

Study of self-actualization needs of Russian students as a factor of competitiveness in the labor market

Estudio de las necesidades de autorrealización de los estudiantes rusos como factor de competitividad en el mercado laboral

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ABSTRACT:

The article discusses the results of the empirical study of self-actualization needs of Russian students on the example of three Russian universities: Moscow Region State University, Belgorod State National Research University and Bratsk State University. The concept of a self-actualizing personality by A. Maslow was taken as a theoretical foundation of the research. For the empirical study, N.F. Kalina's adaptation of A.V. Lazukin's diagnostic methods was used. The study showed that students have a certain motivational potential for self-actualization, which holds true for the whole sample as well as for each of the universities involved. Students enrolled in graduate programs have a higher level of motivation for self-actualization compared to students enrolled in undergraduate programs.

Keywords: Competitiveness of university graduates, self-development, self-realization, self-actualization, self-actualizing personality, Russian students

RESUMEN:

El artículo analiza los resultados del estudio empírico de las necesidades de autorrealización de los estudiantes rusos en el ejemplo de tres universidades rusas: la Universidad Estatal de la Región de Moscú, la Universidad Estatal de Investigación de Belgorod y la Universidad Estatal de Bratsk. El concepto de una personalidad autorrealizada por A. Maslow fue tomado como una base teórica de la investigación. Para el estudio empírico, N.F. La adaptación de Kalina de A.V. Se utilizaron los métodos de diagnóstico de Lazukin. El estudio mostró que los estudiantes tienen un cierto potencial motivacional para la autoactualización, que es válido para toda la muestra, así como para cada una de las universidades involucradas. Los estudiantes matriculados en programas de posgrado tienen un mayor nivel de motivación para la autoactualización en comparación con los estudiantes matriculados en programas de pregrado.

Palabras clave: competitividad de los graduados universitarios, autodesarrollo, autorrealización, autorrealización, personalidad autorrealizada, estudiantes rusos.

1. Introduction

The Russian system of higher education is focused on the development of creative and social activity of future professionals. This provision is enshrined in the new federal state educational standards of higher education. So, for those studying undergraduate, the standards are set to form a universal competence formulated as "the ability to manage one's own time, build and realize the trajectory of self-development based on the principles of lifelong education". Modern Russian high school system has extensive tools that allow students to instill knowledge and skills that contribute to the maximum exposure and use of an individual's creative potential (Pastukhova, 2009; Vittenbek, 2016). However, it should be recognized that these knowledge and skills are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for an individual's self-actualization. It is also necessary to have everyday's life desire (including professional sphere) to utilize this knowledge and skills for continuous self-development.

We also note that the modern era - the era of informatization - is characterized by an avalanche-like increase in the amount of information in all spheres of human activity. Therefore, knowledge and skills become obsolete very quickly, which makes the higher education system insufficient for successful professional realization of a person in the long term. The well-known phrase "An educated man is the one who knows where to find out what he does not know," which belongs to the German sociologist G. Simmel, who lived at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, have not lost its relevance a century later (Simmel, n.d.). Therefore, the idea of "lifelong learning" becomes dominant in the modern world. Steep acceleration of scientific and technological progress, which is one of the most striking trends in contemporary world, reinforces this trend.

Therefore, the task of higher education is not bound to formation of an appropriate set of knowledge and skills related to specialization of a degree, but rather is to create in students steady inner motivation for constant self-development (Slinkova et al., 2017). A high level of motivation as well as striving for the maximum development and use of personal creative potential in solving specific practical problems are becoming the most important factors in the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market (Grudistova, 2009). This determines the relevance of the goal set in this study - to analyze the self-actualization needs of Russian students and to provide evidence for approaches to activation of these needs in university education process.

2. Method

Before turning to the description of empirical research, we introduce some terminological clarifications. The fact is that while analyzing the problem in terms of Russian language, different terms are used: self-development (self-improvement), self-expression and self-realization (self-actualization). Between these concepts there is a subtle, hardly distinguishable difference, which we will try to disclose below.

