

Essential Problems of Russian Students' Educational Activities Style Evaluation

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Abstract—This paper presents the results of the interdisciplinary study of the relationship between teleological determinants, cognitive constituents and individual features of the student's activities within the framework of general educational process. We assume that heuristic educational programs should be developed on the basis of taking into account the alternative cognitive dispositions of students, their attitudes, preferences and styles. The study of students' cognitive styles is designed to reveal the possibilities of improving actual educational practices. This would enable to develop the most efficient learning and teaching strategies and to identify the prominent ways of forming personal attitudes towards education in accordance with social requirements and professional standards. Specifically, this paper considers the issue of how academic corporate culture influences the students' cognitive styles manifested in educational activities. The main constituents of academic corporate culture such as educational standards, values and beliefs play a significant role in framing the vision of the opportunities of the student's personal enhancement as a future professional. The stylistic features of Russian students' educational activities are mainly formed under the influence of professional career guidance and actual demands of the labor market. But this determination does not exclude factors that possibly could lead to the deformation of personal development.

Keywords—*cognitive style; higher education; personality; student; educational goals; culture; educational path*

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of identifying students' cognitive styles and determining their role in educational processes is relevant to the pedagogy of higher education. Modern educational products turn out to be rather complicated entities. That is because the goals of education and higher school curriculum are no longer determined merely on the basis of the paradigmatic orientation at the formation of such qualities of a university graduate that should fit into the system of

instrumental knowledge and professional skills. The prominent goal of education can be adequately explicated in terms of the formation of an "educated person" as an integral person with a persistent type of educational activity implemented throughout his life.

The analysis of the integral unity of cognitive, praxeological, motivational and personal qualities of students manifested in a set of educational activities involves the study of a number of factors and contradictions which are faced both foreign and local education systems.

The first problem can be explicated in terms of the anthropogenic and teleological conceptualization of education. If the objectives of education are determined by actual social demands this will inevitably reduce the scope of possibilities for the overall human development specifically provided by educational practice. The only knowledge that will be obtained is the one which would enable to meet immediate practical needs of society. This is likely to reduce the scope of the opportunities of entire personal development and self-fulfillment. As a result we would possibly have a loss of essential integrity and a functional disaggregation of human being.

The second problem which is initiating the study of cognitive preconditions for and stylistic features of educational activities is associated with the examination of those standards of professional activity of a future specialist that are determined primarily by actual social trends. In today's world the social mechanisms sustaining human existence and society have become more complex. It is necessary to educate people in a sense of cultivating or developing the qualities of an active agent, capable of making choices and bringing in social transformations. Upgrading the concept of education cannot do without a clear understanding of all these trends manifested in a social context.

The third problem which determines the relevance of the study of cognitive styles involved in educational activities can be stated in terms of the individual lifestyle of a person. The major assumption here is related to the fact that there is a gap between the system of post-industrial society and the lifeworld of a person. A person acts as a social subject but being involved in socially institutionalized practices (including education) does not imply that those practices would enable him or her to attain a state of personal and cultural self-fulfillment. Therefore, the concept of education should be reconsidered on the basis of the recognition of the value of such a fundamental goal as providing the opportunities of entire personal development covering not only the intellectual and practical spheres but also the moral and aesthetic spheres of human activity.

II. APPROACHES TO THE DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY STYLE

The style model of educational activity in the well-known concept of David Kolb and his followers is based on the identification of four stages: 1) primary experience 2) observation and reflection 3) abstract notions formation 4) testing stylistic patterns in new situations [1]. Cognitive features come into connection with social and activity ones.

There are several styles that can be identified on the basis of such criteria as the goal, the search of strategies, the character of the activity performance.

Accommodation style links specific knowledge with active implementation strategies and use. Students are configured to perform specific activities, implement plans, conduct experiments and gain new experience. Often it could happen on the risk basis. Students have more resilience in difficult situations and they lean toward the technical knowledge and to the knowledge of how to do business. They embrace educational methods that are highlighting their independence.

