The Evaluation of Students’ Determination in Vocational Schools

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Abstract: One of the strategic goals of vocational education is increasing its quality and competitiveness. Therefore, when training the students of vocational schools for work in the chosen profession, a particular attention is paid to the development of their intentional determination. The purpose of the article is to evaluate factors concerning the development of determination of vocational school students and to evaluate the possibilities of promoting the development of intentional determination. Materials and methods: the theoretical method - the analysis of scientific literature; the empirical method – student surveys. The data processing software SPSS and Excel have been used for the analysis of the data. Results: the article deals with a closer analysis of theoretical approaches concerning the development of determination in individual’s life activity and the data obtained as a result of surveying the students of several vocational schools. There have been singled out the main factors affecting the development of determination in the pedagogical work. Conclusion: With regard to the development of determination, it is very important that students understand learning as the process personally relevant to themselves; they create their self-experience where learning obtains personal meaning.

Keywords: vocational education, determination, motive, self-realization.

Introduction

The contemporary society requires that each individual should be able to use their abilities, knowledge and skills, to be persistent, able to work and achieve their aims under the conditions of increased stress, to act in a well-considered way and maintain determination in one’s life activity. Since the regaining of independence, the system of vocational education has undergone radical changes in Latvia. One of the strategic goals in the development of vocational education is the increase of its quality and competitiveness. Therefore, when training vocational school students in their chosen profession, a particular attention has to be paid to the development of intentional determination in the pedagogical process. The need to develop students’ determination is underpinned by the economic situation in Latvia and issues concerning the entry of potential employees into the job market.

In reality, there is a contradiction between the strivings of vocational school students to attain their goals and the satisfaction for achieved results; as a result, young people cannot achieve their goals.

In the academic year 2012/2013, 32086 students were enrolled in vocational secondary schools in Latvia, while only 9473 people completed their studies. According to the statistics, 5465 students dropped out of the institutions of vocational education (Statistika par..., 2015).

It has to be noted that individuals’ level of education and their acquired competencies: knowledge, skills, attitudes and the ability to use them are the key factors that ensure competitiveness in the global labour market (Bikse, 2009, 5). However, it is equally important to understand that one’s satisfaction with life, success and the feeling of happiness depend on the goals an individual has set for himself/herself and the ability to attain these goals.

With regard to vocational school students, the development of determination is affected by several factors: their upbringing, the attitude of educators and peers, school results and student’s own activity. Studies concerning the life goals of young people and their assumptions about the expected results, vocational interests and the career development goals, youth determination, work during the leisure time, educational success and career development show the interconnection between determination and motivation (Bernande, 2013; Caughlin, 2010; Katane, Kalniņa, 2010; Jurgena, Gedrovics 2011; Jurgena, Gedrovics, Cedere, 2014).
The awareness of one’s goal stimulates individual’s activity, particularly in the situation when the goal becomes the motive of student’s activity. Therefore, it is important to take into account not only the objective meaning of the goal, but also its subjective sense.

The purpose of the article is to evaluate the factors concerning the development of determination among vocational school students in Latvia and the possibilities of promoting the development of intentional determination.

**Methodology**


The analysis of literature leads to the conclusion that the life path project and its implementation is the goal function of life activity (Абулханова-Славская, 1991); the goals, means and products (Василюк, 1984).

With regard to the promotion of youth determination, Rubinstein’s (Рубинштейн, 1989/2004) idea about the interconnection between will and the goal and the progression from external to internal control is very important. Will does not result directly from needs, but rather from the awareness of motives and the goal as their result. The goal itself is the dominant of stimulus. The regulation of activity by means of willpower is conscious, and is strengthened by goals and motives. That is why, determination is defined as the most important feature of individual’s will, which manifests itself as the ability to set and achieve goals (Леонтьев, 2007, 252). The aim of activity is the connection between a subjective need and an idea of what is necessary to satisfy this need (Рубинштейн, 1989/2004); the predicted/ expected desirable or achievable result of activity; the goal expresses the result of any activity and characterises the content of human life (Майерс, 1989).

Determination is defined as the most important quality of human will, which manifests itself as the ability to set goals and achieve them. Determined people can understand the situation and analyse their motivation and needs independently and profoundly, and are able to adapt their desires to their knowledge, skills, abilities and possibilities (Bernande, 2013, 18).

The development of youth determination is connected with three stages of self-regulation: the choice of the goals, the stimulus to take action in order to reach the desirable goal, and monitoring one’s progress towards achieving the goal (Meissner, 2009).

