Methods of Forming Educational and Professional Motivation of University Students

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Abstract: In the article authors touch upon the problem of the development of educational and professional motivation of university students in the context of education enhancement for future specialists. The authors study objective and subjective factors that favour internal and external motivation of students. They give examples of various measures made by the world community including Russian government aimed to increasing the competitiveness of higher school in the world labour market. In the article, one can find the results of survey among entrants of the branch and students. The survey was connected with forming of motivation for education in higher school. The authors analyze the world psychological literature about motivation. Then they give teachers pieces of advice about ways of forming educational and professional motivation of students, especially practice-oriented educational technologies in competence paradigm, such as sign-context teaching technology, worked out by Professor A. Verbitskiy and cooperative learning.

Key words: Educational and professional motivation · Internal and external motivation · Sign-context teaching technology · Cooperative learning · QS World University Rankings · Self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

The problem of educational and professional motivation of students becomes unusually urgent at the present stage of education development. Motivation is one of the means that heighten students’ interest in educational process and further professional activity. High motivation can whittle down the lack of cognitive ability, while great ability cannot make up for lacking or faint motive and it will not lead to considerable success in studies. L.Y. Subbotina points out the fact that learning is implemented at the expense of external motivation if general motivation is quite low [1].

Low motivation is one of the reasons for student dropout. According to our data, 50% of expelled students “didn’t have reasons to study”; they “were not interested in future profession”. Hence, their progress was not good.

Motivation can be internal and external. N.F. Talyzina states: “Interest in cognition connected with a certain subject serves as a motive in internal motivation. In this case, learning is the goal of student’s activity but not a means for some other goals. Unassisted activity of a student, satisfying his cognitive need, only takes place under these conditions. In other cases, a person studies for the sake of some other needs but not the cognitive one” [2]. Thus, a motive is internal if it meets the cognitive need and is connected with mastered knowledge and conducted activity (it coincides with the ultimate goal). An external motive responds to a non-cognitive need (a social one); it isn’t connected with learning (it doesn’t coincide with the ultimate goal) [3].

A motive is external if the main reason of behaviour is to acquire something that is outside this behaviour. In this case, behaviour is a means for some other goals: money, praise, good marks, etc. Internal motives, as opposed to external ones, do not have an outward display and are connected with satisfaction. Students should have a high level of both internal and external motivation to achieve success.

Factors that promote formation of students’ educational and professional motivation can be divided into two groups: objective factors connected with the
features of an educational institution (how training is organized and whether an institution is attractive) and subjective factors that reflect individual psychological peculiarities of a teacher and a student.

Educational and professional motivation of our university entrants was studied using the software package «Interro-SL» (508 entrants, the year 2013). We received the following answers to the question “What influenced your choice of an institution?”: 52.1% – “Good prospects of chosen field of study (profession)”; 3.1% – “Conditions of education”; 1% – “It doesn’t matter where to study if only I get a high education”; 10.8% – “On advice of parents or friends”; 0.4% – “Interesting student life”; 30.6% – “Prestigiousness or good reputation of a regional branch”; 2% – “The prices of education”.

As the results show, the factors of prospective field of study and prestige are important for entrants choosing an institution. Prestige and prospects can be estimated by the rating.

QS World University Rankings is considered to be one of the best world ratings for higher educational institutions. It contains 13 points: international mobility of teachers and students, the number of international grant programs, scientific research level, contribution to innovations, citation index of research papers, the level of educational services, etc. These parameters are estimated according to the statistical data analysis and surveys of world academic community representatives.

The strategic goal of Russian Federation is to develop universities of the country and to raise their competitive capacity among world leading scientific and educational centres. In 2012, “The monitoring of federal institutions for higher professional education” was conducted in Russia in order to assess higher education quality. Five factors were taken into account: educational, scientific, international, financial and economic activity, infrastructure. The analysis of monitoring results is of great importance for determining ways, strategies and prospects of higher education development in Russia. The journal “Accreditation in Education” in alliance with Professional Education Expert Guild and National Centre of Social and Professional Accreditation implements a project “The Best Educational Programs of Innovative Russia” in which highly skilled educational specialists and employers take part. Internet survey shows the institutions that have the most popular educational programs in Russia. This project is also aimed at improving quality of education in regions and in the whole country.

They have attached much value to university web-sites in Russia recently. A web-site becomes university’s “calling card”, information source and quality performance. Web-sites allow conducting global surveys of employers, graduates and students to help to make a decision concerning further lines of development for an institution. Entrants can know about joining and specificity of educational and scientific activity, etc. So, a web-site is one of the tools for university’s positioning and involving students in educational process. This can help to raise educational and professional motivation of students in future.

The main motivation resource is the human factor. It is impossible to overestimate teacher’s role in forming the educational and professional motivation of students. Interest in profession helped 46.5% of entrants to choose their fields of study and specialties. Teacher’s aim is not to reduce this interest but to favour the development of student’s educational and professional motivation. Professionalism of a teacher, positive teaching style and personal charisma – all these things influence motivation of students. On the base of analyzed literature on motivation, the authors give teachers pieces of advice concerning the ways of forming educational and professional motivation of university students:

- Use critical thinking questions. «The great thing about using these types of questions is that they don't necessarily have a right or wrong answer so students are allowed to express their own opinions as opposed to simply being told to memorize facts». [4]
- Relate what students are learning to what is important to them [4].
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- Provide choices. Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process [6].
- Establish a sense of belonging. People have a fundamental need to feel connected or related to other people. In an academic environment, research shows that students who feel they 'belong' have a higher degree of intrinsic motivation and academic confidence [7].
• Balance the challenge. Students perform best when the level of difficulty is slightly above their current ability level. If the task is too easy, it promotes boredom and may communicate a message of low expectations or a sense that the teacher believes the student is not capable of better work. A task that is too difficult may be seen as unattainable, may undermine self-efficacy and may create anxiety. Scaffolding is one instructional technique where the challenge level is gradually raised as students are capable of more complex tasks [8].