Self-development is the deliberate and purposeful activity of a person in developing his abilities, his positive qualities, and limiting or eliminating negative ones. The most important conditions for human self-development are openness to new experience and focus on self-improvement. A person can fully develop only if he strives to learn new things and to improve itself on this basis. Therefore, the self-development issue is, first of all, a question of personal motivation for self-improvement. The lack of motivation for self-development leads to the fact that people do not seek to change themselves or at least get rid of those traits and qualities that disturb their lives.

The awareness of the need of continuous development of one's own inclinations, abilities, personality traits and qualities in order to increase one's level of competitiveness in the increasingly complex conditions of modern life contributes to increase in personal motivation.

However, human life is not limited to professional activities. All what is called personal life is of exceptional importance for a person. At the same time, the sphere of a person's personal life is also constantly becoming more complex, overfilled with stresses, conflicts and other

factors that negatively affect one's physical and spiritual health. Therefore, the tasks of self-development are not limited to achieving high performance in professional activities, but also involve the development of those personal qualities and traits that help a person to make his life more comfortable (ability to handle stress, sociability, tolerance etc.).

So, self-development is a person-initiated own activity which aim is to develop one's own abilities, knowledge, skills, qualities and traits. However, it seems that self-development is not and cannot be an ultimate goal in itself. As an example, let us suppose a person who constantly nourishes his knowledge, for example, by reading popular science literature, but does not use this knowledge to improve his work, does not share this new knowledge with other people. In this case, self-development for the sake of self-development itself, of course, has a certain value, but does not provide full-fledged personal growth, which involves utilization of accumulated knowledge, expression of oneself, actualization of one's true nature by means of new knowledge and skills. When one has in mind these aspects of personal growth, one could refer to "self-realization", "self-expression" and "self-actualization" terms.

The terms "self-realization", "self-expression" and "self-actualization" are often considered as synonyms. The commonality of these terms is obvious, although each of them contains individual shades that are important from the point of view of the question's theory, but are not essential from the standpoint of the practical solution of the personal growth problem. Therefore, from now we will use the term "self-actualization". This term was first introduced into scientific circulation by K. Goldstein, however, the concept of self-actualization of personality was most fully developed in the works of K. Rogers and A. Maslow – representatives of humanistic psychology.

K. Rogers considered self-actualization as "the tendency of an organism to develop its abilities in order to preserve and develop its personality" (Rogers, 1963, p. 45). Within the framework of his concept, self-actualization is a process within which a person realizes its own potential throughout his or her life with the goal of becoming a fully functioning person. The term "self-actualization" in A. Maslow's interpretation "refers to the desire of people to realize themselves, namely, the tendency to manifest in what is potentially inherent in them. This inclination can be defined as the desire to show the distinctive features inherent in a person in order to achieve everything he is capable of in a more prominent degree" (Maslow, 1954, p. 68). Self-actualization is the highest motive in the hierarchy of needs by A. Maslow. The completion of the hierarchical series of needs by need of self-actualization seems to be quite reasonable and logical for us. Since the development of a person as an individual expands his potential, the need for self-actualization can never be fully satisfied. And this means that the process of motivating of one's behavior by means of needs is endless.

Throughout his life, A. Maslow studied prominent public figures and personalities of the past. As a result of these studies, he singled out the characteristics of a self-actualizing person, the main ones of those include the following (Maslow, 1954):

- 1) adequate perception of reality. According to A. Maslow, self-actualizing people live in the real world, they are not vulnerable to confuse what is happening in reality with their own desires, anxieties or ideas of the social stratum to which they belong;
- 2) accepting oneself and others - self-actualizing people tend to reckon with human nature, not trying to contradict it, they accept themselves and others with all the advantages and disadvantages;
- 3) spontaneity, which A. Maslow considered as a manifestation of simplicity and naturalness in behavior. Self-actualized people are not prone to histrionics and attempts to produce an effect;
- 4) focus on external problems and tasks' solving. Since self-actualizing people do not consider themselves as a problem, their energy is directed towards external tasks and problems solving. They have breadth of mind as well as the ability to be above everyday problems, to think big;
- 5) the tendency to solitude. In A. Maslow's opinion, self-actualizing individuals do not feel discomfort in solitude, they love solitude, in any case, more than ordinary people;

