

Cultural Values of University Students: Self-assessment and Peer-assessment

Anna Ilyushina

Department of Foreign Languages
I.P. Pavlov Ryazan State Medical University
Ryazan, Russia
E-mail: annailushina@mail.ru

Varvara Prishvina

Department of Foreign Languages
Ryazan State Radio Engineering University
Ryazan, Russia
E-mail: varvarak1992@gmail.com

Bogdan Shevchenko

Department of Special Linguistic Support
Ryazan Higher Airborne Command Academy
Named after V. F. Margelov
Ryazan, Russia
E-mail: b.a.shevchenko@yandex.ru

Lidia Kostikova

Department of Foreign Languages
Ryazan State University named for S. Yesenin
Ryazan, Russia
E-mail: l.p.kostikova@gmail.com

Anatoliy Belogurov

Department of Pedagogy and Psychology
Moscow State Institute for International Relations
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: belogurov@mail.ru

Abstract—The paper is aimed at the investigation of a Russian university student's self-assessment and peer assessment of cultural values. Under the burden of growing diversity and disruption of modern society the task of educational institutions is to transmit the main cultural values in order to help students develop their self. The first step is to understand what cultural values are treated by students as the most important and requested. The investigation is realized by means of theoretical and empirical methods of research that allowed to compare self-assessment and peer assessment of cultural values of future engineers ($N = 32$), future doctors ($N = 30$), future teachers ($N=36$), future military men ($N=24$). The authors focus on the research questions: What cultural values should be promoted in higher educational institutions? What are the most effective ways to encourage the students' cultural involvement? Is the engagement into cultural scene professionally oriented? The results of the questionnaire revealed differences in self-assessment and peer assessment on its own and in different professional groups of students and put the question for further research.

Keywords—cultural values; university students; assessment; foreign language teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, educational objectives depended on the set of knowledge and skills that a graduate should possess. However, this is not enough for the time being: it is necessary to develop certain values of a competent specialist-to-be. A graduate student is supposed not only to deal with

the range of professional tasks but also to provide guidelines for his/her actions.

Students' value system is shaped on the basis of both their personal experience and under the influence of comprehensive measures aimed at developing humanistic attitudes to professional interactions against the multicultural background. In this respect cultural values come to the fore. Intercultural encounters cannot take place without a value-based approach to national peculiarities and traditions.

The problem of shaping values could not be dissociated from teaching and learning activities. Here the trend towards humanization of higher education is of considerable importance because it has become the source of socio-cultural progress. The significant role in this process is played by the teachers who are intended to ensure the preservation, dissemination and development of national culture and also shape respectful attitude to other languages and cultures.

The question is, whether students realize their cultural involvement and its connection with their future profession. The aim of this analysis is to define what concepts students attach to cultural values and if they see its professional relevance. To avoid the "one-way" principle and a certain level of subjectivity it is useful to arrange students' self-assessment and peer-assessment. That kind of reflection serves as a source of awareness of the self and a better understanding of the current goals. We are also interested in

the difference of students' perception depending upon their vocational programs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the major tasks of all university educational activities is fostering multifaceted personal development of a competitive specialist. Among the marketable qualities are initiatives, willingness to cooperate and work, sociability, flexibility, open-mindedness. As stated by A. Ju. Belogurov, "modern higher education prioritizes training well-educated, socially competent, competitive, productive, mobile and enterprising specialists" [1]. E. V. Voevoda emphasizes that education is inseparable from the national culture because it reflects the existing problems including those connected with communication and social interaction [2]. Another relevant trend is humanization of higher education. L. P. Kostikova gives special attention to this process noting that teachers are supposed to ensure the development of the national culture and establish students' respectful attitude to the languages, traditions and cultures of other people as long as the understanding of interpersonal relationships [3]. We suggest that foreign language education can make specific contribution to the realization of this educational dimension. It is language teaching that has "a responsibility to prepare learners for interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds, teaching them skills and attitudes as well as knowledge" [4]. The world community considers language as one of the values of education because linguistic diversity is definitely an essential element of cultural diversity [5]. In this regard we have every reason to believe that in the process of professional training students internalize certain values which directly influence their choice of behavioral strategies.