The factors promoting the determination of personality both in education and in other areas of life activity can be diverse: the ability of the personality to understand and set the goal, which is connected with initiative (Bundick, 2009); self-regulation, which is connected with undertaking responsibility for one's actions and is ensured by adequate self-confidence (Bandura, 1977, 1989, Рубинштейн, 1989/2004); the use of appropriate means for achieving one’s goals (Yeager, Bundick, 2009).

It has to be noted that teacher’s assistance is an essential factor in developing students’ awareness of their goals and goal-setting skills (Gudjons, 2007). There is a connection between determination and motivation, which is shown by studies concerning the life goals of the youth and their notions about expected results, vocational interests and career development goals (Hirschi, 2010; Jurgena, Gedrovics, 2011). On the other hand, motivation as a factor promoting determination is closely linked with attitudes. Attitudes manifest and perfect themselves in the process of satisfying needs and activity aimed at achieving goals in accordance with the possibilities in particular social conditions. Attitudes are seen in one’s actions and behaviour.

The analysis of the theoretical literature led to the conclusion that for the development of determination it is important to evaluate students’ abilities to be aware of the goal of their activity, to set goals and choose the means for achieving them, to use these means appropriately and to stimulate
the need to achieve the goals. In the institutions of vocational education, the development of
determination could be promoted if students are aware of and understand competent learning, which
manifests itself as student’s ability and skill to choose an appropriate learning strategy corresponding
to a particular learning situation (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The model of competent learning (Kāposta, 2012).

The process of learning is connected with direct and reflexive relationships, which manifest
themselves in the active interconnection between the learner and the teacher. This interconnection is
based on common goals: to teach and to learn. If a student has the aforementioned components that
facilitate determination: the meaning of life, attitudes, will, needs, motivation, the goal, it can be
assumed that there will take place a purposeful process of learning, and determination will be
promoted in this process.

Learning, being student’s cognitive activity, promotes not only his/her intellectual, emotional,
volitional and physical development as well as the cognition of the diversity of reality, but it also
forms various social attitudes and creates the experience of self-cognition and self-realization.
Educational and personal success are criteria promoting determination.

The empirical study was based on students’ survey by means of a questionnaire containing closed
questions. The sample of the survey included 282 respondents from five Latvian vocational secondary
schools (Table 1). The average age of the respondent is 18.5.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>The number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Valmiera Vocational School</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Smiltene State Technical School - vocational secondary school</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Limbaži Vocational School</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jaungulbene Vocational School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kuldīga Vocational School of Technologies and Tourism</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical data processing was done by means of the software SPSS (version 19) and Excel.
Results and discussion

Determination is the basis of individual’s life activity and ensures success both in the educational institution and outside it, as well as in one’s further life activity. The development of determination is based on the goal of life activity, whose function is individual’s own life path plan and its implementation.

The analysis of the results of the survey shows that, generally, vocational school students are quite determined – the mean values of the responses referring to respondents’ understanding of the goal of their activity and their ability to achieve it are above average; in the three-point scale M = 2.25 - 2.48 (Table 2). The students believe that generally they are aware of the goal of their activity, are able to set it and choose appropriate means for achieving their goals, and to use these means rationally. The most frequently chosen value (Mode 2) indicates that most students have a neutral understanding of their goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>The theme of the question</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The awareness of the goal</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The ability to set the goal</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The ability to choose the means for achieving the goal</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The ability to use the means in order to achieve the goal</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The need to achieve the goal</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The division of the answers to these five questions in accordance with the Likert scale with three possible response values (1 – I cannot do it/ I am not aware/ there is no need; 2 – occasionally I can do it/ occasionally I am aware/ occasionally there is a need; 3 – I can always do it/ I am always aware/ there is always a need) shows that only 2% of the students surveyed admit their ignorance concerning determination and their inability to choose and use the means for achieving their goal, and the number of those who believe that it is not important at all to try to attain any goal is even smaller (1.4%) (Figure 2). Taking into account the dominant mean value M = 2, it can be inferred that part of the vocational school students do not really understand the meaning of the notion goal in life activity and have not really thought about purposeful activity so far.

![Figure 2. The division of the respondents (%) depending on their understanding of the goal.](image)

95.4% of the respondents evaluate their school results as good or satisfactory. In order to assess the validity of the difference between two mean values in two independent groups, there was used a t test.
Using this method, it was not possible to determine significant differences in respondents’ answers depending on the level of their school marks. When answering to the question: *Which statement characterises your achievements at school best of all?*, one out of four respondents (24.7%) consider achievement to be a pleasant coincidence; 35.5% state that achievement resulted from the process of work, and only one in four (26.3%) believe that achievement has been purposefully planned. Thus, a significant number of the students are not aware of the process of learning as an activity personally significant for them.

