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The specificity of the adaptation difficulties of students with special educational needs in studying in the university

Abstract: The article deals with the problems of psychological and social adaptation of students with special educational needs to studying in the university. Successful adaptation helps the student to accept new requirements, to build positive relationships with teachers and classmates, to actualize motives of self-realization, it develops personal growth. The authors describe the student's cognitive, motivational, regulatory, communication difficulties; they also identify the main typological groups. As a result of the empirical research four main clusters of students were identified according to the investigated indicators. The leading tactics of assistance to students with special educational needs are described during designing their individual educational routes.

Keywords: psychological, social adaptation, students with special educational needs, cognitive, motivational, regulatory, communication difficulties, cluster, individual educational route

The problem of adaptation of freshmen to university conditions is quite traditional for Russian and foreign psychology, however, it still remains relevant and significant. Modern freshmen are distinguished by psychological, social, cultural features that were not typical for their peers of the late twentieth century.

Teaching students with limitations in physical and mental health is a new phenomenon of learning in higher professional school. Students with special educational needs rightfully and naturally entered a unified university space together with their healthy classmates. How is the adaptation of this group of students happening? What is its specificity? How to help the freshmen to cope faster with adaptive challenges? Adaptation of the students with special educational needs to studying in the university entails a number of problems that require timely identification, tracking, correction in the design of individual educational routes. Adaptation of the students with special educational needs is understood as a process of familiarizing to the conditions of the educational process in the institution of higher education, with the result that the students become a subject of new activities

and relationships, getting the opportunity to optimally perform the required functions. Traditionally, the following types of adaptation are distinguished: psychological, operational and social. Psychological adaptation is connected with the determination of the place in the system of group relations in a team, self-determination in relationship with teachers, with the ability to take into account the psychological characteristics of fellow students while interacting with them. Operational adaptation is understood as getting used to the conditions of teaching and professional activities, to the university schedule, to the time frames and structure lectures, seminars, practices, to the space of auditoriums, taking into consideration the capabilities to the specific office.

Social adaptation is the process of adjusting to a new social role, new status, the process of taking new functional responsibilities, the assignment of values of the future profession.

The core of the adaptation problems of students with special educational needs to studying in the university is the contradiction between the requirements of the new environment and readiness of the individual to them on the basis of his or her previous experience. The resolution of this disagreement is possible by the restructuring of student's activities and behavior, and also due to the regulatory influence of objective factors that contribute to the dynamics of the adaptation process, which indicators are qualitative changes in the structure of personality and behavior models in a new situation.

We consider the adaptation of the student with special educational needs to the conditions of the educational process and the environment without inner discomfort and without conflict with the environment, it also the university space should be changed adequately according to the characteristics of the student. The process of adaptation is bilateral: the environment affects people and the subjects of adaptation affect the environment and themselves.

We believe that effective adaptation to training in high school is not important to only freshmen with special educational needs, but to all subjects of the educational process. Successful adaptation promotes rapid adaptation of students to new requirements and style of academic work, building positive relationships with teachers and fellow students, actualization of motives of self-realization in creative, socially meaningful, sport, research activities; becomes a fertile soil for personal and professional self-development.

In our work, we have focused on the study of specific social and personal difficulties causing problems in the process of psychological and social adaptation of first-year students with special educational needs. Carrying out similar studies was important from the standpoint of scientific justification and further development of individual educational routes of students.

We correlated cognitive difficulties with the lack of formation educational skills necessary for success in high school, a poorly developed ability of adequate self-assessment and reflection. We considered the following indicators of the motivational difficulties: low level of cognitive motivation, lack of academic interest in the study of specific disciplines, lack of development of motives related to mastering of the profession, predominance of external motives over internal, ambivalence of motivations. We also took into consideration the presence of regulatory difficulties, judging on the following parameters: badly developed ability of self-organization, low level of self-regulation, lack of independence. Indicators of language problems were: low level of communication skills, inability to communicate with peers, problems of interaction with teachers, poorly developed organizational skills, inability to work in a group (a team), excessive directness in communication, lack of flexibility.