Assimilation style is characterized by laying emphasis on critical reflection and abstract conceptualization and the preference of precise structured information and confidence in the experts' opinion. It gives high priority to abstract ideas and lower priority to human relations. Preferences are given to logical constructions and reliability of theories.

The divergence style includes targeting specific search activities in conjunction with reflexive observation. The heuristic potential of this style is determined by the fact that it enables to detect contradictions in thinking and the alternativeness of the perspectives of problem analysis. The activity which involves new ideas creation on the basis of detailed and reasonable information is highly valued – it is considered to be a real advantage. A person who enjoys such a style tends to be creative, emotional and communicative. This style corresponds with wide cultural interests and high demands for education quality.

The convergence style stresses the value of abstract excogitation together with the active implementation and knowledge utilization. This style seems to be effective in situations where there is a lack of alternativeness and the sole

correct answer is required. Practical relevance of information is of high priority. Emotional impassivity is combined with practically efficient problem solving. Students may have technical interests and the educational process should be dialog-based [2].

The definition of learning styles proposed by P. Honey and A. Mumford proceeds from a comprehensive style analysis which encompasses a set of motivational, target-related, communicative, energetic, and operational aspects. Thus, those students who fall under the category of "Activists" live in the moment, they are mobile, ready for experiments and practice, communicative, independent; they act without instructions using their own reasons; but they become satiated quickly from slow methodical work. "Reflectors" consider the situation carefully before the activity and they need somebody's advice. The "Theorist" is objective, rational, emotionally restrained, and the "Pragmatist" is practical and goal-directed [3].

Eugene Sadler-Smith makes account of students' cognitive style which is determined by the convergence of two systems - the intuitive (experimental) system and analytical (rational) system. This is a typical representation of the dual (or "duplex") model of cognitive style in complex combinatorics. The style is characterized by a combination of individual characteristics, preferred ways of organizing and processing information [4]. Within the framework of the duplex model both affective and cognitive processes are considered as concurrent processes complementing each other, influencing thought and determining the ways of behavioral adjustment to the information environment. The concept of a cognitive style explicated in a form of duplex model seems to specify the general idea of the cognitive structure of consciousness. There are two functionally additional aspects of mental activity which correspond to the effects produced by associative system (intuition, imagination, creativity, visual recognition, sensitivity, associative memory) and the system of cognitive action based on following the rules (thinking, explanation, abstract symbolic representation, formal analysis coupled with verification and attribution of goals). Cognitive style can be considered as a part of a personal learning style. The concept of cognitive style is defined as a habitual way of perception, data storage, thinking and problem solving - a specific combination of these features can be attributed to individuals. The concept of personal learning style covers cognitive actions (such as thinking and cognition), motivational and affective states (emotions, feelings, moods) together with physiological arousal in their relation to the arrangement of working environment, learning approaches and favorable conditions [5].

Educational programs could be improved using baseline orientation excluding cognitive-stylistic reductionism. Cognitive strategies should be acquired through the educational process and that would allow students to recognize requirements of particular situation, to select and to use an appropriate information processing model on the basis of mixing different styles [6].

The theory of motivation and activity developed by A.N. Leontiev can be taken as the methodological basis for the elaboration of the concept of educational activity style in Russian psychological tradition [7]. An integrative concept of educational activity style is being developed by such authors as Il'yasov I.I., Lyaudis V.Y., Ustinova Y.O., Ishkov A.D., Kostenko E.G., Miloradova N.G. The formation of a particular style is determined by the activities of self-organization which include planning and targeting, operational and control elements. All elements of self-organization are associated with the personal qualities of a student. The effectiveness of training depends on the arrangement of the elements of self-organization. Such features as temperament, character or personality type influence the style of educational activity through the structure of self-organization [8]. Motivational and semantic elements are considered to be essential for the determination of students' educational activities style. The educational activity style formation is explained mostly in pedagogical and professional terms, without appealing to natural factors. That is what makes these concepts heuristically valuable for the study of the student's educational behavior. Cognitive styles differences should be taken into account when designing person-oriented learning process or creating an educational environment with a wide range of possibilities for applying effective individual approaches that could contribute to the development of each individual. [9] [10].