- 6) autonomy (self-sufficiency). Characteristic features of self-actualizing people are the ability to make independent decisions and responsibility for their consequences, self-discipline, a tendency to act independently, and not to be a tool in other's hands;
- 7) freshness of perception and gratitude to fate. Self-actualizing people have the admirable ability to freshly and naively experience simple joys of life, to accept as a miracle what has become commonplace for others;
- 8) modesty and respect for others. A. Maslow notes that self-actualizing people show friendly relations with people, they are ready to learn from anyone who can teach them something new; they do not care about prestige considerations and external signs of their social status;
- 9) creativity. Undoubtedly, this characteristic is a mandatory affiliation of self-actualizing people, and it manifests itself in any occupation, and not only in those areas that are traditionally considered to be creative.

In Russian science, the topic of self-actualization has been developed in works of L.G. Bryleva (2002), I.A. Vitin (2002), D.A. Leontiev (2002; 2011), E.F. Yaschenko (2005) et al.

In addition to theoretical studies, researchers have attempted to create diagnostic methods that allow people to identify the intensity of traits inherent in self-actualizing personality. One of the first such techniques was the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) Questionnaire by E. Shostrom, which was based on A. Maslow's concept of the self-actualizing personality. Among the Russian diagnostic methods, the most widely known is N.F. Kalina's adaptation of A.V. Lazukin's method (Fetiskin et al., 2002), which was used by us in empirical research. This technique is one of the options for adapting the POI test to characteristic features of Russian mentality and includes 11 rating scales:

- orientation in time, characterizing the degree of how much an individual values the present time as the only one able to provide useful results through certain actions (as opposed to regrets about the past and dreams about the future);
- values as the basis of striving for well-being and healthy relationships with people, without desire to manipulate them in one's own interests;
- look at the nature of man. This scale describes the belief in people that serves as a firm foundation of trust in people, impartiality, benevolence;
- need for knowledge, i.e. openness to new knowledge and impressions, unselfish thirst for the new;
- desire for creativity, i.e. desire to act and get satisfaction from an activity;
- autonomy as a characteristic of an individual's mental health as well as his maturity and self-sufficiency;
- spontaneity - a characteristic of self-confidence and confidence to the world around them, common to self-actualizing people; spontaneity relates to freedom and naturalness;
- self-understanding as a characteristic of self-confident people who are not prone to substitution of their own opinions and evaluations by external social standards;
- autosimpathy - perceived positive "I-concept", which serves as the basis of mental health and integrity of the person;
- contact, considered as a general predisposition to mutually beneficial and pleasant contacts with other people, a necessary basis for a synergistic attitude of the personality;
- flexibility in communication, which characterizes presence or absence of social stereotypes, ability to adequate self-expression in communication.

3. Results and discussion

An empirical study of self-actualization needs of Russian students was conducted on the basis of three Russian universities: Moscow Region State University, Belgorod State National Research University and Bratsk State University.

Moscow Region State University (MRSU) traces its roots back to 1931, and is one of the

main spots for students from Moscow and the Moscow Region. Belgorod State National Research University (BelSU) is a leading institution of higher education in the Central Black Earth region located in the center of the European part of the Russian Federation. This is one of the oldest universities in Russia, whose history started in 1876. Bratsk State University (BrSU) is one of the young, but highly reputable universities in Russia, with the majority of students from the Siberian Federal District of the Russian Federation.

The study involved 409 students, and university division was the following: MRSU - 153 participants, BelSU - 136, BrSU - 120. Table 1 presents the results of the research with respect to universities.

