Achievement Motivation in the Context of Psychological Safety as a Factor of Development of Student’s Professional Strategy

Yulia Vladimirovna Vardanyan, Lyudmila Valerjevna Vardanyan, Ekaterina Aleksandrovna Lezhneva

Department of Psychology, Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute named after M. E. Evseyev, Saransk, 430007, Russia

julia_vardanyan@mail.ru

Abstract: This paper aims to study the student’s achievement motivation in the process of increase in psychological safety and positive influence on development of personality’s professional strategy. The research methodology is based on the study and development of achievement motivation and the need to achieve professionally valuable goal, prevention of action of the failure-avoiding motive in conditions of recognition and overcoming of psychological threats in implementation of success achievement training, which provides safety-oriented approach to enrichment of student’s professional strategy with new valuable motivational content. Authors suggest the original way out of paradoxical situation when the growth in vacancies occurs on the background of increasing requirements for professional competence. At the same time, rapid devaluation of the mastered professional competencies leads to acceleration of professional inadequacy. All these increase the role of achievement motivation in implementation of personality’s professional strategy. Particular significance is given to the solution to the problem of achievement motivation by increasing psychological safety during the training. This ensures a positive change in the motivational basis of personality’s professional strategy.

Keywords: achievement motivation, achievement motive, factor of development, labor efficiency, professional inadequacy, professional competence, professional strategy, training, psychological safety

1. Introduction

In modern industrialized countries, there is a tendency towards rapid devaluation of the achieved level of professional competencies, which is no longer sufficient for qualitative solution to emerging professional tasks. Psychological safety gets broken, which leads to the feeling of loss of success, reduction in self-esteem of general and professional achievements, increase in helplessness and loss of familiar opportunities. This destabilizes psychological safety of a student and active professional in case of discrepancy between the desire and opportunity to be engaged in professional work. There are different ways to restore psychological safety. It is important to evaluate them on the basis of their connection with labor efficiency:

1. The initial choice of the post (or change of the previous post at the same or new workplace) for which the existing level of professional competence is sufficient. This quickly restores acceptable level of psychological safety because of return of professional self-acceptance to the usual level. However, the deficiency of such a choice leads to devaluation of the need for professional development that contributes to significant reduction in professional strategy and deceleration of its prospects.

2. Starting of various psychological defense mechanisms. This leads to appearance of imaginary ground for ignoring of new opportunities or discredit of their importance, for projection of one’s own incompetence on coworkers or employees, for devaluation of importance of an experience in application of innovations, for justification of desire to work “as usual” with false arguments. People move over and do not solve new professional tasks or start solving them in old ways, without implementation of the growth potential of modern technical means and technologies. There is a temporarily alleviation of psycho-traumatic situation of professional inadequacy, but at the same time aggravation of the problem of development of professional incompetence and reduction in labor efficiency.

3. The recognition of emerged professional inadequacy (partial or full; elemental or systemic), which leads to finding some (destructive or constructive) ways out of this situation.

The most effective constructive personal resource to prevent the emergence of professional inadequacy is the development of achievement motivation as a causative-guiding, correctional-adjusting, valuable-sensemaking basis of professional strategy and implementation of the need for professional achievements. Therefore, solution to the problem of development of achievement motivation
in the context of increase in psychological safety and prevention of the emergence of professional inadequacy sets an important new field for research.

2. Background and theory

Elaboration of general theoretical basis of research and development of motivation is based on complementary ideas of Russian and foreign scientists. Some points of the activity theory of motivation developed by Leontiev (1972) are significant for our research. According to this theory, different types of motives (motives of actions, motives of activity, “only understanding” and “really existing motives”), differing in the degree of awareness, adjust to each other. They develop by converting an action into self-activity, which leads to formation of new content of motives of activity: “Just so new motives and, consequently, new types of activity arise (Именно так возникают новые мотивы, а следовательно, и новые виды деятельности)” (p. 513). We use this idea of existence of different levels of motives awareness in the process of training work.

The research and development of achievement motivation is based on the ideas worked out in foreign psychology. First of all, we mean several Atkinson’s (1981) ideas: the achievement motive as the ability to feel proud of achievements; the mechanism of achievement motivation; individual differences in the motivational sphere, which are manifested in the fact that some people try to get into such situations that lead to achievement, others tend to avoid them. McClelland (2007) states that the desire to do something better is the inducement for the achievement motive. The achievement motive implies that “something is better than the fact itself, because of internal satisfaction with improvement in one’s own activity (чего-то делается лучше самого этого факта, из-за внутреннего удовольствия от улучшения собственной деятельности)” (p. 262). Later he identified two motivational trends within the achievement motivation: the desire to succeed and the desire to avoid failure.