There is another problem which seems to be relevant to the context of cognitive and educational research - the problem of the cultural determination of educational activity styles. Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky was the first who developed the key concept which formed the core of the most efficient approach to this problem - the concept of cultural and historical development of the mental facilities of human being [11]. First of all, the cultural influence is contemplated in the channel of the traditional psychological problem of the personality and activity interconnection [12]. Cultural patterns are also embedded in any personal cognitive-activity style. Cultural influence can be traced in how personal development is mediated by social limitations and standards of practice. Cultural rituals of educational activity can be also explored in the context of learning process performance improvement [13]. Higher educational process should be rightfully interpreted as the initial stage of professional socialization [14]. The interconnection between the university's corporate culture and the student's educational style is explored in the context of social expectations and social attitudes related to a professional career and the proposed corporate culture of an enterprise.

III. CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY STYLE

The study of university's corporate culture among the other determinants of educational behaviour styles may be very helpful for the further clarification of the ways of improving social learning environment and upgrading educational quality in order to meet labour market requirements.

Lots of social theorists and sociologists have contributed to the study of the phenomenon of corporate culture: A. Kroeber, C.K. Kluckhohn, P. Kotler, K. Cameron, R. Quinn, E. Stein, R. Rüttinger, T. Peters and R.H. Waterman etc.

Researches show that a typical university's corporate culture is associated with such elements of the style of educational activities as: 1) a system of activity's skills and methods; 2) personal qualities update which is performed via activity; 3) effectiveness of actions adjustment to a specific academic environment and to the future professional environment [15].

Most researches identify a set of elements of the university's corporate culture which affect students' educational activities and influence students' cognitive styles: 1) value-normative constituents, i.e. values, norms and rules of behaviour – these are the elements of regulative basis; 2) organizational structure which includes formal and informal elements, leadership and power structure; 3) communication systems which include formalized and non-formalized communication flows; 4) a social and psychological system which includes a system of status roles, interpersonal relations; 5) a system of signs and symbols, including myths, legends or corporate tales; 6) cues of external identification – symbolic systems and advertising characteristics [16].

Comparative assessments of corporate cultures made by managers, employers and students showed that according to student's evaluations a higher education institution in most cases can be described as representing an amorphous type of culture with a steady predominance of the clannish and bureaucratic element. Students prefer educational processes organization which combines a high evaluation of interpersonal relationships with an established internal order of performance monitoring and reporting, stability of procedures with relationship flexibility [17].

The study of students' understanding of a typical university's corporate culture revealed a widely spread commitment to the following values and attitudes: 1) obtaining high-quality education and professional skills (75%) correlated to increasing labour market demand for university graduates (84%), 2) university's sensitivity to high-tech and innovation sectors of the economy (47%), 3) fairness of educational rituals and individual approach to the problems of student's engagement (42%), 4) safe and healthy social and cultural environment of the university (35%), 5) justice of corporate ethics (57%), 6) incorporation of the university into the international system of science and education (27%), 7) university's aiming for leadership in order to increase its prestige (31%), university communication with mass media (56%), 8) good trust-based relations between teachers and students (41%) [18].

The organizational culture researches show that Russian students are aware of significant internal differences and contradictory trends in university culture development: among the most valued things are formal rules and procedures, traditions and conservative attitudes, on the one hand, and the intention to occupy leading positions via solving complex problems and bring innovations into the organizational context and curriculum, on the other. The

most typical students' view of the culture of universities is the one which favors human relational aspects, creative attitudes and innovative policies – such attitudes and policies should outweigh the use of bureaucratic and clannish mechanisms for managing people in formal organizational contexts. Students see the ideal company's culture as a mixture of clannish and adhocracy values: i.e. they would like to appear in a friendly-oriented working environment with support, complicity and mentoring guidance. Students expect flexible and creative working conditions and least of all they are ready to work in an organization with a rigid structure and control with competition as the basis of the relationship [19].

