

# *Development of Students' Academic Motivation During Vocational Training*

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**Abstract**—The article overviews specific characteristics of training in secondary specialized educational institutions, students' socio-pedagogical characteristics and their motivation to learn. The author conducted a survey of the initial level of students' academic and professional motivation and its dynamics during training. It was concluded that academic motivation development is an inhomogeneous process characterized by alternation of stable and crisis periods. The paper presents a pedagogical interpretation of "motivational crisis" and analyses its possible effect on students' attitude towards training. It proposes an approach to solving the problem considering specific features of the distinguished motivational crisis and perspectives of students' development.

**Keywords**—*motivational crisis; motivation; training; academic motivation; secondary specialized educational institutions*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern world is developing very fast and a significant amount of knowledge acquired during vocational training may become outdated or non-demanded. In the current situation, educational process is aimed at not only acquisition of theoretical knowledge and practical field experience but also at developing students' general and general professional competences. Nowadays employers look for individuals who are able to adapt quickly to new situations. They want their workers to have such qualities and skills as flexibility, self-motivation, initiative, effective interpersonal communication skills, and responsibility.

The education efficiency depends not only on organization of training process, academic programs and applied pedagogic technologies but also on students' pursuit to become highly qualified specialists and active society members. Therefore, the study of students' academic motivation and its development mechanisms become one of the primary goals of the modern pedagogics.

Pedagogical work on academic motivation development is particularly important when dealing with secondary specialized college students who are generally characterized by a low level of knowledge acquired at school, weak motivation to learn, and thoughtless career choice.

The problem of academic motivation attracted the attention of many researchers. Modern science accumulated a vast amount of factual material concerning motivation influence on students' learning activity [1-9]. Researchers studied the

structure of motivational sphere [10-14] and described the peculiarities of different age groups [15-19, 21]. However, the majority of above-mentioned investigations were carried out at schools and universities, methods proposed in them are intended for these educational institutions and cannot be effectively applied at secondary specialized colleges. In a small number of scientific works devoted to the problems of secondary professional education [22-24] we could not find

- the analysis of students' academic motivation dynamics at different training stages;
- factors affecting this process;
- difficulties which students face and which cause motivation crisis;
- technics of psychological and pedagogical assistance during crisis periods.

All the above-mentioned point out the necessity of studying the peculiarities of students' academic motivation development during vocational training in secondary specialized colleges and searching for pedagogic technics which would be efficient when working with students in these educational institutions.

The analysis of scientific literature shows that academic motivation is considered by the majority of scientists as a dynamic multilevel motive system. There are two main factors influencing academic motivation development: students' socio-pedagogical characteristics and educational environment conditions. Therefore, in order to choose efficient pedagogical technics, it is necessary to be aware of students' initial level of motivation, its development peculiarities during the training and factors affecting this process.

## II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Students entering secondary specialized colleges already have nine or eleven years of learning experience and, therefore, they possess certain learning skills and attitude toward education. The vocational training process is characterized by gradual complication of educational conditions and increase of professional orientation. However, with the course of time not only educational environment changes, students' personal and age characteristics change too, which results in transformation of predominant learning motives, appearance of new motives and goals, reassessment of students' attitude towards training.

The author conducted an investigation of students' academic motivation in several secondary specialized educational institutions of Tyumen and Tyumen region (Nizhnevartovsk Petroleum Technical School, Tyumen Polytechnic College, and Tyumen Railway College). The applied technics included questionnaire surveys, observations on students' behavior during learning and extra-curricular activities, analysis of students' academic records and class attendance.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The investigation included the study of the initial level of academic and professional motivation and peculiarities of its development during vocational training.

#### A. *The study of the initial level of freshmen's academic and professional motivation*

The research started with the study of the initial level of students' academic and professional motivation. The analysis of the questionnaire survey results and observations on freshmen's behavior allowed distinguishing their most common socio-pedagogical characteristics.

- The majority of freshmen (64%) possess a low level of cognitive motives, a small quantity of them (28%) have a moderate level, the high level was not observed.
- Learning activity of most students (79%) is stimulated by extrinsic stimuli.
- A significant part of students (42%) conflict with educators. The conflicts may be open or latent and are expressed in disciplinary violation, absent-minded behavior, and contumacy.
- Many freshmen (74%) are characterized by the predominance of motivation to avoid failure.
- Many students (85%) often have difficulty making a decision, planning their activity, resolving conflicts, and working under pressure.

The professional motivation survey was carried out using a questionnaire. It involved studying reasons of career choice, adequacy of job image, attitude towards future profession. The most important inquiry results are provided below.

- Why did you enroll in this specialty?

I want to get this profession – 37%.

I followed my parents' advice – 28%.

Because my friend enrolled in this specialty – 12%.

