

Social Identity of Students with Hearing Impairment in a Technical University

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Abstract—The article is devoted to topical issues of social identity formation of students with hearing impairment in a technical university. The current level of technology gives the possibility to compensate for hearing impairment and creates preconditions for the integration of hard-of-hearing people into society. It is shown that the specific social identity of students with a deaf community, the perception of deafness as a "special cultural status" can hinder motivation to integrate, to use modern technical means, for the development of social and professional competencies. The article highlights the mature and diffuse social identity of students, describes their behavioral manifestations in communication, in the educational process and in professional activities. It is concluded that special measures are needed to form the social identity of students with hearing impairment.

Keywords—social identity; professional identity; integration; inclusive environment; deaf and hard of hearing students; technical university

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's high technology has great potential to include people with limited hearing disabilities into the society. Modern digital devices, cochlear implants make the idea of inclusion more real than ever, as they act as its tool, reducing communication barriers. At the same time, the instrumental capabilities of the most advanced technology are effective only in combination with the motivational component — with the desire to apply this technique, with the desire to be the part of the human community and to join hands not on the basis of disorder [1].

In our longstanding pedagogical activity, we have a deal with the reluctance of some students with hearing impairment to use assistive devices (in the absence of medical contraindications to such usage). The analysis showed that this position is based on a specific social identity, and the reluctance to use assistive devices is one, but not the only behavioral marker.

The social identity of a student and a graduate with hearing impairment determines his focus on integration, activity in his life and profession, it determines his professional identity. Professional identity is a particular case of social one and it has all its basic qualities - self-determination in the social space, acceptance of membership

in the group, positive attitude to this fact [2]. Cognitive and motivational contexts of professional identity include understanding of one's profession, professional role, accepting oneself in the profession, the desire to do a good job. Recognition and assimilation of practice and values of the professional community together with specifics of professional activity forms, and then integrates the images of "professional" and "self-made professional".

These factors led to the necessity for a more detailed analysis of the specifics of the social identity of students with hearing impairment in a technical university. Particular moments of this question are well and thoroughly worked out in the literature: the concept of "social identity" and the identity of disabled people as a separate social group. At the same time, there is lack of works clarifying the specifics of the formation of social identity of students with hearing impairment in the inclusive environment of a technical university. The above question defined the purpose of the work.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis for researching the problem of social identity in future engineers with hearing impairment is outlined by two conceptual approaches: 1. understanding of identity as a dynamic education, background in the works of E. Erikson; 2. consideration of the social identity of disabled people as a socially constructed phenomenon (P. Berger, T. Luckmann, E. Goffman, E.R. Iarskaia-Smirnova).

In E. Erickson's theory, identity is presented as an indicator of the psychosocial balance of an individual, including such essential parameters as: individuality self-comprehension; sense of self integrity, continuity of one's biography and identification with different social groups. Thus, according to E. Erickson, identity is both a sense of self-integrity and, at the same time, a dynamic process of permanent change of the individual, allowing him to adapt in different life situations [3].

Social identity is a sense of belonging to a social group that forms solidarity with group values, i.e. it reflects the social position of the individual. It is inextricably linked to personal identity – to the perception of one's uniqueness and integrity of own personality. The digestion of social roles, group values and practice of behavior happens on

identification processes. And a person learns to manage social roles - on the basis of differentiation. Balance of these processes is the key to successful self-fulfillment and adaptation of a person in society.

The study of the problem of identity in the context of social roles is presented in the work of E. Goffman. The author presents the social identity as a typification of the individual by society based on the characteristics of the social group to which the person refers. On this basis, social identity is viewed through a variety of social statuses and roles [4].

On the opinion of J. Marcia - identity is shaped by man's solution to life's problems: solving each problem contributes to the identity achievement. As a person makes a variety of decisions, the structure of identity develops: the perception of merits and flaws together with goal orientation and sense of purpose of life are formed in this process [5].

The dynamic aspects of social identity are most vividly represented in crises moments, in situations of major life problems solving. The crisis leads to a revision of values, goals and beliefs. According to the results of the crisis, new qualities, which are necessary for social life, are formed. These qualities prepare a person for the next life stage [6]. Identity changes could be fixed at the level of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components [7].

Let's consider now the specifics of identity formation with young people with hearing impairment from the point of view of social constructivism. The formation of the social identity of the individual is conditioned by the influence of typical schemes that categorize the world around them, that schemes are assimilated by the individual in the process of development. In the process of socialization, the child learns his place in the world and the identity prescribed to him. In the future, a person strives to protect identity, choosing information, places, and people on the principle of similarity. In this context, the social identity of disabled persons is shaped by stereotypes of their perception in society as incapable/limited-bodied and in an unsuitable, inaccessible environment. The latter significantly limits the child's social activity [8].

To understand the essence of the social identity of students with hearing impairment is important is the postulate of E. Fromm that the true identity of the individual is based on freedom, spontaneity and creativity, not on passivity and dependence. At the same time, the formation of a mature identity of the personality is associated with a conscious departure from social stereotypes imposed by the scenario of a certain social role - with a role-playing distance [9].

