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PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTIKS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS IN THE MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Annotation

The article examines interpersonal relationships among university students as a complex, multi-level psychological system and substantiates a comprehensive approach to their diagnostics in the modern higher education environment. Drawing on the systemic approach of B. F. Lomov, the stratometric concept of the group developed by A. V. Petrovsky, N. N. Obozov’s three-component model of interpersonal relationships, T. Leary’s interpersonal circle, W. Schutz’s theory of fundamental interpersonal relations orientation and J. L. Moreno’s sociometry, the study identifies six interrelated components of students’ interpersonal relationships – cognitive, emotional, behavioural, communicative, regulatory and motivational-value – and four levels at which they are realised: individual, dyadic, group and institutional.

Keywords: interpersonal relationships, university students, systemic approach, student group, sociometry, interpersonal circle, psychological.

ZAMONAVIY OLIY TA’LIM MUHITIDA TALABALAR O‘RTASIDAGI SHAXSLARARO MUNOSABATLARNING PSIXOLOGIK XUSUSIYATLARI

Annotatsiya

Maqolada universitet talabalarining shaxslararo munosabatlari murakkab ko'p bosqichli psixologik tizim sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi va zamonaviy oliy ta'lim sharoitida ularni tashxislashga kompleks yondashuv asoslanadi. B.F.Lomovning tizimli yondashuviga asoslanib, A.V.Petrovskiy guruhining stratometrik kontseptsiyasi, N.N.Obozovning shaxslararo munosabatlarining uch komponentli modeli, T.lirining shaxslararo doirasi, V.Shuttsning shaxslararo munosabatlaridagi fundamental yo'nalishlar nazariyasi va J.L.Moreno sotsyometryasi.

Kalit so‘zlar: shaxslararo munosabatlar, universitet talabalari, tizimli yondashuv, talabalar guruhi, sotsiometriya, shaxslararo doira, psixologik.

ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ МЕЖЛИЧНОСТНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ СРЕДИ СТУДЕНТОВ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ СРЕДЕ ВЫСШЕЙ ШКОЛЫ

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются межличностные отношения студентов вузов как сложная многоуровневая психологическая система и обосновывается комплексный подход к их диагностике в современных условиях высшего образования. Опираясь на системный подход Б.Ф.Ломова, стратометрическую концепцию группы А.В.Петровского, трехкомпонентную модель межличностных отношений Н.Н.Обозова, интерперсональный круг Т.Лири, теорию фундаментальных ориентаций в межличностных отношениях В.Шутца и социометрию Я.Л.Морено, авторы выделяют шесть взаимосвязанных компонентов межличностных отношений студентов.

Ключевые слова: межличностные отношения, студенты вузов, системный подход, студенческая группа, социометрия, интерперсональный.

Introduction. The period of university study is one of the most intensive stages in the development of a young person’s social relationships. Students leave the familiar environment of school and family, enter new academic groups, live in dormitories or rented accommodation, and build relationships with peers from different regions, social backgrounds and, increasingly, different countries. The quality of these relationships has a direct impact on students’ psychological well-being, academic motivation and achievement, and on their decision to continue or abandon their studies. V.Tinto showed in his model of student departure that social integration into the university community is one of the key factors of persistence in higher education (Tinto, 1993). E. Pascarella and P. Terenzini, summarising several decades of research, concluded that interactions with peers are among the most influential factors of student development during the college years (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

From the perspective of psychology, this importance is rooted in a basic human need. R. Baumeister and M. Leary argued that the need to belong – to form and maintain lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships – is a fundamental human motivation, and that its frustration leads to a wide range of negative emotional and health consequences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The aim of this article is to identify the systemic-psychological characteristics of interpersonal relationships among students in the modern higher education environment and to substantiate a comprehensive approach to their diagnostics.

Literature review. The systemic approach in psychology, developed in particular by B. F. Lomov, requires that psychological phenomena be considered as multi-level, multi-dimensional systems whose properties cannot be reduced to the sum of their elements and which exist in a network of relations with other systems (Lomov, 1984). Applied to

interpersonal relationships, this means that the relationships of a student cannot be understood only through his or her personal traits, nor only through the structure of the group: they arise at the intersection of individual, group and institutional levels.

N. N. Obozov defined interpersonal relationships as the subjectively experienced connections between people, objectively manifested in the character and methods of mutual influence in the process of joint activity and communication. Ya. L. Kolominsky studied the structure of relationships in small groups and the status positions of their members, showing how sociometric methods can reveal the hidden structure of group relations (Kolominsky, 1976). A. V. Petrovsky, in his stratometric concept, argued that the relationships in a group are mediated by the content and values of joint activity: the deeper the level of activity mediation, the more the relationships acquire the character of a collective (Petrovsky, 1982).