Orlov (1987) used the term “need for achievement” and pointed out that its satisfaction leads to the sense of superiority, which is associated with superiority over the situation, not over another person. Westbroek et al. (2010) argue that in order to achieve a certain goal, students should be motivated and they should have “rudimentary conceptual and procedural knowledge of how to attain that goal” (p. 603).

A number of foreign researchers point out that achievement motivation “is an important contributor to students’ academic success” (Trumbull & Rothstein, 2011). It has a positive impact on students’ progress and, consequently, on their activity and personal self-development (Alderman, 2004; Elliot & Thrash, 2001; Price & Kadi-Hanifi, 2011; Seifert, 2004, etc.).

Other researchers study achievement motivation in the context of its influence on success of professional activity; as the driving force encouraging its formation and development; as a factor of successful adaptation of the learning environment to students or teachers’ peculiarities (Gordeeva, 2006; Grigoricheva, 2009; Marihin, 2009; Edilson, 2009; Hung-Wen, 2010; Hung-Wen & Ching-Hsiang, 2009; Ribeiro et al., 2012; Teoh, Koo & Singh, 2010). Achievement motivation aims at possibly best performance of any kind of professional activity oriented to achieve some result, to which the criterion of success can be applied. Besides, being a reliable predictor for mastering of educational programs and successfullness of professional work, this motivation promotes student’s professional development (Gordeeva, 2006). The problem of development of achievement motivation in the course of professional training is relevant for its consideration in connection with such psychological phenomena as successfullness, competence of professional activity, competitiveness, professional mobility and development of personal and intellectual potential. A variety of negative psychological factors prevailing and in a number of cases “thriving” in educational environment, leads to the fact that “motivation for success is often replaced by the motivation failure avoidance” (Kechina, 2013). Kechina (2010) gives the comparative analysis of specialists with high and low achievement motivation. High achievement motivation directs a person, moves him to the goal and promotes his development. Future professionals with the fear of failure motivation are usually not enterprising. They avoid important tasks and always try to find reasons to refuse them in their professional activity. Therefore, “High achievement motivation is the preferred drive for the behavior of employee” (Hung-Wen, 2010).

Thus, achievement motivation is an integrative characteristic of personality’s focus on success achievement in educational and professional work, production of professional intentions and life goals. It affects the development of professional strategy which is understood as a dynamic system of personality’s perspective orientation, focusing on conscious change and design of one’s life in the context of its professional development; a way of planning and designing of one’s life through gradual formation of one’s professional future (Solnyshkina, 2006). Nandan and London (2013) defend the idea of development of interprofessional competencies,
which can help the graduates to be “well prepared to participate in local, national and global social change strategies” (p. 815) and ensure the quality of their preparation for the complex professional realities.

The analysis convinces us that the scientific base established in psychology enables to explore deeply the essence of achievement motivation, as well as internal and external conditions of its emergence, development and influence. However, the analysis of the practice of professional activity shows that the growth in the dynamic of vacancies in labor market and a shortage of personnel take place on the background of increasing requirements for professional competence. As for rapid devaluation of the mastered professional competence, it promotes the accelerated emergence of professional inadequacy. This confirms the growing importance of achievement motivation for implementation of personality’s professional strategy and the need for its development. Thus, the study of achievement motivation in the context of psychological safety and implementation of new opportunities to prevent situations of professional inadequacy remains very urgent and poorly researched factor of development of motivational basis of personality’s professional strategy.

3. Methodology

In order to study students’ achievement motivation we used the following methods: “Measuring of achievement motivation” by Mehrabian (Practicum..., pp. 509-512); questionnaire “Diagnosis of personality on achievement motivation” by Ehlers (Practicum..., pp. 505-506); “The need for goal achievement” by Orlov (Practicum..., pp. 512-513). We used training to increase the level of achievement motivation, actualize students’ social values, enhance the ability to self-realization, develop the goal-setting skills and form the experience of valuable behavior regulation. Statistical significance of changes in peculiarities of achievement motivation, as well as the need for goal achievement was detected using the Mann-Whitney U test (Sidorenko, pp. 49-59).

4. Hypothesis, experimental data, data analysis and results

We hypothesized that the effect of students’ achievement motivation on formation of professional strategy can be increased if: to create and implement training program for development of achievement motivation by reducing the failure-avoiding motive in the context of increasing psychological safety; to create psycho-pedagogical conditions that ensure its implementation.

Experimental work carried out at the research laboratory “Development of professional competence of the teacher and psychologist in the system of continuing education” of the Department of Psychology of Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute named after M. E. Evseyev. It consisted of three stages: ascertaining, forming and controlling.