The beginning of professional self-determination is: choosing and entering a university is the most important stage of the development of social identity. For students with disabilities, this is a period of increasing of the fixation on the defect, but at the same time it is also a period of identity restructuring, the possibility of building a new image of the "I". This is the beginning of a life phase requiring independence in the decision-making. The university's

environment, being an active one, is represented by a variety of social spheres and roles, it has the facilities to form a true identity [10] [11].

The admission of a young person with hearing impairment to a technical university is the most important and complex crisis of identity, the moment when the total structure of personal roles can be restructured. This is a period of fitting out for: self-awareness, worldview and for further expansion of social ties. The success of this process depends on many factors: on the attitudes, learned at the previous life periods; on the psychological climate in the university; on positive samples for identification in the university environment; on the student's own internal activity, etc.

Students with disabilities face a double identity crisis at a university - a stage in rethinking the role of the defect in their lives. The role of "student" and "specialist" will conflict with specific roles "disabled" ("limited-bodied") due to the requirements of the university environment. Identification with the role of "disabled" and "deaf" can lead to an insufficient realization of oneself as a professional.

III. TYPES AND FORMS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY OF STUDENTS WITH DISABLED HEARING

Years of experience (teaching, consultations and research work) with technical university students who have auditory limitations gave us the possibility to identify two main criteria of social identity: 1) a positive and adequate structure of social roles; 2) active social position. In accordance with these criteria, two types of social identity of students were found: mature and diffuse. The diffuse (blurred) social identity of students with auditory limitations is represented by subtypes: "deaf," "hearing," "hearing".

Mature social identity of students with hearing impairment is based on a positive and constructive role-playing range: an idea about oneself as a professional with an adequate self-estimation, who is able to build cooperative relationships, expand social connections in the business environment. The identification matrix is represented by a variety of roles, among which there is necessarily a perception of oneself as a person with a hearing impairment. This ensures the adequacy of self-estimation, knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, ability and desire to compensate for barriers to communication, use technical facilities, etc. Such an identity with the role of "a person with hearing impairment" also means knowing their objective auditory abilities - hearing impairment according to the audiogram - "deaf" or "hearing impaired". Knowing their objective limitations is an important condition that the graduate will take care himself on comfortable communication with active usage of technical facilities and planning in advance the organizational moments of business communication [12]. At the same time, the type of role structure is positive and adequate. The graduate's concept about himself as a person with hearing impairment - does not prevail in the identification matrix over the idea of self-identification as a professional. Hence the constructive career orientation: the orientation of the person to self-design, self-realization, creation for the benefit of others and society.

Diffuse social identity is represented by a non-constructive structure of social roles with a passive life position. Such students have a dominant role in the social disability identification matrix: "disabled"; less pronounced social role - "professional." At the level of behavior, this is shown by the intensification of connections within one's environment, the consideration of disability as a special cultural state, interaction with other people from the position of "I must." Career focus is characterized by dependence, non-independence, consumer attitudes, narrowness of goals and results, social isolation and associated with unconstructive identity. Such a graduate will not have skills of establishing and expanding business connections or skills of organizing the environment for comfortable business communication.

Diffuse social identity is represented by subtypes: "deaf," "hearing," "hearing."

The status of the diffuse identity of "Deaf" is based on the prevailing social role of "Deaf Man." This is not a question of a real hearing condition. Students who are hard of hearing and deaf can belong to this group. A student with a "deaf" identity is oriented towards isolation within the boundaries of his group; often he considers deafness as "speciality" and "cultural state". A student with this identity, even with good hearing residues that allow speech, prefers sign language. In this case hand-language acts as a marker of belonging to a "deaf" subculture.

Students with this identity feel fear and distrust towards to hearing and hard-of-hearing students. Fear of interacting with those who hear initially pushes them to self-isolation. We will illustrate this provision with a snippet from the essay of a hard-of-hearing student: "In the general stream I had to contact people who were hearing...", "... it was hard to make friends in the general course, and they didn't really want to make contact, sometimes some people said hello and asked: "How are you?" In this snippet we see a contradiction: "the hearers did not want to make contact", but "some said hello and asked "how are you?". Obviously, some of the hearing students were contact-oriented, but the student deliberately isolated himself because of fear, self-doubt, and reduced the motivation of the affiliation.

Objective speech difficulties of students with hearing impairment form the fear that the hearing person will not want to communicate, because it discredits the hearing person: "... the problem with diction arises in any public place, like you know a person, you communicate with him, but that person has discomfort in front of everyone".

Social activity of a student with a deaf identity is aimed at mastering the world of the deaf: attending special exhibitions, discos, events for the deaf. At the university - attending special events for students with hearing impairment, after being moved into general groups these students stay close to their group, they prefer to interact with hearing students with the support of an interpreter.

The motivation to improve verbal means of communication and to use of loudspeaker installation is weak or absent. As a consequence of years of belonging to

the "subculture of deafness" - insufficiently developed social competences.

