family relations and health are studied.

American physiologist W.B. Cannon (1953) also suggests the similar ideas about the objective need of a living organism to sustain the constancy of internal environment, “balancing” itself with changes that take place in its environment.

The fundamental discoveries of national physiologists of the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries I.M. Sechenov (1863) and I.P. Pavlov



(1955), who objectively proved the role of the central nervous system as the key factor of that counterbalancing, were of paramount importance for developing the issue of organism's adaptation.

For the moment the issue of adaptation is still of relevance and being studied by representatives of many human sciences (philosophers, sociologists, culture experts, biologists, teachers, etc.).

Representatives of psychological science show a special interest in the issue of adaptation. The analysis of psychological studies devoted to personality's adaptation (scientific papers of O.A. Ashikhmina (2009) and others) effectively proved that scientists, assuming the concept that human is not only a living organism but a personality, a subject in macro- and Microsystems, consider homeostasis, which is regulated by the central nervous system, in relation to not only biological and neuropsychic body state but also to personality. Moreover, proceeding on the basis that society and social environment have a significant influence on the development of personality, researchers reasonably suggest strong interrelation of the processes of adaptation and socialization of a subject, introducing the term of "social-psychological adaptation" into scientific usage. In our opinion the idea that personality's activity determines success of the process of social-psychological adaptation also appears important (Kolarkova & Chikina, 2015).

Statement of basic research material

In accordance with results of in-depth analysis of both foreign and national researches on the topic of social-psychological adaptation (Serebryakova et al., 2016), we suggest to understand this phenomenon as a process of interaction between a personality and social environment that results in adaptiveness. It is emotional stability, which acts as a personal formation and implies "effective accustoming to social environment by a personality through accepting of its standards of interaction, system of values and forms of domain-specific activity as well" (Serebryakova et al., 2016), provides success in person's adaptation to most diverse life situations.

That said, we distinguish the level of development of personality's emotional sphere, namely, its emotional stability, as a major structural component of social-psychological adaptation. What is typical for that phenomenon? To answer this question we referred to the analysis of researches pursued by scientists in this area (scientific works of V.G. Norakidze (1966), O.A. Chernikova (1967), V.D. Shadrikov (1997) and others). Here are approaches of some researchers to the definition of "emotional stability":

— one should begin the psychological study of difficult life situations with studying the issue of correlation between the "internal" and "external", subjective and objective components (Chernikova, 1967). The "internal" means a complex of personality's individual-psychological characteristics and adaptive potential, which determine resistance to stress-producing exposure; the category of the "external" is determined by the content of a difficult life situation. The need for differentiation of these two components is caused by the fact that majority of modern scientists understand a life situation as a consequence of active interaction between a personality and environment, therefore, posing a problem of correlating personal and situational variables;

— a result of continuous interaction between an individual and situations he belongs to. Dominating of personal or situational variables in the formation of personality's behavioral performance mainly depends on the genesis of a difficult life situation and its subjective significance for a person. In the majority of difficult life situations a personality influences the course of events through peculiarities of psychophysiological organization, personal traits (locus of control, emotionality, extraversion), appraisal of his own capabilities. In addition, personality's behavioral performance in difficult life circumstances is of overcoming nature, i.e. it is focused on solution or adaptation to situation at hand.

A combination of subjective and objective factors, therefore, forms a unique life situation of a personality, takes a particular time span on the ontogenetic way of individual's development and is a cause of formation of new patterns of behaviour for the purpose of effective overcoming of life's challenges.

High school graduation and enrolment in a higher education institution is one of such crisis, emotionally charged stages of a person's life. According to D.B. Elkonin (Chernikova, 1967), it, above all, comes from a gap in educational system. The educational system a child, teenage, youth accustomed in school is finished. What's next??? What career should I choose??? What my life will be like in a higher education institute where educational process dramatically differs from the one I get used to in school??? Complete change of social environment, common information overlearning, etc. may also appear as adaptive risks. However, how successfully a subject adapts to society at such crisis stages of its life determines the process of its socialization, which is "of complex nature and can be conditionally divided into objective (behavioral responses observed externally) and subjective (subjective sensation of success, adaptedness under conditions of society)" (Volkov & Okonskaya, 2016).

Working in a higher education institute and handling a number of students' (particularly, first-year students') problems made us to set studying emotional stability as field of our research. In addition, we consider emotional stability a condition of successful social-psychological adaptation of first-year students to studying in a higher educational institution.