Table 1
Assessment of the degree of manifestation of the student's needs in self-actualization at universities

Assessment scale	Degree of manifestation, <i>points</i>			
	In the whole sample	MRSU	BelSU	BrSU
Time orientation	8.91	8.76	8.89	9.07
Values	9.25	9.76	9.33	8.66
A look at the nature of man	6.74	6.63	6.19	7.40
Need for knowledge	8.46	8.34	9.68	7.35
Desire for creativity	9.39	9.49	9.79	8.89
Autonomy	7.49	7.59	7.10	7.77
Spontaneity	6.71	6.87	6.27	7.00
Self-understanding	7.48	6.96	7.25	8.22
Autosympathy	7.41	7.16	7.02	8.05
Contact	7.26	7.69	6.46	7.64
Communication flexibility	7.58	8.47	7.17	7.09
Average value	7.91	7.97	7.83	7.92

The survey showed, that students' needs for self-actualization are to some extent above the average level, which holds true for the whole selection as well as for each of the universities separately. According to the generally used method of self-actualization diagnostics, the maximum value for each of the assessed scales is 15, and mean value was defined to be 7.5 points). At the same time, the maximum level of manifestation of the need for self-actualization among the universities was revealed among MRSU students (7.97), and the minimum level among BelSU students (7.83). Analyzing the selection shows that the highest score was obtained on "desire for creativity"-scale (9.39), which indicates a fairly high level of students' creativity. On such scales as "orientation in time", "values", "need for knowledge" and "flexibility in communication" the scores obtained were also above the average level.

The lowest level of expression in the whole sample was obtained on "spontaneity" (6.71 points) and "view of human nature"-scales (6.74 points). It should be noted that "spontaneity" -scale has the largest dispersion of individual results: from 0 to 12 points. Spontaneity is called one of the most characteristic signs of a self-actualizing personality. Spontaneity is ensured by inner freedom, self-confidence and trust in others. Spontaneity implies self-acceptance, naturalness in behavior and expression of feelings; therefore, it is usually considered as the highest manifestation of a person's individuality. Spontaneity usually correlates with autonomy, self-understanding, autosympathy and contact, which has been confirmed in our research. The indicators were below the average on these scales. As the personal experience of the authors witnesses, this picture is quite typical for the majority of Russian students. In the presence of creative potential, striving for new knowledge and experience, as well as possessing fairly well-developed system of moral values, they lack confidence in themselves and in the world around them (Yadrov, 2018). This does not allow students to fully realize their potential and demonstrates the need for a lot of inner work in gaining self-confidence and all that might be called as free will in order to unleash their potential.

The students of Moscow Region State University have the highest level of expression of "value" scale's characteristics (9.76 points) with individual results from 6 to 13 points. This indicates that the majority of students share the values of a self-actualizing person, among whom A. Maslow attributed such values as truth, good, beauty, perfection, accomplishments, justice, etc.

The students of Belgorod State National Research University express the highest (in the total sample) level of desire for creativity (9.79 points) with individual values varying from 6 to 14 points. Perhaps this is due to the fact that this university is promoting itself as a research university, which attracts the most creative youth. At the same time, the students of this university have the lowest level (both in the total sample and in the context of the assessed scales) in "look at human nature"-variable (6.19 points) with the individual values dispersing from 3 to 12 points. This circumstance is considered as concerning, since it indicates a lack of trust in people, impartiality and benevolence. This conclusion is confirmed by the low values on the scales of "spontaneity" (6.27 points) and "contact" (6.46 points).

Students of Bratsk State University recorded the smallest scatter of results on the evaluated scales. The students of this university gained the maximum number of points (9.07) on "orientation in time" scale. This indicates that the participants live in the present, not postponing their lives "for later" and not trying to seek for refuge in the past. They are well aware of the existential value of life, "here and now".

Table 2 presents the results of the study with differentiation according to the levels of education (bachelor's and master's degrees). The study involved 342 undergraduate students and 67 masters.