Values should be undoubtedly considered in close connection with the concept of culture which has become an indispensable part of foreign language teaching. Due to the heterogeneous character of cultural communities it is challenging to define the term "culture". There is a rough distinction between the material, social, and subjective aspects of culture, the former being represented by social institutions and the latter – in beliefs, values, norms and discourses [6]. It is worth remembering that certain cultural identity imposes limitations on one's thoughts and actions. Though definition of the term correlates with "the software of the mind or collective mental programming" [7], it is generally agreed that the idea of shared values is inherent in any interpretation of culture. There have been attempts to identify the main problems common for all societies and different ways they treat these problems – cultural dimensions and cultural values. One of the most sustainable theories in this respect is G. Hofstede's five-value dimension

paradigm: individualism vs. collectivism, high-power distance vs. short-power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, strong uncertainty avoidance vs. weak uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation [8]. However, the theory gave rise to criticism because it may lead to overgeneralization and stereotyping. Still, according to M. J. Bennet, it is possible to maintain the idea of "preponderance of belief" which means that each culture has a preference for some assumptions and opinions over others [9]. Here it is necessary to note that there may be different ethnic groups within one culture that may deviate from the main tendency.

In this instance it is appropriate to address culture as processes taking place in society, social relations, established regulations, attitudes and values used as behavioral models. It is "a comprehensive set of judgments, values, element of social identity typical of a particular culture" [10]. Taking into account the above-mentioned priorities of higher education, it is reasonable to focus on activities that ensure the development of the required cultural values relevant for the certain cultural background. As mentioned by A. V. Ilyushina, higher education should prioritize in developing cultural and intercultural competencies that are among basic educational values [11]. L. P. Kostikova speaks of the new Russian mentality based on the interaction of national and global values: modern education is aimed at training a person who possesses such qualities as mobility, tolerance, sensitivity to democratic values and the ability to communicate in the multicultural environment [12]. One of the results of professional training can be seen as "the dialogue nature of student's cognitive mind: the students take a different view of the world while adding value to their own" [13].

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research is done by means of theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical analysis gives the foundation to single out four blocks of values deriving from G. Hofstede's approach to values gradation [14]. These are moral and spiritual values, educational and environmental values, values in arts, liberal values.

The empirical methods include observation and analysis of the students' work, systematization of the authors' personal practical experience of teaching at University, questionnaire, comparative data analysis.

For the purpose of the following research a special questionnaire was developed to interview the students on the subject of cultural values possessing. To better objectivity self-assessment and peer assessment were compared (Table I).

TABLE I. AN ASSESSMENT CARD OF CULTURAL VALUES POSSESSING

No n/n	Cultural values	(-) Assessment scores (+)					An Average Score
Moral and spiritual values							
1.	Valuing maintenance of human moral principles	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Valuing spiritual development of the self	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Educational and environmental values							
1.	Valuing education through life	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Valuing responsibility for the health and well-being of the whole environment	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Values in the Arts							
1.	Valuing the arts as a means of opening horizons to feeling and enriching individual experience	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Valuing the arts as the most powerful learning and educational potential	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Liberal values							
1.	Valuing cultural diversity and equality of respect for all individuals	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Valuing justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law	1	2	3	4	5	
		Score reference					Total score
	SELF-ASSESSMENT:						
	AN EXPERT ASSESSMENT:						

Quantitative data was gathered through the analysis of scores of opinions received from questionnaires of 122 participants:

- 1) Future teachers – 36 students from Ryazan State University named after S. Yesenin;
- 2) Future doctors – 30 students from I. P. Pavlov Ryazan State Medical University;
- 3) Future engineers – 32 students from Ryazan State Radio Engineering University;
- 4) Future military men – 24 students from Ryazan Higher Airborn Command Academy named after V. F. Margelov.

The data provides the material for comparative analysis of the university students' self and peer assessment of

cultural values possessing in four higher education institutions.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained was made with special focus on the comparison of students' self and peer assessment of possessing cultural values.

The juxtaposition of students' self and peer assessment average scores (to make it more convenient for comparison we equate average numbers with 5 scores) demonstrates that trainees are very optimistic estimating their values possessing (Table II).