• Adopt a supportive style. A supportive teaching style that allows for student autonomy can foster increased student interest, enjoyment, engagement and performance [9].

• Teacher’s personality. In our motivation research, first-year students were asked a question about their favourite subject. They were to ground: “Why this subject is the favourite?” As a result, 36% of students (14% male and 26% female) answered “Interesting teacher”. Darrel J. Wiens and his colleagues carried out a research with notable results described in Journal of College Science Teaching. In this study, 271 college biology students were surveyed to learn when they became interested and what factors determined their origin and maintenance of interest in biology. One finding was that females were more likely to cite a positive influence with a teacher as a factor for becoming interested in science, which has implications for teacher behavior in fostering an interest in science among female students [10].

• Individual approach to students.

• Teacher’s professionalism. This means an integral characteristic that presupposes skills in all kinds of professional activity. Besides, a teacher should have professional and psychological qualities ensuring effective problem-solving while educating and upbringing students [11].

• The diversity and emotional colouring of teaching material. One of the main reasons students are unmotivated is boredom. According to our research, 26% of unmotivated students confessed that feel bored during classes almost every day.

• Forming an adequate self-esteem of students. Self-esteem is person’s attitude towards himself. [12] Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. These students will put forth a high degree of effort in order to meet their commitments and attribute failure to things which are in their control, rather than blaming external factors. Students with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, believe they cannot be successful and thus are less likely to make a concerted, extended effort and may consider challenging tasks as threats that are to be avoided. Thus, students with poor self-efficacy have low aspirations which may result in disappointing academic performances becoming part of a self-fulfilling feedback cycle. [13] Teacher plays a great role in forming self-esteem. He encourages students’ progress and shows his interest in the quality of their education. Thereby, he makes them feel positive and favours their adequate self-esteem. Teacher should instruct students in rating themselves.

• Psychological training.

• Using practice-oriented educational technologies that stimulate a cognitive activity of students, promote educational and professional motivation of students and provide conditions for self-determination and self-fulfillment of students. One of such technologies used in Russian higher school is the sign-context teaching worked out by Professor A.A. Verbitskiy.

The technology of context teaching consists of three basic forms of activity and several transitional forms from one basic form to another. Basic forms include:

• Academic learning;
• Quasi professional activity;
• Educational and professional activity [14].

Academic learning contain lecture as a basic teaching form. The goal of a modern teacher is to create lectures that will not only provide students with information to master but also promote educational and professional motivation of students. For instance, there is a visualized lecture based on visual methods with the help of computer.

Visual methods require selecting and demonstrating the material in such a way that it would help systematizing students’ knowledge, create a problem situation, form a cognitive interest in the subject. According to the results of our survey, 86% of students noted that studied material is memorized easier when a teacher uses a slide-lecture; 92% noted that visualized material is more understandable. Video fragments arouse a special interest of students. In the opinion of Adam Wexler, “Video is one of the most misunderstood teaching tools and is often abused. However, if used correctly video can be a great tool increase student motivation to learn” [4].
Along with visualized lecture, problem-solving lectures and press-conference lectures are also effective. To prepare and conduct a problem-solving lecture teacher should be able to frame a problem accurately and ask students to solve it together using their knowledge. Problem-solving lecture is recommended when students acquire competences necessary for a certain problem, while press-conference lecture should be delivered at the beginning of studying a complex theme because it helps to check whether students are ready for this theme and to find out their attitude to the subject. Students should study the materials without assistance, frame questions and set them forth to the teacher. During the lecture, teacher and students investigate these questions together.

Quasi professional activity shapes production content and relations between the people engaged. This activity presupposes such active teaching methods as role playing, simulation and business games, case-study method, interactive software, interactive response devices, etc. Professor A.A. Verbitskiy interprets the essence of active teaching methods as a transition from mostly regulating, algorithmized and programmed forms and methods of didactics to developmental, problem-solving, investigative, searching ones that promote cognitive motives and interests and conditions for creative work in studies [15].

Role playing and business games are the most common forms of quasi professional activity. Role-playing games help students improve communicative skills and learn to work in a team. A role-playing game presupposes improvisation; it is less structured and regulated than a business game. A business game is aimed to master ways and methods of solving professional problems. Business and role-playing games are the favourite occupations of students. In our branch, 76% of students prefer these teaching methods.

Educational and professional activity includes research work, field experience, diploma design, mentored/independent research projects. These are the kinds of work in which a student fulfils real practical and research tasks.

Any forms that provide a step-by-step transformation of one basic form of student activity into another can act as intermediate forms. It can be problem-solving lectures, group practical lessons, analysis of some certain production situations, various training, special courses, special seminars, etc [14].

So, context teaching is based on integration of different kinds of student activity: educational, practical and scientific. This promotes educational and professional motivation of students.

One more widespread technology is cooperative learning. Practical lessons are organized in such a way that all students carry out interrelated and interdependent tasks with almost no assistance. In the opinion of Albert Bandura, “Cooperative learning structures, in which students work together and help one another also tend to promote more positive self-evaluations of capability and higher academic attainments than do individualistic or competitive ones” [13].

Besides, “researchers state that students in small groups get more knowledge and store it longer than those who try to get the same amount of knowledge in the boundaries of other teaching methods. The question arises, whether there is a positive correlation between group education and satisfaction students get while studying” [16].

Thus, forming educational and professional motivation of university students is one of the main goal for an educational institution because motivation is a very important factor enhancing education and competitiveness of students in labour market.

REFERENCES