Because I did poorly at my examinations and could not enroll in the desired specialty – 11%.

- Do you know what your future job will involve?

Yes – 20%.

I have some idea of it – 37%.

I have a blurred vision of it – 31%.

I know nothing about my future job – 12%.

The survey results show that many students made a thoughtless career choice and do not have a clear-eyed image of the future profession. Consequently, they are not motivated to work hard to get professional knowledge and skills.

Many freshmen do not realize their professional interests and aptitudes. When asked why they chose this specialty, many students say they did not have the sense of vocation for any profession and it did not make any differences for them what educational institution to enter. Parents or friends were the main sources of information about the college and specialty, their advices students followed when choosing future profession. Some students could not enroll in the desired specialty because of weak school backgrounds or lack of money to pay for education. The college attracted them by a low passing grade and absence of tuition fees.

It must be acknowledged that in present-day conditions the career choice is often stimulated by utilitarian motives and this reflects the changes in social and economic life in the country. The vast majority of freshmen consider professional education as an opportunity to get a highly paid job in the future, in other words, they are guided by material well-being motives and do not take into account their professional interests and aptitudes.

In summary, it can be said that most freshmen are characterized by weak school backgrounds, low motivation to learn, and thoughtless career choice.

#### B. *The study of students' academic motivation dynamics during the training*

Having studied the initial level of freshmen's motivation, the author tried to investigate peculiarities of students' academic motivation development during the vocational training. The analysis of the research results allowed distinguishing several stages of this process. Their brief description is provided below.

1) *The first stage (the first term)*. The initial period of training is generally characterized by adaptation to new educational environment. The motivation dynamics begins with protective response to the changed learning conditions and attempts to adopt to them. Then there comes self-perception in the new educational environment, self-assessment of abilities, study skills, and attitude towards learning followed by comparison between the present development level and new requirements. Disclosed incompliances cause generation of new motives, goals, and senses, which leads to structural changes in academic motivation, its alteration.

The initial period of training is a rather difficult stage, during which motivation development is ambiguous. On the one hand, this is time of break with the school conventional learning method, involvement in new educational and social activities, which results in transformation of students' self-perception, their attitude towards learning and interpersonal relations.

On the other hand, the changed educational conditions make students analyze if their development level meets new

requirements, and assess the amount of efforts that they will have to make to be successful at the college. If students understand that the gap between their scholastic skills and new requirements is significant, they will have to work hard to achieve their goals, and at the same time, they do not possess strong volitional powers and good organizational abilities, their academic motivation decreases. Students despair, miss classes, which leads to the failure in the examinations and expulsion from the college.

During the initial period of vocational training, students face many difficulties, which have an adverse impact on academic motivation development: doubts about career choice, weak knowledge acquired at school that does not meet new requirements, difficulties to establish relationship with groupmates, work-rest distribution under new conditions, etc.

Motivation of most freshmen is extrinsic. Learning activity is stimulated by anxiety and fear of unknown methods of knowledge assessment and punishment (credits, examinations, disciplinary actions, etc.). Students try to do well not so much in order to get solid knowledge as to produce good impression on educators and groupmates and prove their ability to be successful in new educational environment.

As it can be seen from the above, extrinsic motivation predominates at the initial stage of training.

2) *The second stage (the second and third terms).* By the beginning of the second term, students adopt to new rules and regulations, they get experience of learning and extra-curricular activities in the new educational institution. Anxiety and fear caused by new environment gradually decrease which leads to ebbing of extrinsic stimuli influence. At this stage, students' learning activity is stimulated not so much by the fear and necessity to adopt to new situation as by understanding the need to obtain a good education and the wish to become highly qualified specialists.

However, the listed above motives have a profound effect on learning activity only if students are able to embody them by a sequential system of goals. The ability to set intermediate and long-range goals, to choose means and methods of their achievement organizes and systematizes learning activity, and volitional powers help to overcome obstacles on this way.

The conducted survey shows that many students do not possess developed goal-setting skills, good organizational abilities and strong volitional powers, so in the majority of cases the motives remain intentions. At this stage, such motives do not work also because students see only remote perspective of acquired knowledge application.

Students are aimed at self-actualization, but not all of them are able to achieve success in learning. As the result, they take an active part in extra-curricular activity. Sometimes this activity becomes more important for them than studying which leads to academic motivation reduction, irregular learning activity, absences from classes without valid excuse, academic record degradation.

At this stage, academic motivation decrease is caused by ebbing of extrinsic stimuli influence, insufficient effect of cognitive motives, students' poor volitional powers and organizational abilities, their inaptitude to combine learning with extra-curricular activity.