Some questions included in the questionnaire reveal students’ ability to act in non-standard situations or in the case of failure as well as their knowledge concerning the opportunities of developing their future career (to show determination). When answering to the question: *What prevents you from achieving better results at school?*, a surprisingly large number of the respondents (30.2%) admit that it is laziness (Figure 3). This response does not indicate readiness for purposeful activity.

![Figure 3. The division of the responses to the question: What prevents you from achieving better results at school?](image)

With regard to the question *How are you searching for the direction of activity for your future success?*, the responses where very different: only 6.0% of the respondents mentioned reading specialist literature as the main factor; 12.6% and 23.9% respectively mentioned consulting specialists or relatives, while one third (29.5%) marked involvement in social activities. Almost one student in five (17.9%) believe that it is necessary to rely on intuition, chance and coincidences. A small number of the respondents (2.5%) believe that no purposeful planning is needed.

In order to determine whether there are differences between the responses of boys and girls, there were formed two independent groups – girls and boys. By means of the t test it was determined that there are no significant differences in the mean values of the answers to most questions. For instance, both groups have similar results at school: 48% of the girls and 46% of the boys consider their results as satisfactory, while 49% of the girls and 48% of the boys rate their marks as good. Similarly, the majority of the respondents in both groups (56.4% and 55.7% respectively) admit that sometimes they cannot control their emotions, and only 37.9% of the girls (36.5% of the boys) believe that they can control their emotions.

There are statistically significant differences in the responses to the question concerning one’s possibilities (*How do you rate your possibilities?*) ($t = 2.280; p < 0.05; M_g = 2.48; M_b = 2.31$), where it appears that the girls look at their future with more optimism and confidence than the boys. Similarly, with regard to educational achievements, girls rate higher the importance of personal abilities and talents; there is a statistically significant difference in responses to this question ($t = 2.031; p < 0.05$;
Mo = 2.66; Mb = 2.54). It is worrying that only a half of the respondents are optimists, and one respondent in ten looks at the future with fear and pessimism.

There are also differences in the views of girls and boys how they would act in the case of (Figure 4). Compared to the boys, the girls are more focused on trying to find the causes, while the boys tend to search for another solution. By means of Pearson Chi Square test, it has been determined that the division of the responses is significantly different ($\chi^2 = 15.047; df = 7; p < 0.05$).

![Figure 4. The division of the responses to the question How would you act in the case of failure?](image)

Generally, the role of school in students’ development is rated positively (M = 2.21 – 2.27); within the context of this survey, it means that the institutions of vocational education involved in the present study care about developing students’ determination and the training of young competitive specialists. In this question, there is no significant difference between the responses of the girls and the boys ($\chi^2 = 17.450; df = 12; p > 0.05$).

On the generally quite similar background of the responses given by the girls and the boys, there can also be seen some gender specific nuances: compared to the girls, the boys give higher ratings to the role of the school in the development of independence and responsibility; on the other hand, they rate the role of the school in the development of skills related to setting goals and achieving them lower than the girls.

The study also revealed that in several questions the differences in the responses given by the girls and the boys is a topical issue, which has to be taken into account in further studies. Other important factors are the mutual relations between students and teachers and their cooperation, which were not included in this article.

Conclusions

Determination as a general psychological personality feature is forming and developing in the self-regulation and self-realization process of vocational school students.

In order to promote the development of determination among vocational school students, it is necessary to single out and evaluate factors which facilitate determination: the need to achieve the goal, the awareness and setting of the goal, the choice of the means for achieving the goal, the ability to use the means corresponding to a particular situation in order to achieve the goal, the development of a concrete plan of future life activity and the implementation of this plan. It was determined in the present study that these skills are not high, but most of the students are aware of the necessity of determination in their activity. Overall, students’ answers are neutral because among the 1st year students, who constituted the majority of the sample, the determination skills are still developing.
30% of the respondents mention laziness as the factor preventing them from achieving better results at school – it is an important indicator, which shows that it is necessary to pay more attention to the development of students’ willpower in the pedagogical process.

Students need knowledge of promoting the development of determination, the awareness of the choice of their life goal and the possibilities of achieving it. Developing determination in the process of learning at the institutions of vocational education is one of the key opportunities that develop students’ self-regulation skills and promote the development of self-confidence and self-esteem.

There are differences in the responses given by the girls and the boys, which educators have to take into account in the organization of the process of learning adapting the methods of education and learning to gender differences and trying to provide maximum opportunities for students ‘self-realization as the basis for their further successful life activity.

With regard to the development of determination, it is important that students understand the process of learning as a process important for themselves; in that way; they are developing their self-experience, where learning is becoming personally relevant for them. The data of the study show that a significant number of the respondents (about one in four) are not aware that the process of learning is an activity personally relevant for them.

Bibliography


