

PROBLEMS OF INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION IN A STUDENTS' GROUP

PROBLEMAS DE INTERAÇÃO INTERPESSOAL EM UM GRUPO DE ESTUDANTES

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ABSTRACT: The article explores the concept of interpersonal interaction as a necessary condition for the development of human life activity. The key problems of interaction of student groups in collaborative work are considered. The study suggests that in collaborative work on a project, each learner gains experience, learns and creates new things, and establishes contacts within the group. The conducted diagnostics indicate a high level of communicative ability of the students, and a high degree of favorable microclimate within a small group. On the basis of the studied material, the authors come to the conclusion that the students will be the most productive in working on a project in collaboration in small groups due to harmonious relations and mutual solidarity.

KEYWORDS: Interpersonal relations. Collaborative activities. Small group microclimate.

RESUMO: O artigo explora o conceito de interação interpessoal como uma condição necessária para o desenvolvimento da atividade da vida humana. Os principais problemas de interação de grupos de estudantes em trabalhos colaborativos são considerados. O estudo sugere que no trabalho colaborativo em um projeto, cada aluno ganha experiência, aprende e cria coisas novas, e estabelece contatos dentro do grupo. Os diagnósticos realizados indicam um alto nível de capacidade comunicativa dos estudantes e um alto grau de microclima favorável dentro de um grupo pequeno. Com base no material estudado, os autores concluem que os alunos serão os mais produtivos no trabalho de um projeto em colaboração em pequenos grupos, devido às relações harmoniosas e solidariedade mútua.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Relações interpessoais. Atividades colaborativas. Microclima de pequenos grupos.

RESUMEN: The article explores the concept of interpersonal interaction as a necessary condition for the development of human life activity. The key problems of interaction of student groups in collaborative work are considered. The study suggests that in collaborative work on a project, each learner gains experience, learns and creates new things, and establishes contacts within the group. The conducted diagnostics indicate a high level of communicative ability of the students, and a high degree of favorable microclimate within a small group. On the basis of the studied material, the authors come to the conclusion that the students will be the most productive in working on a project in collaboration in small groups due to harmonious relations and mutual solidarity.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Relações interpessoais. Atividades colaborativas. Microclima de pequenos grupos.

Introduction

Relationships between colleagues, friends, or group mates play a major role in a person's life since an individual is a reflection of their surroundings, the community they interact with every day. Minding the fact that people spend the most part of their lives at work or in school, where they typically become part of a collective, the importance of interpersonal relations becomes one of the critical factors in a person's work productivity and psychological condition.

In higher educational institutions, interpersonal interaction occurs not only between professors and students but also between students themselves. In addition, people with interpersonal learning styles learn best when they are allowed to use their human feelings as part of the learning process (GARDNER, 2017). They often prefer direct participation with others in group projects in higher education and in the broader community. They are stimulated by dialogue with students and adults and seem to have a strong sense of intuition about the opinions and preferences of others. Learners who build interpersonal relationships read people well and are very knowledgeable about the root causes of problems in communication.

In modern conditions, the problem of interaction gains greater relevance and requires deeper scientific study since the problems of interpersonal relationships between students with their fellow students have been virtually neglected by scholars of the humanities.

In the works of Russian researchers (AGEEV; ANDREEVA, 1981; ANANEV, 2001; BODALEV, 1995; KRUGLOVA, 1981; LOMOV, 1984; MIASISHCHEV, 1998; etc.), interpersonal interaction is viewed as a part of communication. In foreign psychological science (R. Adler, M. Argyle, R. F. Verderber, etc.), interpersonal interaction is considered within the framework of the concepts of "interaction", manner of action, and nature of expression (PAKHTUSOVA, 2013).

Furthermore, the insufficient study of the problems of interpersonal interaction of the subjects in the educational environment of the university is caused by a number of reasons.

First, there is a constant expansion of the communicative space, which affects all human life processes as it involves various members of society who perform different social roles and functions (POLIAKOVA, 2017).

Second, current changes in the content and forms of social relations entail a revision of former patterns, causing social tensions, which, in turn, create favorable conditions for the emergence of various kinds of contradictions, conflicts.