In Western psychology, T.Leary developed the interpersonal circle, in which interpersonal behaviour is described by two basic dimensions – dominance versus submission and friendliness versus hostility – and their combinations form eight interpersonal styles (Leary, 1957). W. Schutz proposed the theory of fundamental interpersonal relations orientation (FIRO), according to which interpersonal behaviour is determined by three needs: inclusion, control and affection, each of which may be expressed towards others and wanted from others (Schutz, 1958). J.L.Moreno founded sociometry as a method for measuring the structure of preferences and rejections in a group (Moreno, 1934), and R.F.Bales developed interaction process analysis for the observation of group interaction (Bales, 1950).

Methodology. The study is theoretical and methodological. It is based on the systemic, activity and ecological approaches, on the analysis and synthesis of psychological research on interpersonal relationships and small groups, and on the comparative analysis of diagnostic instruments. The method of structural-functional modelling was used to construct a model of students’ interpersonal relationships and a diagnostic algorithm. To demonstrate the application of sociometric indices, an illustrative example of a student group of twelve members was constructed; the data of this example are hypothetical and serve only to show how the indices are calculated and interpreted.

Results and discussion. Interpersonal relationships of students as a psychological system. The analysis of the theoretical approaches makes it possible to consider students’ interpersonal relationships as a system consisting of six interrelated components (Figure 1). The cognitive component includes the perception, understanding and evaluation of fellow students, social stereotypes and expectations. The emotional component includes sympathy and antipathy, attraction, trust and the feeling of belonging. The regulatory component includes the ways in which students manage conflicts and regulate their own emotions in relationships. Finally, the motivational-value component includes the needs for affiliation, recognition and achievement, as well as the values and goals that determine with whom and why students build relationships. Obozov’s three components (Obozov, 1979) thus form the core of the system, while the communicative, regulatory and motivational-value components reflect the specific conditions of student life.

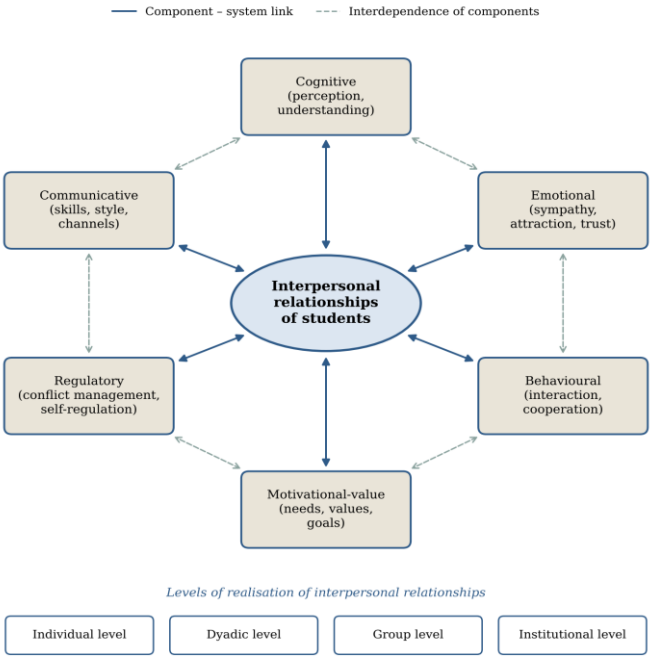


Figure 1. Structural model of students’ interpersonal relationships as a psychological system: six interdependent components and four levels of realisation

The system-forming property of these components is their interdependence. A negative perception of a fellow student (cognitive component) produces antipathy (emotional component), which leads to avoidance (behavioural component); avoidance, in turn, deprives students of information that could correct the initial perception. Conversely, joint successful activity in a project group can change perceptions and emotional attitudes. This is consistent with Petrovsky’s idea that relationships in a group are mediated by joint activity (Petrovsky, 1982).

Levels of the system. Interpersonal relationships of students are realised at four levels. At the individual level, they depend on personal characteristics: interpersonal style, needs for inclusion, control and affection, social skills, and vulnerability to loneliness. At the dyadic level, they take the form of friendships, partnerships in study, rivalries and

conflicts between particular students. At the group level, they form the structure of the academic group: its status hierarchy, subgroups, leaders and isolated members, and its socio-psychological climate. Factors of the modern higher education environment. The analysis allows us to identify several factors that transform students’ interpersonal relationships today. The first is the instability of group composition: under the credit-module system students increasingly choose individual courses, so that they study with different peers in different classes, and the traditional stable academic group loses part of its integrating function. The second is the digitalisation of communication: a significant part of interaction takes place in messengers and social networks, which facilitates contact but may also reduce the depth of relationships and create new forms of conflict and exclusion, such as exclusion from group chats.

Interpersonal styles. At the individual level, Leary’s interpersonal circle provides a useful framework for diagnosing the characteristic style of a student’s relationships (Figure 2).