At the initial stage of the study, we supposed that the most significant negative influence on the adaptation process of students with special educational needs in studying in the university was badly developed educational and professional motivation and reflective abilities. As a result of empirical research, we have identified 4 main subgroups of students in the study sample with different graphic profiles on the investigated indicators (Fig. 1). All profiles were constructed on the basis of average values for relevant indicators in the subgroup.

We correlated motivational difficulties with the indices on scales 1, 2, 3. We judged about the presence of communication difficulties by the results obtained on scales 4, 6, 7, 12. Poor results on scales 5, 8, 9, 10 testified cognitive difficulties. The presence of regulatory difficulties indicated low rates of the scales 11, 13, 14, 15.

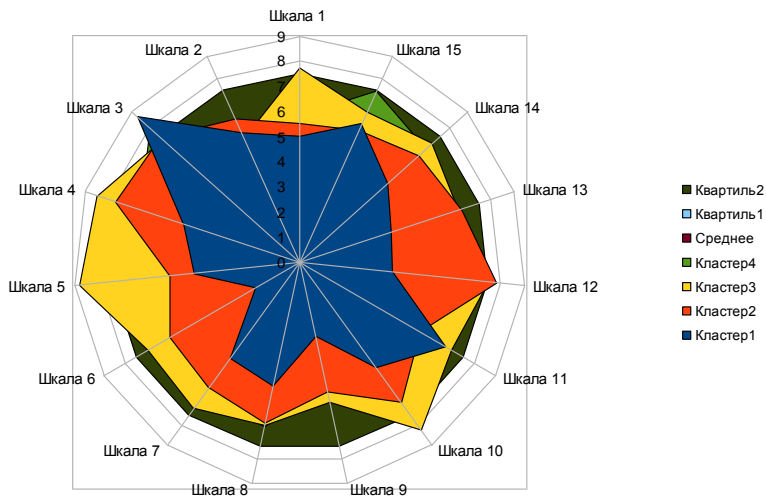


Fig. 1. Generalized graphical profiles of subgroups of students, selected on indicators of the presence/absence of difficulties in the process of adaptation to learning in school the university

Each scale corresponds to one investigated indicator:

- scale 1 - the motive of acquiring knowledge,
- scale 2 - the motive of mastering the profession,
- scale 3 - the motive of obtaining a diploma,
- scale 4 - adaptation to the training group,
- scale 5 - adaptation to educational activity,
- scale 6 - communication skills,
- scale 7 - organizational skills,
- scale 8 – planning,
- scale 9 – modeling,
- scale 10 – programming,
- scale 11 – evaluation,
- scale 12 – flexibility,
- scale 13- independence,
- scale 14 - overall level of self-regulation,
- scale 15 - level of reflection

Describing the students of the first subgroup (cluster), we can note that generalized graphical profile has a curved, uneven, asymmetrical, angular view, where there are both haunting figures (below average) and protruding beyond the borders, built on the average values (Fig. 2).