TABLE II. STUDENTS' SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENT AVERAGE SCORE

No		Max	Future engineers	Future teachers	Future doctors	Future military men
1.	<i>Moral and spiritual values</i>	5	3.8	4.3	4.6	4.8
2.	<i>Educational and environmental values</i>	5	4.5	4.6	4.4	4.0
3.	<i>Values in the Arts</i>	5	3.5	4.2	3.2	3.6
4.	<i>Liberal values</i>	5	4.1	3.5	3.6	3.4

The following graphic chart shows the correlation between the blocks of values that the students are likely to possess (Fig. 1).

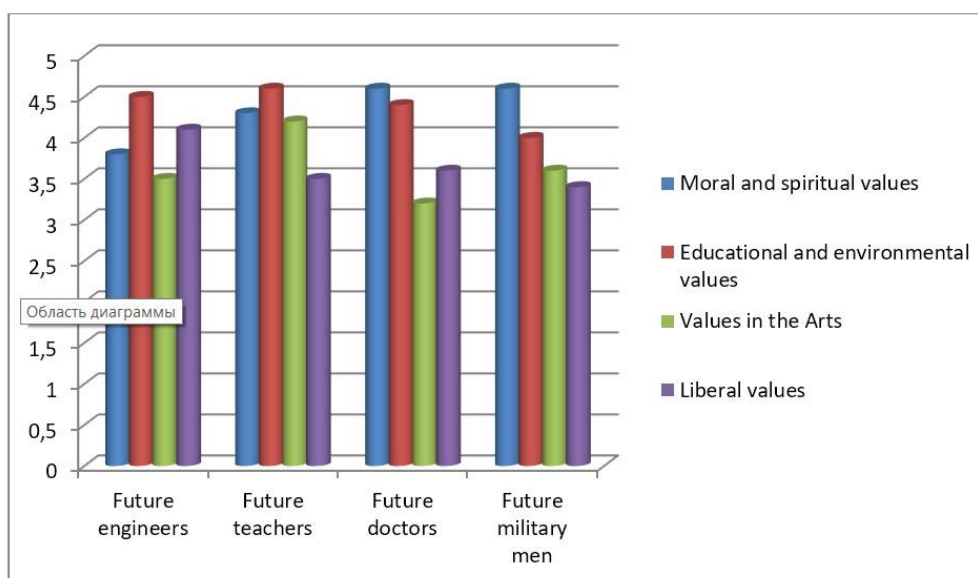


Fig. 1. Students' self-assessment and peer assessment of cultural values possessing.

Still, the results of the questionnaire revealed differences in self-assessment and peer assessment in different professional groups of students.

A. Future Engineers

Out of 8 values 5 were scored equally or almost equally (the difference being 1-2 points). A substantial difference of 3 points was revealed in assessing moral, spiritual and liberal values. The "debatable" statements concern valuing justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law – with the self-assessment being much lower in every case.

B. Future Teachers

The respondents showed more consensus: out of 8 statements up to 6 were scored equally or almost equally (the difference being 1 point). A single incident reveals a large discrepancy in self-assessment and peer assessment: the student's scores are much higher (2-3 points) than his group mate's scores of his moral and spiritual values. It is interesting that this student demonstrates low performance and productivity.

C. Future Doctors

Respondents are very critical to self-assessment of their values in the arts (20 cases). More congruence is observed while self-assessment and peer-assessment of educational and environmental values with only 7 cases of divergence, in this self-assessment being higher than peer assessment (5 cases) and lower (2 cases) and in assessing liberal values with 8 cases of divergence, in this self-assessment being higher than peer assessment (6 cases) and lower (2 cases).

D. Future Military Men

Absolutely other picture emerges in case of future military men: 6 values are scored very similar while 2 of

them show discrepancy of up to 3 points. The most significant disparity is revealed while assessing moral and spiritual values being higher than peer assessment.

V. CONCLUSION

The effective promotion of cultural values in higher educational institutions is highly demanded as the modern society lacks stability and harmony. Moral and spiritual, educational and environmental, liberal values and values in arts can provide the basis for concordant self-development and self-realization. To attract students to culture, to inculcate cultural values are the tasks of the educational process which can be accomplished through self-assessment as the first step. Students are encouraged to analyze their own cultural involvement. Future teachers, doctors, engineers and military men demonstrate a desire to be engaged in cultural and intercultural environment. Moreover, they are very optimistic in the assessment of their own possessing the cultural values and believe that they are capable to develop such qualities in future. A difference between self-assessment and peer assessment of students is expectable but proves to be professionally oriented.

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