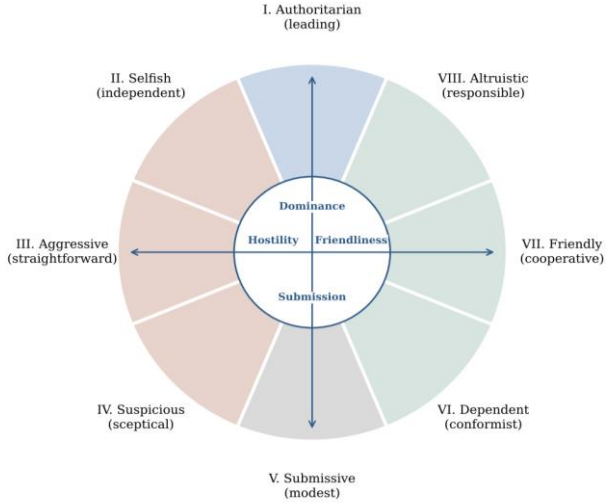


Figure 2. Leary’s interpersonal circle: two axes and eight interpersonal styles (after Leary, 1957)

Diagnostic battery. On the basis of the systemic model, we propose a diagnostic battery in which each component and level of interpersonal relationships is assessed by appropriate methods (Table 1). The battery combines group-level methods, which reveal the structure of relationships in the academic group, with personality-level instruments, which reveal the individual characteristics that underlie a student’s position in the group.

Diagnostic algorithm. The diagnostic process is organised in five stages (Figure 3). At the preparatory stage, the aims of the diagnostics are defined, the instruments are adapted to the language and cultural context of the students, and informed consent and confidentiality are ensured. At the second stage, the structure of relationships in the group is studied by sociometry and assessment of the group climate. At the third stage, students’ individual characteristics are assessed with personality-level instruments. At the fourth stage, the data of the different levels are integrated: for example, the sociometric status of a student is compared with his or her interpersonal style.

Table 1. Components of students’ interpersonal relationships, indicators and diagnostic methods

Component	Indicators	Diagnostic methods
Cognitive	Accuracy of social perception, stereotypes,	Repertory grid, sociometric perception (expected choices)
Communicative	Communication skills and style, digital communication	Social Skills Inventory (Riggio, 1986), interviews
Regulatory	Conflict-handling modes, emotion regulation	Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974)
Motivational-value	Needs for inclusion, control, affection; perceived support	FIRO-B (Schutz, 1958), MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988)

Illustrative example of sociometric analysis. To demonstrate the group level of diagnostics, consider a hypothetical academic group of twelve students (S1–S12), each of whom was asked to name three classmates with whom they would like to work on a joint project. The resulting sociogram is shown in Figure 4. Student S1 received eight choices and occupies the position of a sociometric “star”, while student S12 received no choices and is isolated. Students S9, S10 and S11 form a relatively separate subgroup connected with the rest of the group mainly through S8 and S1. Thirteen pairs of mutual choices were recorded.

The main sociometric indices calculated for this example are presented in Table 3. The index of sociometric status of a student is calculated as the number of choices received divided by $N - 1$; the group cohesion index as the number of mutual pairs divided by the number of possible pairs, $N(N - 1)/2$; and the reciprocity index as the share of all choices that were reciprocated.

Table 3. Sociometric indices for the illustrative group (hypothetical data)

Index	Formula	Value
Sociometric status, S1 (“star”)	Choices received / (N − 1) = 8 / 11	0.73
Sociometric status, S2	5 / 11	0.45
Sociometric status, S11 (neglected)	1 / 11	0.09

Index	Formula	Value
Sociometric status, S12 (isolated)	0 / 11	0.00
Group cohesion index	Mutual pairs / [N(N − 1)/2] = 13 / 66	0.20
Reciprocity index	all choices = 26 / 36	0.72

The interpretation of these indices illustrates the value of the systemic approach. A high reciprocity index (0.72) shows that most choices are mutual, which indicates stable dyadic relationships; at the same time, the presence of an isolated member and a separate subgroup shows that the group is not fully integrated. Sociometry alone, however, cannot explain why S12 is isolated. At the next stage of diagnostics, the personality-level instruments would be applied: if S12 shows a submissive interpersonal style, a high level of loneliness and an avoiding conflict-handling mode, the isolation is likely to be associated with social anxiety and lack of social skills; if S12 is, for example, a newly arrived student from another region who studies in mixed format, the isolation is more likely to be associated with institutional factors.

Conclusion. Interpersonal relationships among university students form a complex psychological system consisting of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, communicative, regulatory and motivational-value components and realised at the individual, dyadic, group and institutional levels. The components of this system are interdependent, and the system as a whole is shaped by joint educational activity and by the institutional and cultural context of the university. In the modern higher education environment, the instability of group composition, the digitalisation of communication, mixed learning formats, growing diversity and academic pressure transform these relationships and create new risks of isolation and conflict.

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