Table 2
Assessment of the degree of manifestation of the students' needs in self-actualization with regard to study level

Assessment scale	Degree of manifestation, <i>points</i>	
	Baccalaureate	Magistracy
Time orientation	8.57	9.53
Values	9.25	9.04
A look at the nature of man	6.91	6.78
Need for knowledge	8.24	9.24

Desire for creativity	9.23	9.12
Autonomy	7.24	7.79
Spontaneity	6.53	7.03
Self-understanding	7.31	8.04
Autosympathy	7.16	8.24
Contact	7.17	8.18
Communication flexibility	7.47	8.93
Average value	7.73	8.26

In general, students enrolled in master's programs have higher level of motivation for self-actualization compared with students enrolled in undergraduate programs (8.26 and 7.73 points, respectively). This seems to be quite logical, since, among the admitted to master's programs are predominately those who seek to increase their competence in a chosen field. At the same time, according to certain scales ("values", "view of human nature" and "desire for creativity"), the intensity of the characteristics of a self-actualizing personality among bachelors turned out to be higher than for masters. For bachelors, maximum values were recorded on the scales of "value" (9.25 points) and "desire for creativity" (9.23 points), and for masters on the scales "orientation in time" (9.53) and "need for knowledge" (9.24). The minimum values for both bachelors and masters were detected in "look at human nature" (6.91 and 6.78 points, respectively) and "spontaneity" scales (6.53 and 7.03).

Table 3 presents the results of the study with differentiation by age.

Table 3
Assessment of the degree of manifestation of the students' needs in self-actualization with differentiation by age

Assessment scale	Degree of manifestation, <i>points</i>		
	up to 20 years	20-25 years	over 25 years old
Time orientation	8.87	8.81	9.60
Values	9.82	8.56	7.71
A look at the nature of man	7.31	6.54	7.28
Need for knowledge	8.52	8.30	7.68
Desire for creativity	9.49	9.19	7.69
Autonomy	8.34	7.17	6.86
Spontaneity	6.32	6.63	7.45
Self-understanding	7.27	7.30	7.66

Autosympathy	6.97	7.40	8.59
Contact	7.39	7.00	8.41
Communication flexibility	7.86	7.54	8.09
Average value	8.02	7.68	7.91

No stable relationship between age and the degree of intensity of self-actualization needs has been found during this study. Perhaps this is due to the fact that age differences of participants does not exceed 12 years. Nevertheless, the fact that the greatest general manifestation of the characteristics of a self-actualizing personality was revealed in the youngest group of respondents (under 20 years) allows us to appraise the “new” generation with optimism as well as to conclude that it mainly shows a commitment to the values traditionally attributed to self-actualizing personalities.

It is also gratifying to recognize that the main contribution on the “value” scale (9.82 points) was provided by this age group of students. We also note a more positive view of human nature and a more pronounced need for knowledge and desire for creativity among students in this age group compared to other participants. It should be especially noted that only in this age group results recorded on “autonomy”-scale exceed the average values. Autonomy implies internal integrity, self-sufficiency of an individual as well as ability of a person to maintain his life credo and personal dignity in any situation, and to remain committed to his principles and value orientations (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Therefore, this trend should certainly be considered as positive.

In the elder age group (above 25 years), the values obtained on “orientation in time” (9.60 points), “self-understanding” (7.66), “autosympathy” (8.59), “contact” (8.41 points) and “flexibility in communication”-scales (8.09) were higher than in other groups. Perhaps this is a consequence of richer life experience of the students in this category (Slinkova and Patrusova, 2013).

The next task set in the study was to identify gender differences in students' needs for self-actualization. The study involved 246 women and 163 men. Table 4 presents the results of such assessment.

Table 4
Assessment of the degree of manifestation of the students' needs in self-actualization with differentiation by gender

Assessment scale	Degree of manifestation, <i>points</i>	
	Females	Males
Time orientation	8.79	9.28
Values	9.39	8.20
A look at the nature of man	6.71	6.41
Need for knowledge	8.33	9.40
Desire for creativity	8.38	9.28
Autonomy	7.30	9.10
Spontaneity	6.60	7.11

Self-understanding	7.33	8.22
Autosympathy	7.31	7.99
Contact	7.07	8.04
Communication flexibility	7.59	7.13
Average value	7.80	8.20

In general, male participants have a higher level of expression of the characteristics of a self-actualizing personality as compared to females (8.20 vs. 7.80). According to study results, the female participants exceeded the average level for such scales as "orientation in time", "values", "need for knowledge", "desire for creativity" and "flexibility in communication". The maximum level for the females was registered on "values"-scale (9.39 points). The female participants' results were below the average level on scales such as "look at human nature", "autonomy", "spontaneity", "self-understanding", "autosympathy" and "contact", with the minimum value recorded on "spontaneity"-scale (6.60 points).