Ascertaining phase included examination of initial level of students’ achievement motivation. The study involved 40 third year students receiving psycho-pedagogical education. It was found with the help of such method as “Measuring of achievement motivation” by Mehrabian, that 25 % of participants showed the domination of the achievement motive, 75 % – the failure-avoiding motive. Application of the questionnaire by Ehlers helped to reveal that students in the sample have the following levels of achievement motivation: low – 22,5 %; average – 57,5 %; moderately high – 17,5 %; too high – 2,5 %. The method, worked out by Orlov, helped to found that 47,5 % of participants have low need for goal achievement; 32,5 % – average; 20 % – high.

Data obtained on the ascertaining stage of the study indicate that the most of the respondents are characterized by the failure avoiding motive (75 %), average level of achievement motivation (57,5 %) and low need for goal achievement (47,5 %). Consequently, it is necessary to increase the students’ achievement motivation. After the completion of this stage equal experimental and control groups (each of 20 people) were created. The proportions of students with more or less same studied characteristics were kept.

On the forming stage, the training program aimed at the development of achievement motivation and competencies ensuring its implementation on the basis of personally significant change of motivation-valuable structure of personality of students of the experimental group was worked out and implemented. It consisted of 18 lessons and included the following phases:

1. primary – motivation-directed phase (tasks: to involve the participants into the content of the training; to actualize and supplement the knowledge about the achievement motivation; to promote the awareness of the need; to form the orientation to attraction of success);
2. basic – educational and developmental phase (tasks: to create the conditions for students’ self-knowledge of the components of achievement motivation; to reveal and develop personality traits that affect the achievement motivation (self-esteem, level of aspirations, valuable orientations, abilities, locus of the control, etc.); to learn the techniques of awareness of motives of one’s own behavior and to master the system of ways to achieve success);
3. final – directing to self-actualization
(tasks: to teach the participants how to use the knowledge and competencies in the field of implementation of achievement motivation; to reveal the influence of achievement motivation on formation of professional strategy; to consolidate the active life strategy).

During the training, the following activities were practiced: diagnostics and self-diagnoses of the need-motivational sphere and personal qualities; compiling an autobiography; identification of the main lines of one’s own professional and personal development; compiling a program and “Diary of motivational and personal development”. Besides, students did different exercises aimed at actualization and development of achievement motivation and participated in discussions about factors of personality’s success and professional development.

Besides, during the training special attention was focused on creation of psychologically comfortable environment, which (in the process of development of achievement motivation) enables to provide psychological safety for participants. Developmental work was carried out with regard for the ideas worked out by members of the research laboratory. To achieve a state of psychological safety during the training the following actions were important: development of “a sense of psychological safety and involvement in the creation of psychologically comfortable social environment (чувства психологической безопасности и причастности к созданию психологически комфортной социальной среды)” (Ruskina, 2011, pp. 86-87); “refusal from using psychologically dangerous behavior, high level of moral development” (Vardanyan & Ruskina, 2013, p. 966); development of emotional flexibility as “the ability to express genuine emotions competently (способности грамотно выражать подлинные эмоции)” (Tsareva, 2013, p. 289); consolidation and actualization of valuable orientations, “regulating the professional activity in a situation of uncertainty, conflict, moral responsibility, difficult choice (регулирующих полноценную профессиональную деятельность в ситуации неопределенности, конфликта, моральной ответственности, сложного выбора)” (Vdovina, 2012, p. 143).

To increase the effectiveness of the training several psychol-pedagogical conditions were created:
- diagnostic (providing multilateral detection of characteristics of student’s achievement motivation, taking into consideration one’s individual psychological peculiarities);
- stimulating and motivational (encouraging students to activate, master and use the technologies of development of achievement motivation, as well as to follow the certain principles of training);
- organizational and implementing (providing the application of received competencies by a student and including after-training support);
- correctional and developing (aimed at correction and improvement of the process and result of development of achievement motivation and its components);
- evaluative and productive (allowing to estimate the level and quality of development of achievement motivation and its effectiveness).

Provision of these conditions enables to move the achievement motivation in the context of psychological safety to the mainstream of professional strategy development, ensuring the formation of “student’s career orientation, which the success of professional activity ultimately depends on (карьерных ориентаций студента, от которых в конечном итоге зависит успех профессиональной деятельности)” (Lezhneva, 2012, p. 58). Vardanyan and Lezhneva (2012) pointed out that it is necessary to develop the training competencies of students of psycho-pedagogical direction of education through mastering the system of “theoretical knowledge, practical skills and the efficient organization of a training work with students (теоретических знаний, практических навыков и умений эффективной организации тренинговой работы с учащимися)” (p. 150), as well as their application in the process of self-development of achievement motivation and preparation for its development among future clients.

The effectiveness of the developed and tested training program was evaluated during the control phase. To do this, we compared the data describing the achievement motivation of students in the experimental and control groups, as well as the data in the experimental group obtained before and after the training.