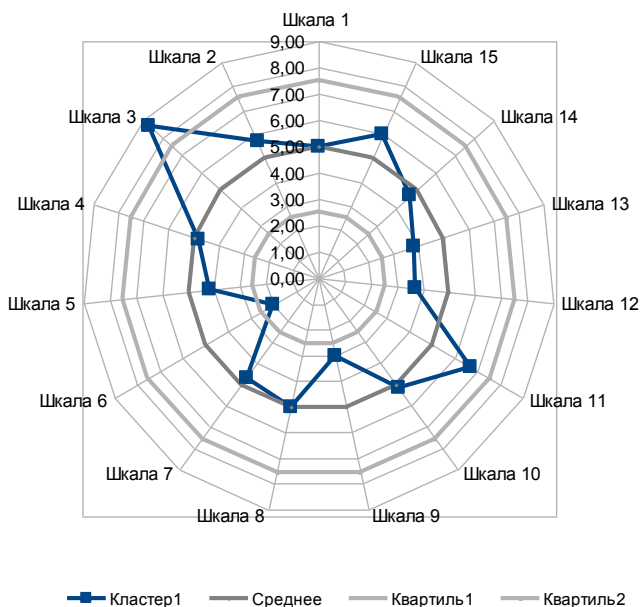


Fig. 2. Generalized graphic profile of the students of the first subgroup

The highest rates in the first subgroup of students are marked in scale 3 - motivation graduation, scale 11 - ability to evaluate results, scale 15 - level of reflection. The results suggest that external, conscious motivation prevails in the educational activities in the university and is associated with the desire to acquire a diploma and the formal assimilation of knowledge. The predominance of the motives in the third scale indicates a formal approach of students to the choice of their profession, dissatisfaction with it. These students are studying there, where they could enter with their exam scores. At the same time they adequately assess their capabilities (a high enough value in scales 11 and 15), they know that their level is below average and do not expect high scores and a place in the group.

Scales 6 (communication skills), 9 (modeling), 12 (flexibility), 13 (independence) are sinking down in the first profile. The studied subgroup has

the lowest rates in these scales. The obtained results suggest that the students in this cluster have serious communicative difficulties (the reason is the low level of communication skills, incompleteness of the skills of communication with peers, possible problems in interaction with teachers). Freshmen with low scores in a scale of flexibility feel insecure in the dynamic, quickly changing environment in terms of adaptation to training in high school, they also have difficulties getting used to the change of scenery and lifestyle. They are not able to adequately respond to the situation and to plan quickly their own activities and behavior, to develop a program of action, to evaluate the misalignment of the obtained results with the purpose of activities and to make relevant adjustments. As a result, these students inevitably face regulatory failures and, as a consequence, failures in training activities.

Students with low scores in the scale of "modeling" have a badly developed formation of this ability, which leads to inadequate assessment of important internal conditions and external circumstances that arise in the process of learning. It is manifested in fantasies that may lead to rapid changes in relation to the development of the situation and the consequences of their actions. Such students often have difficulties in defining goals and programs of their actions adequate to the current situation; they do not always notice the changing circumstances, which also often leads to failure in learning activities.

Low performance in the scale of independence indicates the dependence of respondents from the opinions and evaluations of others. Such students are unable to develop their own plans and programs of their own actions, often uncritically follow other people's advice. In the absence of outside help, they have problems in learning.

These difficulties inevitably lead to a decrease in the indicators of students' adaptation to educational activity that can be observed in their graphical profile (values below the average on scale 5). Taking into consideration the other indicators students of the first group demonstrated average values.

Thus, the freshmen, who are in the first cluster, are characterized by the presence of clearly expressed motivational, communicative, cognitive and regulatory difficulties. In other words, they are very quiet, depending on others and not very popular in the group. Usually the teachers of these students feel pity towards them, especially because the latter, as a rule, attend classes, being unable to perform the proposed tasks, but at the same time they don't argue or be rude, do not enter into any conflicts, so the teachers

sympathetically give them satisfactory marks and transfer them to the next year, "closing their eyes" to poor results of educational activities.

While designing the individual educational routes for such students with special educational needs we considered tactic of psychological-pedagogical assistance to be the best, because it is necessary to form their inner motivation and communicative skills, to overcome the problems that hinder the learning process, to develop qualities providing a normal level of self-regulation.

The results of the second cluster students (or subgroup) are characterized by a rather asymmetrical, angular figure of a histogram indicating a disproportionate number of values (Fig. 3). However, unlike the students of the first subgroup in this cluster all values, even on the haunting scales are in the range above the average.