While evaluating the male participants' results, it has been found that the average level was exceeded in all the criteria evaluated, except for the scales "look at the nature of man", "spontaneity" and "flexibility in communication". Maximum value for male students was found in "need for knowledge"-scale (9.40 points), whereas minimum - on the scale "look at human nature" (6.41 points).

A comparative analysis of the manifestation of the need for self-actualization in young women and men allows us to draw the following conclusions. A higher level of motivation for self-actualization among females compared to males was ascertained on the scales: "values" (9.39 and 8.20 points respectively), "look at human nature" (6.71 and 6.41) and "flexibility in communication" (7.59 and 7.13 points respectively). For the rest of the scales, higher values were recorded in male's group. In principle, this corresponds to the traditional ideas about the male and female patterns of conduct. Young men are more prone to unconditional acceptance of themselves. Young women are more influenced by an external environment and show more self-criticism.

With this in mind, we can assume that the female participants have greater opportunities for self-actualization due to greater acceptance and awareness of the values of a self-actualizing person, a more positive attitude towards others, more developed emotional intelligence, empathy and flexibility, compared to male peers. In turn, young men have higher opportunities for self-actualization as compared to young women due to more developed needs for obtaining new knowledge and impressions, more creative attitude to the life tasks being set to solve, greater internal freedom, independence and self-confidence.

4. Conclusion

Summing up the study, we note that in general, students have a certain motivational potential for self-actualization. Among the positive factors to be mentioned, first of all:

- desire for creativity. Creativity is the most important quality of a self-actualizing person. Rather high marks on this scale indicate good opportunities for students to realize their creative potential;
- adherence to the values inherent in a self-actualizing person;
- recognition of the value of the current moment of life, without undue immersion in the past or concern about the future;
- sufficiently developed needs for knowledge, understanding value of new knowledge, experience and impressions, which creates a favorable basis for self-actualization.

At the same time several factors which limit the possibilities for self-actualization were

identified in the course of the study. Among those to be mentioned primarily:

- low level of spontaneity, which predetermine the natural manifestation of behavioral reactions. Probably, the ability for spontaneous behavior is limited by the influence of social norms and values, whose role is traditionally large in Russian society. Accordingly, it can be assumed that self-actualization for Russian students is rather a desire, rather than a well-established lifestyle;
- a predominantly negative view of human nature and potential. This circumstance requires special attention, since full-fledged self-actualization is based on a positive vision of the original human nature;
- low level of autosympathy and contact, which is mainly relevant to female participants. The former indicates a lack of internal integration and self-sufficiency. The latter is related to insufficient external integration. Both are serious obstacles in the deployment of self-actualization processes.

The lack of developed needs for self-actualization leads to stalled self-development. This can be a big issue for graduating students. While studying at a university, a student in some way develops by acquiring new knowledge, skills, developing and improving certain qualities. Entering into adulthood, he largely loses his external "support" and is forced to shift the burden of responsibility for his own development. In fact, a person must make a choice between two options: to rely on the existing knowledge and skills or, constantly, throughout his life, increase this knowledge. The first option is low-cost (in terms of spending financial, physical, intellectual and emotional resources), but it has little efficiency due to the lack of meaningful results that are improve quality of life. Therefore, for a person seeking to achieve a lot in life, the only correct option is the second option, which involves constant efforts aimed at self-development. The most important task of higher education is to give a stimulus to this process. The distinguishing characteristics of manifestation of the self-actualization needs identified in the course of the study allow us to define the main directions of the application of pedagogical efforts to increase motivation of Russian students to continuous self-development and self-realization.

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