The definition of a "difficult life situation" is quite vague due to wide use of the notion in numerous psychological works. The suggested category is, therefore, should be analyzed in two ways. A difficult life situation being a kind of social-psychological situation in a broad sense places strict requirements to personality's adaptative resources, determines changes of its mental state and quality of interaction within the system "subject – situation". "Difficult life situations" should be understood as any life circumstances, which lead to deterioration of performance and established relations, cause negative emotions and experience, give rise to discomfort and may lead to negative consequences for personality development under certain conditions. The difficulty of life circumstances in a narrow sense (Volkov & Okonskaya, 2016) defines value, which could be lost or destroyed under certain conditions. Finally, difficult life situations can be defined as actions a person needs to do, which exceed his adaptive capacities and resources. Thus, we can distinguish characteristic features of difficult life situations based on the analysis of literature. These are strict requirements to personality's adaptative resources, deterioration of performance and established relations, domination of negative emotions and



experience. Another characteristic feature of difficult life situations should be noticed. It is symptomatology of deformation of personality's temporal transpective, when the future lacks its positive valency, the present is chaotic, and the past doesn't provide resources for productive life activities any longer. Thus, each of the above-mentioned definitions puts an emphasis on the stress-producing nature of difficult life situations and need for stirring up the personality's adaptive potential for the purpose of their efficient transformation. That is why the need for searching for an integrative personal characteristic, which would largely determine maintaining personality's psychological well-being under conditions of negative influence of numerous stress factors, arises. Considering emotional stability as an individual psychological characteristic, which determines, to some extent, the efficiency of activities in stress-producing and difficult life conditions, we, therefore, assume that its structure has stress-protective and adaptive potential. The latter ensures personality's adaptation to activity, acts as a regulator of behavior tactics and strategy of selection of action in an emotive situation of life activities.

For the purpose of planning the program of our empiric study we addressed to researches of scientists who characterize personality's emotional sphere at the stage of youth, which correlates to enrolment at a higher educational institution by time (scientific works of G.M. Andreeva (2005), N.D. Levitov (1969) and others). We distinguished the following fundamental characteristics of emotional sphere of young age based on the analysis of those researchers' works:

— emotional sensitivity. In the period of youth the potential of person's emotionality is unlocked under favourable conditions;

— emotions become vivid, expressive to the utmost (when we describe a teenager we use words "blood-boiling, fervent" for a reason);

— both the range, content and depth of feelings change. At this age stage general senses, which are closely interrelated with the process of establishing personality's world view, self-acceptance, and formation of the self-concept, are being actively formed along with formation of the system of object-specific feelings, which A.N. Leontyev (1971) defines as so-called "emotional constants" responsible for stability of emotional attitudes.

However, emotional expressions are still fluctuating at this age stage and any disbalance with society may lead to a sharp change of emotional profile, mood, state, often driving a teenage to a critical level. It's no coincidence that many scientists who study the issue of adaptation at the stage of youth pay attention to display (seemingly groundless) of such emotion as anxiety that prevents formation of personality's adaptive behaviour and leads not only to disruption of personality's behavioural integration but also to general mental disturbance. G.S. Gabdreva (2009) points out that the higher anxiety level being subjective manifestation of personality's ill-being characterizes its experience of emotional discomfort, looking for ill-being, premonition of impending danger, etc. Experiencing anxious feeling cannot but affect results of studying in a higher educational institution that in turn will undermine the process of students' social-psychological adaptation.

For the purpose of organization of an experimental research we planned the research program that includes the system of test methods aimed at studying both the level of first year students' social-psychological adaptation and their emotional sphere:

Social and psychological adaptation (Rogers C. And Dymond R.)

The goal of this test method is studying peculiarities of personality' adaptive period using such integral indicators as adaptation, self-acceptance, acceptance of others, emotional comfort, internality, strive for domination. It is made in the form of a questionnaire with 101 statements about a person, his life style, feelings, thoughts, habits, mode of behavior. Of these, 37 statements match criteria of personality's social-psychological adaptation, other 37 – criteria of deadaptation and 27 statements are neutral (these statements involve a control scale (false scale)). A respondent reads a statement and relates it to his life style, habits and estimates how far the statement correlates with his own experience. A respondent chooses one option (the best option) of seven options numbered from 0 to 6: «0» – it is not applicable to me at all; «1» – it doesn't sound like me in most cases; «2» – I doubt it could be applicable to me; «3» – I scarcely could relate it to myself; «4» – it's sounds like me, but I'm not sure; «5» – it's sounds like me; «6» –that's exactly who I am. The data obtained are processed using a key developed by the authors of the method. The key makes it possible to examine the following characteristics:

- coefficient of social-psychological adaptiveness,
- coefficient of social-psychological de-adaptiveness,
- factors, which determine adaptiveness – de-adaptiveness.