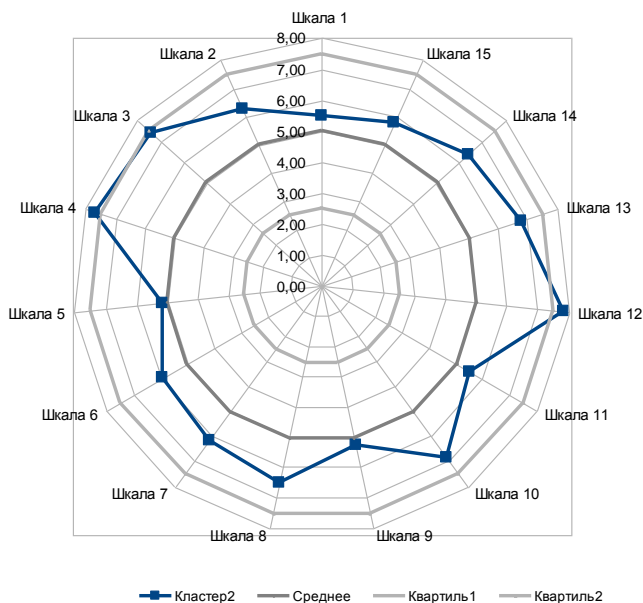


Fig. 3. Generalized graphic profile of the second subgroup students

The highest values of the second subgroup students are marked in scales 3 (the motive of obtaining a diploma), 4 (adaptation to the study group) and 12 (flexibility in behavior and communication). Therefore, these students, as well as in the first subgroup, are dominated by the outer, con-

scious motivation associated with the desire to acquire a diploma with the formal assimilation of knowledge, desire to find workarounds during examinations and tests, etc. Such students need not the knowledge, but a mark in the record book that they want to obtain, as a rule, without any special effort, using their personal qualities: flexibility of behavior in various communication situations, good relationships with the group, all kinds of acquaintances.

Such students, if necessary, interact with other students in their group, the course faculty or familiar teachers who can give hints or make arrangements; they ask for help, use cheat sheets written by classmates; make requests for downloading the lectures of a certain teacher in the network. They are interested, which teachers are taking exams and tests, they can easily change their viewpoint depending on the situation, tend to manipulate information and people. High enough scores from the students of the second subgroup are also recorded in scale 10 (programming) and 13 (independence).

The ability to program is evident in the individual development of conscious thinking over the ways of actions and behavior to achieve goals. Programs are developed independently. In case of discrepancy of the obtained results, the purpose is correction of the program of action to obtain an acceptable result. All this comes along with well-developed independence, which was the weak link among the students of the first group.

The presence of high indicators in the scale of independence makes evident the students' autonomy in the organization of activities, their ability to plan activities and behavior, to organize the work to achieve the nominated goals, to monitor progress, to analyze and to evaluate midway and final results.

As is already noted, there are no low levels in the second subgroup of students. All values are either at average or above average area. However, it is interesting to analyze three relatively haunting subgroup scales.

The lowest score among the students of the second cluster is marked in scale 5 (adaptation to educational activity), 9 (modelling), 11 (evaluation). The histogram clearly reflects the relationship between the lack of motivation to learn and low adaptation to learning activities that is, in our opinion, logical.

The ability to model reflects the individual development of ideas about the external and internal significant conditions, the degree of awareness and adequacy. Such students are not always able to allocate significant conditions for achieving the targets both in the current situation and in prospective future that is manifested in a number of cases in the controversy of

action programs and their plans, as well as in the discrepancy in the obtained results.

Finally, not very high average values in the scale of "evaluation" indicate that the assessment and the results of the activities are insufficiently developed and not always adequate among the students of this subgroup.

Such students may find different excuses for themselves, invent all sorts of stories that something hindered them to learn, to write, to fulfill tasks on time. In this process they, as a rule, never involve their parents, do everything themselves.

Thus, in the second subgroup of students only motivational difficulties are clearly diagnosed. While building an individual educational route and organizing the work with such students the best, in our opinion, is the **tactics of psychological and pedagogical support** in the process of which it is necessary to take into account their independence, flexibility of behavior, not always adequate self-image and strive to develop internal motivation of educational and professional activities.

A generalized profile of students assigned to the third subgroup (cluster) is characterized by a predominance of values above the average. The graphical profile has irregular edges, is not symmetrical (Fig. 4). It clearly has several peak heights, prevailing over the others, and clearly there are two sinks in the scale relatively to the other averages.

The students of the third subgroup have highest points in scales 1 (the motive of the acquisition of knowledge), 4 (adaptation to the study group), 5 (adaptation to educational activity), 10 (programming). High points in the first scale indicate a predominance of internal, conscious cognitive motivation, as expressed in the desire to acquire knowledge, interest in learning academic subjects because of curiosity. Formed cognitive motivation is combined with good adaptation to learning activity: students easily learn academic subjects successfully and timely perform training tasks, freely express their thoughts on the workshops, showing individuality.