Russia is a multinational country and studies of the ethnic and cultural aspects of student activities are especially relevant for Russia. It is legitimate to talk about specific ethnic and cultural features as constituents of a dominant type of self-identity. A variety of features of the same type is manifested through the educational activities of students. A comparative study of Armenian and Russian students showed that the core of the ethnic normativity of the Armenian respondents is comprised of qualities associated with openness and concern for others, while the core of the ethnic self-consciousness of Russian students is comprised of qualities associated with achievement. [20]

The study of cultural attitudes of Russian and Chinese students showed that in both samples the priorities include values that motivate them to achieve personal success and self-determination. The differences in value hierarchies were revealed: the value of "security" ranks first among Russian students and sixth among Chinese students; the value of "hedonism" is among the least significant among Chinese students, among Russian students it is in the middle of the hierarchy of personal values [21].

IV. STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES STYLES AND PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES

Professional attitudes and the style of students' educational activities are related to each other. Studies show that attitudes towards education may determine a certain type of career. The early start of business activity and the experience acquisition is an important career factor. It is typical of Russian companies to give priority to experience over qualifications, knowledge and training level. But the early start of work has a negative effect on the quality of education [22].

There are several types of professional behavior.

Thus, the behavioral dispositions of "unsuccessful specialists" fit to the first type. According to the results of a special research "unsuccessful specialists" come from humble families and in most cases these are women. There is a big share of diploma with honours holders amongst them. Not having connections, they are forced to put more professional effort. They have high formal qualification indices, but low salaries. "Novice managers" find work through formalized channels; they see the reason for failure in the absence of connections.

"Successful specialists" are the most dynamic workers who have changed several jobs. They gave the lowest rate to the role of qualified education. The highest parts amongst them are those who obtained the position using family-friendly channels. This group is noted for high satisfaction with career and salary. They explain their failures with their own mistakes.

"Successful executives", children of large businessmen, worked more, while still studying at the university, used cribs more often, used non-formalized channels more often when finding a job. But in this group, entrepreneurship and educational background are more often noted as the factors of success [23]. Several scholars note that education serves not so much to increase as to maintain status. Most researchers single out a universally-attaining business segment — these are large foreign companies in which formal recruitment channels and professionalism play dominant role. Companies offer career opportunities to medium-and low-resource groups of people who are interested in the quality of education. But there is also a particularist-ascriptive segment in small business and high-wage industries. Communication and entrepreneurial skills are actively used for careers there. Diplomas are important for prestige, but not the quality of education. For students of this type, the main thing in high school is the acquisition of connections. Career strategies are consistent with them [24] [25].

The attitude of students to the various elements of education and the level of their demand for various disciplines with subject to the planning of future professional activities is under the research [26]. Respondents indicated enterprises of medium and large Russian business (75%), businesses with foreign participation (20%) as the most preferred places of work. The most desired position is the mid-tier executive (68%) but many admitted highly skilled, highly paid position of an ordinary specialist (32%). For the means of career building most of respondents were going to rely on themselves (88%). The importance of the necessary "relationship", "clan" and "friends" in their careers was highly appreciated - indicated 67% of respondents as a leading role factors. Business communication elements in the educational and professional environment were highly appreciated too. Up to 80% of respondents stressed the role of business communications in a successful career [27].

Another subject of study is the attitude of students to the various components of education and the degree of demand for particular disciplines. Researchers approach the question of whether or not such an attitude is dependent on how future professional activity is planned. The respondents indicated that the most preferred jobs are those which were associated with the enterprises of medium and large Russian business (75%) and businesses with foreign participation (20%). The most preferred position is the middle manager (68%), but many admitted highly skilled, highly paid job of an ordinary specialist (32%). When implementing career lines, the majority of respondents were going to rely on themselves (88%). The importance of the necessary "connections", "clan" and "friends" in their careers was highly appreciated by 67% of respondents - they indicated the leading role of

these factors. Communicative components in the educational and professional environment were also highly appreciated (80% of respondents stressed the role of business communications in a successful career).

The high qualification of the employee's was recognized as the most important factor of the career success is work (82% of respondents). Qualification consists of many elements including knowledge, skills and abilities such as the ability to make rational choices and to determine precisely the most efficient strategy of performing professional tasks. Only 55% respondents believe that fundamental scientific knowledge has a real value for qualification. And 92% of respondents stressed the importance of applied knowledge associated with practice. A high importance of the humanities was noted by honors students with high attendance level (87%). The interest shown to humanities was much lower (45%) within the group of mediocre students, those who stressed the role of clout, relationship and the "human factor" in their careers.