Third, success in learning is contingent on collaborative work with fellow students based on shared intellectual interests and professional goals. That is where students, by communicating and discussing their thoughts, create a network of contacts, which contributes to their personal and professional development.

The aim of the article is to study the theoretical aspect and to carry out diagnostics of interpersonal interaction within groups of first-year university students.

Literature review

In scientific literature, interpersonal interaction is understood as a person's behavior and tactics that they use for effective interaction with other people.

In this line of thought, the main aspect of interaction falls on the interactive side of communication. It contributes to the organization of the mutual exchange of knowledge, ideas, and actions between individuals. A group of students performing a joint activity is aware that everyone has to make a special contribution to it. On the basis of this activity, a communicative process or interpersonal communication emerges. Exchange of knowledge and ideas with regards to collaborative activities also inevitably involves the participants reaching mutual understanding, which is realized in new joint attempts to organize and further develop their activities. Herein, it is important for the participants not only to exchange information but to organize an exchange of actions, to plan them (EGORIKHINA, 2011).

The form of interaction of subjects is defined by two key characteristics (SPRECHER; FELMLI, 2000; SYROVA; SEROVA, 2015):

- 1) the ways of interaction of the partners, the system of their mutual expectations;
- 2) the restructuring mental neoplasms, which allow the student to maintain functional independence in the context of mastering new knowledge, methods of action, and interaction via the collaborative model.

Statistically, former classmates often become group mates at the university, thus creating segregated social groups, and have no need to expand this group or to accept new, unfamiliar students into it. On the other hand, the students who have no acquaintances try to make new ones and face the problem of being accepted into the "collective". Despite these problems, the learning process is organized in such a way that whether or not the students are

familiar with each other, they will still have to study together and socialize in collaborative work in the university.

The training and education of a future specialist are carried out through involvement in such areas as:

Scientific research activities

Scientific research activity consists in research of basic theoretical knowledge of different disciplines, in their analysis and comparison, i.e., concerns basic research of science. Students take part in scientific and practical research, formulate new atypical questions in the sphere of professional activity, gain experience in public speaking at international or regional conferences.

Learning activities

Learning activities are the main type of activity for the student to master professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. The learning process is aimed at personal and professional development and independent motivated learning for further self-development, self-education, and improvement.

Public activities

Public activities at universities are often represented by volunteer organizations that encourage students in a variety of ways. One of the main benefits of public activities is the development of the student's interpersonal and communicative skills. Through this, the student begins to try themselves in aesthetic and leisure activities that have a positive impact on their personal and professional development.

Despite the diversity of factors that can influence interpersonal relations in the educational environment, the human factor remains the leading one. A student group itself is the "cradle" of future professionals.

As a rule, a collective is formed on the basis of a common goal, needs, value orientations, attitudes, and motives of actions. It takes more effort to form a collective in the process of learning than in games and other types of free communication.

At the initial stage of the formation of a student group, only external, formal unity can be observed. The views, goals, and interests of students do not coincide, there is no universal opinion, decisions are spontaneous, the first attempts of the leader to show themselves are made. Interpersonal relations are established here at the level of sympathy and antipathy, they originate, consolidate, and reach a certain maturity, starting from acquaintance and then potentially growing into buddy, comradely, and friendly relations (VARLAMOVA, 2019).

At the second stage, students are still disconnected, however, they begin to form small groups, in which patterns of behavior are established. Such groups start to support the demands of the informal leader and present them to their fellow students. All learners outside of such groups are not proactive, however, they already listen to their classmates without resistance. In the course of the performance of functional duties, not only business contacts are consolidated, but interpersonal relations are born and develop, later becoming multifaceted and deep (SPRECHER; FELMLI, 2000).

The true cohesiveness of a collective is observed only at the third stage. At this level, students require each other's dedication. There is mutual assistance and cooperation. The discipline of such a collective is high, and also conscious. The opinion of each group member is respected, but collective decisions are the top priority. Conflicts rarely occur at this stage and are quickly resolved.