Students of the third subgroup, taking into consideration average values reflected in the chart, are well adapted not only to the educational activities, but also to the study group. During the process of studying in the university they develop friendly relationships with fellow students, form a cohesive team, a sense of mutual responsibility, value-orientation unity. Such students feel comfortable in the group, easily find common language with classmates, follow the group norms and rules. If necessary, they can ask for help, able to be active and initiative. Classmates also accept and support the views and interests of these students.

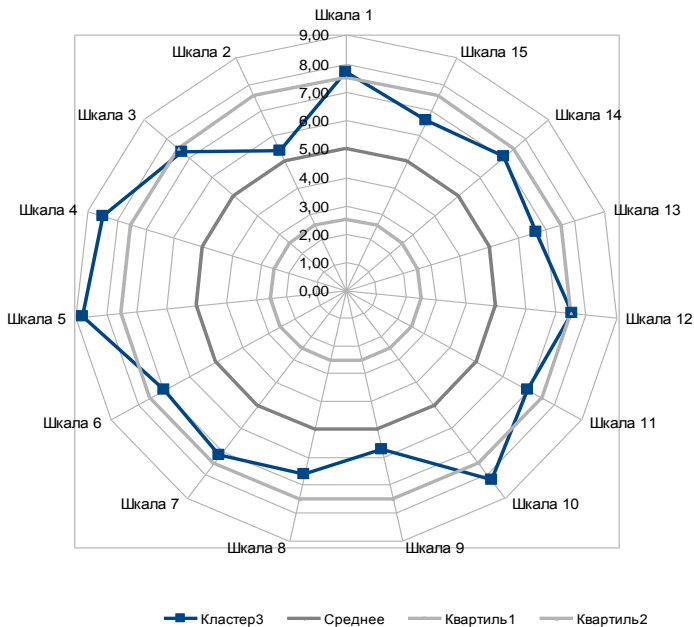


Fig. 4. Generalized graphic profile of the third subgroup students

High indicators in the scale of "programming" show that these students need to think about how to act and behave to achieve their objectives, they expand and consider the details of the programs. Programs, developed by the students, are flexibly changed in the new circumstances, are sustainable in a situation of interference.

The average points in this cluster are recorded in scale 2 (the motive of vocational training) and 9 (modelling). We can assume that these students are interested to study in universities, they like to learn new disciplines, but they haven't made a career choice, don't see the connection of the obtained knowledge for future professional activities. This is reflected in their modeling of important conditions for achieving the objectives, both in the current situation and in future.

Thus, the students of the third subgroup do not have distinct challenges in the learning process in the university. On the contrary, they can be described as almost perfect first-year students, willing and able to learn in different conditions including teamwork and various joint activities. They need to be helped in the formation of the professional motivation, it is nec-

essary to familiarize them with the possibilities of future professional activities, to build (model) the relevant plans for their future "I in the profession". While designing the individual educational route and the organization of work with such students, in our opinion, **the tactics of psycho-pedagogical support** will fit the best.

A generalized graphical profile of students referred in the course of cluster analysis to the fourth subgroup, has an asymmetrical appearance with projecting edges and haunting points (Fig. 5). Most of the values in these scales are in the area above average.