Table 1. Changing of indicators of achievement motivation (EG, experimental group; CG, control group; A, ascertaining stage; C, controlling stage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of achievement motivation</th>
<th>Number of students (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure-avoiding motive</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement motive</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of changes in the indicators of achievement motivation obtained during the measurement of achievement motivation using the method by Mehrabian showed that in the experimental group the number of students, aspiring to avoid failure significantly decreased, and the number of students characterized by the desire to succeed increased, whereas in the control group, these
The changes were estimated using the statistical significance of differences at the critical levels of achievement motivation. The empirical levels of the formation of achievement motivation were initially equivalent. On the controlling stage of the experimental work, the empirical indicators of U-test proved the statistical significance of differences between the data obtained in the experimental and control groups: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \geq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 187; U_{\text{critical}} = 114 \) when \( p \leq 0.01; U_{\text{critical}} = 138 \) when \( p \leq 0.05 \). This proves that the indicators of formation of achievement motivation in these groups were initially equivalent.

The estimating of the level of formation of achievement motivation using the method by Ehlers shows significant changes associated with an increase in the number of students with high and very high level of achievement motivation and at the same time reduction in the number of students with average and low achievement motivation.

Table 2. Changing of indicators of the level of achievement motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of achievement motivation</th>
<th>Number of students (in %)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately high</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too high</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To estimate the significance of differences between these levels of achievement motivation the statistical testing of the equivalence in the experimental and control groups using the Mann-Whitney U test was applied. On the ascertaining stage of the experimental work there were no significant differences between the levels of formation of achievement motivation of students in the control and experimental groups: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \leq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 163.5; U_{\text{critical}} = 114 \) when \( p \leq 0.01; U_{\text{critical}} = 138 \) when \( p \leq 0.05 \). Statistical testing proved the significance of differences between the data obtained on the control stage in the experimental and control groups: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \leq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 127.5; U_{\text{critical}} = 138 \) when \( p \leq 0.05 \). Also the significance of differences between the data in experimental group obtained before and after the training was proved: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \leq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 68; U_{\text{critical}} = 114 \) when \( p \leq 0.01 \).

The data analysis of levels of the need for goal achievement according to the method by Orlov shows that in the experimental group the number of students with low need for goal achievement reduced and the number of students with average and high levels of this need increased. Changes occurred in the control group too, but they are minor.

Table 3. Changing of indicators of the level of the need for goal achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of the need for goal achievement</th>
<th>Number of students (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the obtained data and their significance using the Mann-Whitney U test showed that on the ascertaining stage of the study there was no significance of differences between the indicators of the investigated properties of students in the control and experimental groups: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \geq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 193.5; U_{\text{critical}} = 114 \) when \( p \leq 0.01; U_{\text{critical}} = 138 \) when \( p \leq 0.05 \). On the controlling stage of the experimental work a statistically significant differences between the data obtained in the experimental and control groups was detected: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \leq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 112; U_{\text{critical}} = 138 \) when \( p \leq 0.05 \). Also the significance of differences between the data in the experimental group obtained before and after the training was proved: \( U_{\text{empirical}} \leq U_{\text{critical}} \); \( U_{\text{empirical}} = 66.5; U_{\text{critical}} = 114 \) when \( p \leq 0.01 \).

The detecting positive dynamics of development of achievement motivation among students in the experimental group can be explained by the following: in the process of training several psycho-pedagogical technologies and conditions were introduced. This contributes to its actualization, reduction in the failure-avoiding motive in the context of psychological safety, action and mastering the ways of implementation of achievement motivation in the process of development of students’ professional strategy.

5. Conclusions

Student’s achievement motivation increases the desire for success and high results in activity. It enhances learning activity, influences the formation of professional significance of the goal and choice of ways of its achievement in the process of development and implementation of professional strategy. The development of student’s achievement motivation acquires positive qualitative changes when the attractive image of future profession is
formed. The action of the failure avoiding motive significantly restricts the implementation by a student of his intellectual and personal potential in future professional activity, contributes to frustration of the need for self-actualization, and consequently, development of unproductive professional strategy. The removal of this action is successfully achieved in the context of enhancing student’s psychological safety. Training is one of the most effective technologies of development of achievement motivation. It promotes the transfer of achievement motivation in the context of psychological safety to the mainstream of professional strategy development, providing further self-development of achievement motivation and preparation for its development among future clients.

Acknowledgements:
This study was carried out with the financial support of the Department of Education and Science of the Russian Federation on the task № 2014/356 for making the state works in the field of scientific activity in the basic part of the State task for Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Professional Education “Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute named after M. E. Evseyev”, the project “Psychological safety as a factor of development and implementation of a personality’s professional strategy” (project code 2041).

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Yulia Vladimirovnna Vardanyan
Department of Psychology
Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute named after M. E. Evseyev, Saransk, 430007, Russia
E-mail: julia_vardanyan@mail.ru

References