3) *The third stage (the fourth and fifth terms).* At this stage, educational process becomes more professional-oriented (the number of vocational subjects increases, students do practical training in the college workshops to get professional skills) which rises students' interest to the acquired profession, and consequently, the wish to obtain specialized knowledge and skills. Students' age-related changes also contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation.

This stage is characterized by the reduction of motivation to learn general subjects because students consider them insignificant for the future profession.

The increase of professional orientation has a negative impact on educational motivation of students who made a wrong career choice and whose interests and abilities do not match training profile. Such students usually have trouble with technical and vocational subjects. Lack of interest in the acquired profession discourage them from making efforts to overcome the difficulties.

However, in general this stage is characterized by educational motivation increase.

4) *The fourth stage (the sixth term).* Students' attitude towards education in the college changes after the first internship, which they do during this training period and which confront their expectations with reality.

At this stage, the dynamics of students' academic motivation is different: motivation either increases (if the real working environment conditions satisfy students' expectations) or decreases (if students get disappointed in the acquired profession).

Students get disappointed not only because their vocational interests do not match job requirements but also because they are not ready to work in difficult environment (to do physically demanding job, to work outdoors in severe climatic conditions, etc.). In some cases, negative influence on students' attitude towards the acquired profession is exerted by students' soaring ambitions (they expect a high salary while having insufficient skills).

As a rule, disappointed in the acquired profession students understand the necessity to get secondary vocational education, but their motivation to learn either decreases (which leads to low educational results) or becomes extrinsic (they try to get a good grade point average rather than solid knowledge and skills).

At this stage, the dynamics of academic motivation is different and is effected by students' impressions of the first internship.

5) *The fifth stage (the seventh term).* By the seventh term, students have a clear-eyed image of the future profession, a certain attitude towards it. As a rule, they have specific plans for future (getting higher education, working in specialty, doing military service, etc.). The final training term is characterized by a longtime internship and a short period of classroom training. The dynamics of academic motivation at this stage may be different.

On the one hand, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation increase. Extrinsic motivation rises because of students' ambitions to get a diploma with a high grade point average. Intrinsic motivation increases due to students' orientation towards getting solid professional knowledge and skills, which they consider necessary for future career or higher education and which they will have to apply in the nearest future. Students also try to develop their interpersonal communication skills because they understand that these skills are important for effective professional activities.

On the other hand, some students continue working after the internship trying to combine their labor activity with education. For some of them the job, which gives them an opportunity to make money, becomes more significant than studying at the college. Such students not always manage to combine labor activity with education, which leads to numerous absences from classes, low educational outcomes, failures in the examinations and even expulsion from the college.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The conducted survey allowed making the following conclusions.

- ✓ The development of students' academic motivation during vocational training at secondary specialized colleges is characterized by alternation of stable and crisis periods. The author distinguished four motivational crisis:
  - the first – *adaptation crisis* which occurs during the first term and results from thoughtless career choice and adaptation difficulties.
  - the second – *crisis of cognitive motive development* which lasts from the end of the second term to the fourth term and is caused by ebbing of extrinsic stimuli influence and immaturity of cognitive motives;
  - the third – *career choice crisis* which takes place during the fifth and sixth terms after the first work placement and results from discrepancy between the real working environment and student's expectations;
  - the fourth – *crisis of substitution of utilitarian motives for cognitive motives* which occurs during the seventh term and is caused by students inaptitude to combine labor activity with education.

- ✓ A motivational crisis (the word "crisis" is derived from the Greek "crucial moment") is considered as internal disharmony resulting from discrepancy between students' development level, their needs and aspirations and changed education environment conditions. A motivational crisis occurs when students face problems, which they cannot escape or solve in a short of time by conventional methods.
- ✓ A motivational crisis involves not only possible negative effects but also opportunities for students' personality development, in other words, it possesses both negative and positive potentials. A motivational crisis can make a positive impact on development of students' academic motivation as it stimulates students to look for the ways to overcome the internal conflict and requires mobilization of internal and external forces to solve faced problems. However, students' unsuccessful efforts to overcome the difficulties lead to anxiety, dejectedness, hopelessness, and personal disorganization and in this case, the motivation crisis has a negative impact on academic motivation development.
- ✓ Pedagogic work should be aimed at activating positive potential of a motivation crisis by helping students to overcome crisis period difficulties. It can be done by urgent assistance (helping to overcome the current difficulties) and preventive assistance (preparing students for solving the problems of the coming stage).
- ✓ The pedagogic work methods should be selected taking into account the peculiarities of crisis periods and perspectives of students' development. They should be intended to developing
  - the adequate image of the future profession and positive attitude towards training at the first stage;
  - orientation to general and special knowledge acquisition at the second and third stages;
  - positive attitude towards the future profession and motivation to work in specialty at the fourth stage;
  - understanding the importance of getting a good education and orientation to professional self-improvement and self-development at the fifth stage.

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