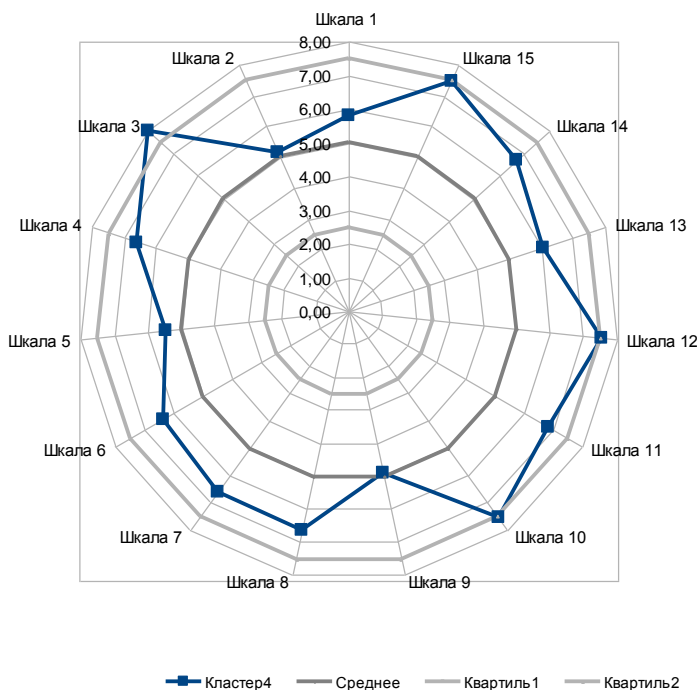


Fig. 5. Generalized graphic profile of the students of the fourth subgroup

Peak tops in the fourth cluster are recorded in scales 3 (the motive of obtaining a diploma), 10 (programming), 12 (flexibility), 15 (reflection). Thus, in this subgroup, the dominance of external, formal conscious motivation is associated with the desire to acquire a diploma. At the same time, cognitive motivation (scale 1) has values above average. This combination of motivation, in our opinion, is higher for part-time students.

The fourth subgroup of students is characterized by individual development of a conscious programming of their actions. They tend to think carefully about how to perform their own actions to achieve the objectives. Typically, these students present independently developed detailed, comprehensive program, they are able to adjust flexibly to change depending on circumstances.

Sufficiently high level of development of the regulatory flexibility is diagnosed among the students of this cluster, i.e. the ability to rebuild, to make a correction in the system of self-regulation of changing external and internal conditions. They differ in the plasticity of all regulatory processes. In case of unforeseen circumstances such students easily rebuild their program of actions and behavior, they are able to rapidly assess the change of important conditions. When there is misalignment of the obtained results with the adopted goal, they quickly analyze the fact of misalignment and make appropriate correction. The regulatory flexibility allows them to react adequately to the rapid change in events, to successfully solve problems even in situations of uncertainty and risk.

Unlike students of other subgroups, the members of the fourth cluster have high values on a scale of "reflection", which is manifested in the ability to analyze themselves, their mental States, personal knowledge, the product of its own activity, the rethinking, etc.

Disengaging values in the area average, in the fourth sub-group of students observed on scales 2 (motif mastering of profession) and 9 (simulation). This indicates a lack of unawareness of the choice of the future professional activity, or low satisfaction with their chosen profession. Doubts about the correctness of professional choice have an impact on the modelling of such students of important conditions for achieving the objectives, as in the current situation and promising future.

Unlike students of other subgroups, the members of the fourth cluster have high values in the scale of "reflection", which is manifested in the ability to analyze themselves, their mental states, their personal knowledge, the product of their own activity, reassessment, etc.

Sinking values, that still are in the area of average, in the fourth subgroup of students are observed on scales 2 (motive of profession mastering) and 9 (modelling). This indicates the lack of awareness of the choice of the future professional activity, or low satisfaction with their chosen profession. Doubts about the correctness of professional choice have an impact on the modelling of important conditions for achieving the objectives both in the current situation and in prospected future.

In general, a group of students with special educational needs from the fourth cluster is not characterized by any significant difficulties. In the design of individual educational routes and constructing them, in our opinion, the most effective is **the tactics of psychological-pedagogical counselling** with a focus on the organization of self-evaluation activities in connection with a sufficiently high level of development of reflection.

Thus, the pilot study revealed a number of difficulties in social and personal spheres, hindering the successful adaptation of students with special educational needs. Four major subgroups of students were identified with their own different graphic profiles, reflecting the specificity of adaptation difficulties; their psychological characteristics were given. Analysis of the specificity of adaptation difficulties allowed us to offer the best psychological and pedagogical tactics to the organization of work for each of the selected subgroups of students with special educational needs on the basis of which it is expedient to design the individual educational route.

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