The method of Self-Esteem of Psychological Adaptiveness

A respondent appraises 15 statements: 10 from A group and 5 from B group. If a respondent totally agrees with a statement, he writes "yes" next to the statement. If he disagrees, he writes "no". The difference of sums of affirmative answers to questions from both groups makes it possible to estimate the level of personality's psychological adaptability. The key to interpretation of experimental findings (levels of social-psychological adaptiveness): 8-10 points – high; 6-7 points – above average; 5 points – average; 3-4 points – below average; 2-3 points – low.

The Eysenck's method Self-esteem of Mental States

According to the method, a respondent is offered 40 statements, which help to estimate anxiety, frustration, aggression, rigidity. If a described state is typical for a respondent, he gets 2 points; if a described state is not common, the answer is estimated at 1 point; if a respondent doesn't observe the state described in a sentence at all, he gets 0 points. The data obtained are processed using a key according to which #1-10 characterize such parameter of emotional sphere as anxiety; questions #11-20 characterize the level of frustration; questions #21-30 – aggression and questions #31-40 – rigidity. By summing points by each group of questions, we can appraise the level of respondent's emotional development.

We assume if a respondent has low indicators by all four characteristics (anxiety, frustration, aggression, and rigidity), it is possible to draw a conclusion on a high level of development of his emotional sphere, including a high level of emotional stability. High values obtained within the framework of the method,



on the contrary, indicate a low level of development of personality's emotional sphere, including such characteristic, as emotional stability.

First-year students of Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after Minin were respondents in this research.

Conclusions

The thorough analysis of data obtained at the end of the undertaken study leads to the following conclusions:

— implementation of the method of Rogers and Dymond Social and Psychological Adaptation indicates that 73% of all research participants feature adaptiveness within the limits of denoted standard indicators. The rest 27% of respondents exceed the standard. However, if we relate the parameter of adaptiveness with other indicators, we see that they somewhat do not match each other. For example, consistent emotional discomfort is typical for 30% of respondents who experience it being in the group with their fellow students. These respondents also exceed parameters by the “acceptance of others” scale that, in our opinion, indicates their emotional discomfort, disbalance, which lead to unstability of their emotional expressions and, as a consequence, a drop in adaptive opportunities. We also consider the data obtained by the “self-acceptance – non-acceptance” scale as another factor influencing a decrease in the level of adaptiveness. The values of 27% of respondents indicate their non-acceptance of themselves, negative attitude towards themselves, which, in our opinion, also has a negative impact on the level of adaptation;

— the data obtained based on the method Self-Esteem of Psychological Adaptiveness confirm the above made conclusions. 30% of respondents have a low level of self-esteem of psychological adaptiveness within the framework of this method;

— the detailed study of the level of development of emotional sphere within the framework of the Eysenck's method Diagnostics of Self-esteem of Mental States indicates that only 50% of respondents have a high level of development of emotional sphere, stability of emotional expressions. They're moderate, calm, non-aggressive, easily switch from one activity to another. The other half (50%) of respondents needs an adjustment of emotional expressions, since overanxiety, aggression, inability to move from one activity to another, and a high level of frustration as well are typical for them.

Area of further research

The generalized analysis of the above-described experimental findings objectively confirms the relevance of our address to the issue of emotional stability and its impact on the social and psychological adaptation of first-year students.

Based on the analysis of modern studies of the phenomenon of emotional stability, we can state the presence of stress-protective and adaptive potential in the structure of emotional stability and consider the above-mentioned individual psychological characteristic as one of determinants, which determine efficiency of activity in stressogenic conditions of everyday life.

Development and experimental approval of a developing program aimed at optimization of the process of social-psychological adaptation through stabilization of personality's emotional expressions is also of particular interest.

We set elaboration of that developing program as a goal of further research activity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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