Reaching the final, third stage requires the ability to organize a group. This takes a lot of effort and time from group tutors. Only a managerial lever can form a highly effective, responsible team in which the potential of each member is fully unleashed. For this reason, one of the most important tasks of the tutor is to form a group climate that helps students achieve the highest possible goals.

At present, in the process of formation of interpersonal relations in groups, one person often stands out – a “leader” who typically sets the overall pace of development of the group. Nevertheless, teachers, too, establish certain rules of behavior in lessons for student groups (SYROVA; SEROVA, 2015). One professor may tend to require discipline from their students, while another may strive to develop their collective abilities.

Of importance is also the division of students by gender, since female and male individuals are known to have unique peculiarities in social interaction. Worthy of consideration is also the direction of the learning process. In particular, technological universities are dominated by male students, whereas medical universities have mainly female students. Regarding the specifics of interpersonal relations between women and men, it needs

to be considered that male groups are generally characterized by a spirit of competition, authority, and willpower, while the characteristic features of female groups are heartiness and a disposition toward democracy (BIKBULATOVA *et al.*, 2016; BUKHTEEVA *et al.*, 2019).

In technological universities, where male students are predominant, competition is more pronounced, as the competition also takes place for the attention of the female sex, developing a healthy competitive atmosphere in which each young man tries to stand out, to seem unique, special in communication and in joint activities.

Methods

A psychological and pedagogical study is conducted in the Industrial University of Tyumen on 45 first-year students in the direction of training “Oil and Gas Industry”. Of these, 36 students are male and 9 are female.

First-year students at the Industrial University of Tyumen currently study according to individual trajectories. Their curriculum includes the “Project activity” discipline, which is taught for three years. Project activity involves practical classes, in which students participate in mini-groups (of 6-8 people). Their task for the semester is to collaboratively develop a project on the assigned topic.

The current study employs the following methods and techniques:

1. Conflict-resilience level assessment.
2. Diagnostics of motivational orientations in interpersonal communication (I.D. Ladanov, V.A. Urazaeva).
3. Seashore’s Index of Group Cohesiveness.
4. Assessment of the student group microclimate (V.M. Zavialova) (FETISKIN; KOZLOV; MANUILOV, 2002).

The practice of the past three years shows that project activities contribute to the development of universal and professional competencies. The introduced and implemented project method presents a set of didactic techniques that help to resolve problems through the student’s own efforts (KRIUCHEVA; TOLSTOUKHOVA, 2015). In working with their group mates, students form competencies associated with problem-solving, analytical thinking, analysis, creativity, initiative, and the ability to persuade.

The discipline in question is mandatory for all students, which is why the issue of determining the leading communicative orientations and their harmonization in formal

communication (FINK, 2020) is the main priority in determining the current problems of students and directly affects the efficiency of work and the quality of students' collaborative projects.

In light of the above, the present study explores and analyzes the main problems of interpersonal interaction: the aspects of communication, conflict-resilience, and cohesiveness in first-year student groups in collaborative work on a project. Under interpersonal interaction, we understand collaborative activity, as a result of which each student gains experience, learns and creates new things, and establishes contacts within the group in forming interpersonal relations.

Analysis based on various diagnostics of first-year students should take into account their "specific" period of life, the period of maturation, personality development, formation of character, etc.

Results

The diagnostics conducted among the first-year students deliver the following results.

A high level of conflict-resistance is detected in the majority of the students (53%); the average level (24%) is demonstrated by the students who are oriented on compromise and strive to avoid conflicts; students with low conflict-resistance (23%) show a pronounced proneness to conflict (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – Conflict-resistance level in first-year students