In an integrated educational environment, self-identification of students with hearing impairment with a social group of deaf people acts as a protective mechanism that relieves mental stress due to feelings of inferiority [14]. As a rule, such students have low level of academic performance and educational motivation. The choice of university for them was accidental or forced; they find it difficult and sometimes just uninteresting to study at a technical university. After graduation, the most important criterion for choosing a place of work for them is the presence of employees with audial limitations in the organization.

A. *The Predominance of the Identity with the Role of "The Hearing"*

These are students with varying degrees of hearing impairment (may be hard-of-hearing and deaf). They have learned the parental setting of avoiding sign language as a marker of their belonging to the subculture of deafness. Parents from childhood purposefully formed their circle of communication, chose for them to study in a general school. These students are focused on integration, on speech communication and they avoid specific activities for the hard-of-hearing. They expressly separate themselves from students with hearing impairment, which is manifested in aggressive self-affirmation against them.

In some cases, one could avoid using loudspeaker equipment and the help of a sign language interpreter, in order not to attract attention with given explanation that "and it is so well heard", while an important piece of information passes by. From the essay of a graduate with hearing impairment:

"Unfortunately, after graduation, there is an understanding comes that between the invisibility of the hearing aid and hearing, the priority should be with the hearing, so one need to choose the devices, based solely on how well it is heard with their support. Also I underestimated radio classes (FM-system for classroom). I would say to myself in the past - use these radio classes wherever is possible, as long as there is an opportunity to. Perhaps it is worth paying more attention to these points on the 1st course. It would be a different way to motivate. For example, to explain that it is a privilege, that teachers are aware of the existence of such devices, that teachers themselves are interested in using them, because if a student gives an FM transmitter with a microphone to the teacher, then he (the student) wants to hear his lecture very much".

As we can see, such an identity prevents not only the development of social competences, but also prevents the development of professional skills.

Possible problems are: underdeveloped social competences - as a result of inadequate self-estimation, lack of vision of existing problems of perception of information. This type of identity is also common amongst students with low levels of general and special abilities. However, having a pronounced professional motivation, this identity provokes

the extremeness of behavior in an integrated environment. For example, such a student, having received a C mark on the exam, tells his fellow students: "I was given a C mark, because I hear well, and the teacher got higher demands on me than on all of you".

B. The Pre-emptive Identity with the Role of "Hard-of-hearing"

It is a less destructive identity than the previous two. It could possibly include hard-of-hearing students who objectively assess their hearing condition. If the role does not prevail in the identification matrix, it will not have a significant impact on the development of both social and professional competencies.

If the role prevails, then it is focused on integration, but at the same time aggressive self-affirmation towards deaf students (as in the situation with the identity "hearing"). There is a desire to distinguish themselves from all whose speech and auditory skills are worse and can "cast a shadow" on a student with such an identity. This strategy is destructive, as it provokes conflicts within the environment of students with hearing impairment. The skill of aggressive self-affirmation in the future could be transferred to the professional environment.

Here is an example from a student's essay with a "hearing" identity: "During a double period, there are big problems are created by people who speak hand-language...for them it should be a separate group."

And this is an example from the essay of a deaf graduate with a cum laude degree: "You can notice that the attitude to hand-language is not very good, but still you need to understand that it is also a full-fledged language of comfortable communication".

Students with hearing impairment first of all should learn to interact in their surroundings, regardless of their communication partner's hearing status. This is necessary not only from a humanistic point of view, but also it is necessary as a condition of mastering the tools of minimizing barriers, including – with the usage of technical means [15].

In addition, in our practice, we encountered students with severe hearing loss (deaf according to the audiogram), who identified themselves with "hard-of-hearing". This means the excluding themselves from the cultural community of the deaf and their focusing on interacting with people who choose the way of communication — oral speech. It could be hearing, hard-of-hearing or deaf who prefer to communicate with speech. This strategy could be considered relatively constructive, depending on behavioral manifestations.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis define the criteria for the mature identity of a student - future professional from amongst persons with hearing impairment: 1) Balanced structure of roles; 2) Adequate positive self-estimation; 3) Active social position, focus on cooperation. Awareness of one's objective audial limitations is an important condition for a mature identity. Without this awareness, there is no incentive for compensation.

The diffuse (blurred) identity of a future professional student is characterized by: 1) Sharp role-playing misbalance: the predominance of specific roles to the detriment of professional; 2) Inadequate self-estimation, including own auditory capabilities (overestimation or underestimation); 3) Passive social position, aggressive self-affirmation, selectivity of communication on the principle of presence/absence of hearing impairment.

It is important to underline once again that the types of diffuse identity "deaf," "hearing" and "hard-of-hearing" highlighted in the work are not an objective reflection of the student's hearing status.

Diffuse identity is a consequence of the protective mechanisms of the psyche, which compensate for the feeling of inferiority. This type of identity prevents the development of social and professional competences and the realization of the career orientation of graduates.

In this regard, the social identity development of students with hearing impairment in the integrated environment of the university requires special targeted measures - the development and conducting of special adaptation courses, group and individual consultations, socio-psychological trainings. Such comprehensive support in the first courses, i.e. on an early stage of integration, is especially important in the case when students find themselves in a situation of identity crisis.

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