Formalized skills included in job descriptions are highly appreciated by students who have good academic performance and explicit intention to build a self-made-man career - 89%. For those students who rarely attend classes the importance of formalized skills has lower rating - 57%. Many of them embrace the opportunity to acquire these skills not in high school but in the process of doing their work. The importance of non-formalized skills for a career, for example, the ability to negotiate and to get along with the "right" people, was also on average quite high - 69%, but the assessment of this indicator varied widely. The need for non-formalized skills was most appreciated by students planning to make a career relying on friends and acquaintances - 92% [28].

The study revealed an underestimation of the role of the fundamental sciences in formation of the integral picture of the world and in giving knowledge of general principles of human activity. Meanwhile, it is precisely this knowledge that ensures the independence of professional behavior, and enhances the ability to solve a wide range of professional tasks and forms epistemic preconditions for additional self-training of a specialist.

V. CONCLUSION

The study allows identifying four basic types of students' educational styles in their correlation with the patterns of productive combination of motivational, cognitive and cultural components of student's activity.

The first stylistic type is characterized by a preference for a hierarchical culture in teaching and by a positive attitude towards adhocratic culture as the basis of personal development. In this group there are a significant proportion of students who embraced professional work as a highly qualified and highly paid specialist, rather than a manager or an executive. The most important personal qualities were considered to be diligence, responsibility and availability of a wide range of required knowledge [29]. The students of this group had high discipline, attended all classes, had strong results, had a wide range of scientific interests, and

there was a significant number of excellent students among the members of this group. Most students of this group agree that a high qualification including knowledge, skills and abilities of performing job related cognitive tasks is of the greatest importance for employment and successful career growth.

The second type of educational style is characterized by a preference for a market culture and a loyal attitude towards hierarchical and clan cultures. This group includes students who admit a career as a highly paid specialist, but are generally focused on leadership work. Educational behavior is based on the preference of disciplines that are directly necessary for the performance of professional tasks while ignoring other sciences that, in their opinion, have no professional implications and no pragmatic value. The quality of knowledge in this group of students is uneven, as are exam grades. Communication and educational behavior is active. Students strive to study on a budgetary basis in foreign partner universities, for the sake of this they often engage in public work in student councils. More attention is paid to acquiring social capital than improving the quality of knowledge [30].

The third type of educational style is typical for students who prefer a clan culture with market loyalty. Their educational style is characterized by dynamism, combining motivation for and high appreciation of formal achievements in the learning environment with an explicit desire to acquire the social capital which would increase the chances of getting a good job after graduation. Academic performance is achieved through quantitative indicators to the detriment of the quality of education and the depth of development of the material. A set of diplomas and certificates which they obtain correspond to the values of the prestige of education, but this official certification has nothing to do with the depth and range of knowledge. When selecting and assessing the importance of disciplines a pragmatic approach is considered to be the most relevant one. They tend to accept everything that can be used in order to promote their future professional careers.

The fourth type of educational activity style is characterized by a preference for clan culture and loyal to adhocratic culture. Students rely on career and employment through clan mechanisms; they expect the same attitude towards themselves in high school. The motivation for academic achievement is quite low, and the educational activity itself is uneven, poorly directed. The degree of involvement in the educational process is associated not so much with professional as with personal interests. Self-organization of educational activities is low and needs formal control. Communicative components of the style of educational activities are quite selective.

At the same time, it is necessary to note that the underestimation of the demands of the labor market is correlated with the deformations of the style of educational activities. The study of the cultural components of the style of students' educational activities made it possible to reveal the competence-based shortage of graduates and the mismatch of their expectations and the requirements of

companies for staff. Companies expect a potential employee to be prepared for a high degree of autonomy, self-organization, initiative, focus (result orientation), autonomy and readiness for risk and uncertainty, while students themselves demonstrate an orientation towards comfort, safety and security, show a desire to receive support, care and security from the company.

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