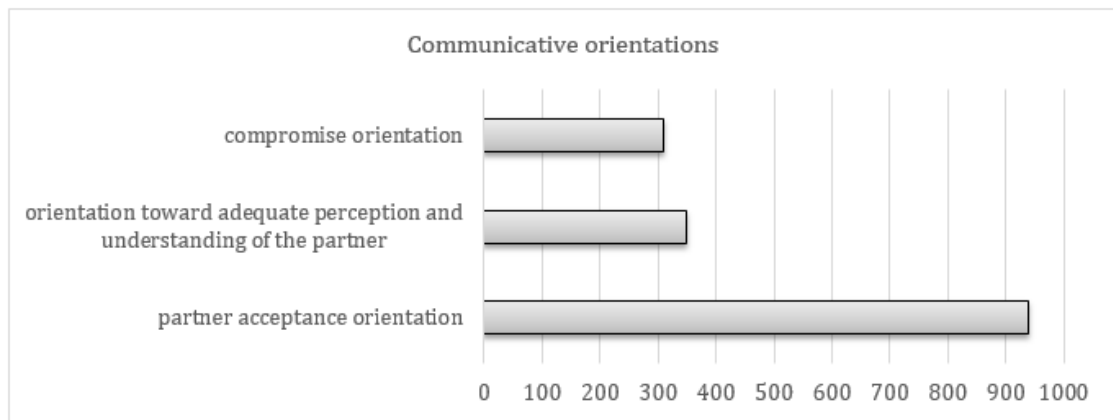
Source: Prepared by the authors

Assessment of motivational orientations in interpersonal communication shows that the majority of the students believe that good relationships depend on the efforts of all group members (73%). Three convictions are expressed by the same share of respondents (62%): all group members look at the object of discussion comprehensively, considering my opinion, too; my group mates respect me; I sincerely try to understand the intentions of my project group.

In the process of intergroup interaction, the students try to satisfy each other (62%). In the discussion of the projects, the students, when upset, use too harsh language, show excessive emotionality and aggression towards their classmates (56%). However, after a quarrel in the group, students typically try to be more attentive to each other (58%).

The obtained results (Fig. 2) indicate that the diagnosed communicative orientations lean in the studied groups toward acceptance of the partner. Partner acceptance orientation suggests a desire for communication that is based on mutual trust, attentiveness, and sincere respect for each other (FINK, 2020).

Figure 2 – Assessment of communicative orientation



Source: Prepared by the authors

Thus, it can be summarized that the groups show satisfactory results, mainly above average, which is indicative of a high level of the students' communicative abilities. Noteworthy, female students score on the test higher. Considering the numerical advantage of the male students, for the greatest result in the collaborative project activities, mini-groups should be formed so as to include at least one female student in each group, which would allow raising the level of communicative ability of the group.

Assessment of the group cohesiveness index indicates that the level of intra-group cohesiveness is above average.

The students develop a sense of “we”, which is good on the one hand, but on the other, leads to a disconnect with the members of other teams. Interpersonal relationships are established, students interact with each other at an average level. In addition, most of the respondents confirm that for the next collaboration on project activities, if possible, they would like to stay in the same composition.

Discussion

Overall, assessment of the microclimate suggests a high level of favorability in small groups. For a student, a mini group is a place where they feel cozy and comfortable, where they find mutual understanding, tactfulness, and support in difficult times. Nevertheless, in one group, the students note that the members of the mini group are graded unfairly since some students do not join in on the collaborative work yet get the same grades.

The students consider studying and working on a project to be their main concern (72%). Some micro-groups have developed their own traditions and common interests.

Theoretical research and the conducted diagnostics of interpersonal interaction in small groups suggest that high efficiency and harmonious relationships can only be achieved in groups with minimal psychological and pedagogical costs. In addition, over the course of the project, by the end of the first semester, students begin to adequately perceive and understand other classmates, and the following indicators of cooperative activity change:

1) empathy – the participants of the project method within the small group start to quite often show empathy toward their group mates in communication, expressing compassion, demonstrating empathic listening, and providing emotional support;

2) conflict-resistance – students start to coordinate, correct behavior in unpleasant situations, find different approaches to solving problems, and begin to choose the right style of behavior.

3) intergroup emotions – students learn to express their point of view and suggestions without excessive temper and aggression, and not to succumb to ridicule by their group mates;

4) self-assessment – during collaborative activity and interpersonal communication, the students take an outside view on themselves, recognize their own shortcomings and try to correct them. This relates to self-assessment in the group, reflection, and consideration of the contribution of work done in a week of work on the project.

Conclusion

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that students will not have difficulties in interpersonal interaction and will work with maximum productivity thanks to harmonious relationships and mutual solidarity when working on a project as part of the “Project activity” discipline.

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