

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIAGNOSTICS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' ADAPTATION TO A HIGHER SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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The relevance of the investigated problem is caused by the need for theoretical basis for special activities aimed at prevention the first-year students' psychological maladjustment on the one hand, and insufficient development of theory, methodology and content of such activities on the other. It is important to diagnose emerging problems of first-year students' adaptation correctly in order to provide them with psychological help, to overcome psychological maladjustment factors during the initial period of their higher school training. The aim of the article is to justify the choice of psycho-diagnostic tools, to present the means of tools testing, to summarize the results of psycho-diagnostics of first-year students' social and psychological adaptation to a higher educational environment. The leading method of our research is psycho-diagnostics, it allows us to identify the most common causes, factors, and barriers in first-year students' effective adaptation to a higher school environment; the results of psycho-diagnostics can be used to provide students with timely psychological assistance, and to overcome psychological maladjustment factors. The results indicate that special activities aimed at the prevention of students' psychological maladjustment are of critical importance. The parameters of first-year students' adaptation levels, received on the basis of special criteria and with the help of psycho-diagnostic toolset, are presented in the article. The algorithm of psycho-diagnostic tools implementation is also given. The implementation of the proposed psycho-diagnostic toolset is aimed at prevention the first-year students' psychological maladjustment; it is focused on providing students with individual counseling and overcoming psychological maladjustment during their initial period of training.

Keywords: psychological diagnostics toolset, social and psychological adaptation, psychological maladjustment, adaptation criteria and parameters.

INTRODUCTION

Not every first-year student can easily and with no traumatic impact adapt to a new social situation, a new status. It certainly is reflected not only on students' health, behavior, actions and identity formation in general, but also on their knowledge acquisition process, their relationships with peers, parents and teachers. It is important to diagnose emerging adaptation problems of a first-year student correctly and provide them with appropriate psychological assistance for neutralizing psychological maladjustment factors (Kashina *et al.*, 2016).

The adaptation process of higher education first-year students is very important, that is why the adaptation mechanisms are to be thoroughly studied, psycho-diagnostic methods for identifying maladjustment symptoms are to be carefully

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selected, and social and psychological means of enhancing social and psychological adaptation are to be designed.

Psychodiagnosis problems of a person's socio-psychological adaptation are very diverse and complex. In the arsenal of psychology research, there are many methods for studying different adaptation aspects. They can be divided into two groups: methods used to assess the adaptation process, though they have been developed for some other purposes; functional methods used to study adaptation mechanisms.

The methods of the first group, diagnose one particular aspect, so complementary techniques are a high priority (Dorokhina, 1994). The selection of relevant diagnostic techniques enables a researcher to obtain such data that would represent essential features of an adaptation process. However, the unconditional acceptance of this statement does not exclude variation in methods selection. For example, some scholars insist on using both psychological (aimed at the study of locus of control, anxiety level) and physiological (aimed at cardiac activity and vegetative regulation studying) techniques. A. Kiriltseva (1980) emphasizes the importance of using different inquirers, standardized and ordinary interviews, questionnaires and reports.

The second type of methods are specifically designed for the study of adaptation. It should be noted that they are all focused on the diagnosis of only one component of a psychosocial adaptation. Although the methods' descriptions do not always ground this fact. The complexity of the problem can be explained by the fact that all-inclusive psycho-diagnostics of socio-psychological adaptation is to be directed both at the overall social and psychological adaptation diagnosis and at the individual's adaptation level and their adaptive capacity diagnosis. In addition, it is rather difficult to develop relevant psycho-diagnostic tools due to a number of problems within the social adaptation theory itself (Shevandrin, 1999; Kiryakova *et al.*, 2016).

Adaptive changes are determined by both subjective and objective factors. Therefore, social and psychological characteristics, which are the main parameters of an adaptation process, are on the one hand, characteristics of a person who adapts, and on the other hand, characteristics of external conditions of an adaptation process.

As our study emphasizes an adaptation of an individual, which is a rather complex system, we are being focused on internal factors, as they are an adaptability prerequisite (Boyko, 2002). Internal adaptation criterion is traditionally described in terms of overall psychological well-being, comfort, subjective satisfaction with one's own status, social wellbeing, absence of stress and anxiety.

The methodical basis for our study of the first-year students' adaptation process is a generally accepted thesis proposed by B. Ananiev (1968) about critical importance of complex experiment methods in psychology research.

Based on the foregoing, we have selected and tested a set of methods targeting problems of our research. Each of the methods and techniques has its own focus

and at the same time, they complement each other, compensating drawbacks and limitations inherent to each of them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

In our research, we used the following methods:

- theoretical (analysis, specification, generalization);
- diagnostic (questionnaires, tests): the self-evaluation anxiety scale by C. Spilberger (2007); the questionnaire for measuring mental stress by T. A. Nemchina; the stress diagnostics (by K. Shrayner, 2002); the questionnaire “Mental Status of students” (by A. O. Prokhorov, 2004); the method of self-concept study by C. Rogers, 2009); the test “Willingness for personal self-development” (by V. Pavlov, 2009);
- empirical (methodical documentation studying, pedagogical observations);
- experimental (the method of ascertaining);
- methods of mathematical statistics.

Experimental research base

The experimental research base was the Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education “Crimean V.I. Vernadsky Federal University”, Humanities and Pedagogics Academy (branch) in Yalta.

Research stages

The study was conducted in three stages:

In the first stage, we carried out theoretical analysis of current approaches to psychological adaptation and psychological maladjustment presented in psychological and pedagogical literature and dissertations; we highlighted the relevance of the problem, the purpose, objectives and methods of our research; and then, we designed a framework of our experimental study.

In the second stage, first, we developed the criteria and parameters of first-year students’ adaptation to a higher school environment; then, we selected and tested appropriate diagnostic tools; next, we conducted our experimental work; and last, we analyzed, tested and refined the obtained findings.

In the third stage, we finished our experimental work, completed and clarified the theoretical and practical conclusions, and summarized and systematized the results.

Psycho-diagnostic tools selecting

On the basis of theories presented in literature and chosen adaptation criteria and parameters, we developed psychological diagnostics tools to identify the first-year students’ adaptation level to a higher school environment. To measure the first

year students' adaptation level effectively we had to start with identifying students' anxiety level, mental and general stress level, and their general mental conditions. The level of students' willingness for personal self-development is also a critical issue. The psycho-diagnostic tools are used to identify 'a risk group' among first year students with regard to their adaptation to a higher school environment, to determine the content of future activities aimed at this category of students in order to prevent their psychological maladjustment and neutralize existing problems.

The methodology stages of measuring first-year students' adaptation

The selected diagnostic tools' implementation involved the following stages of experimental work:

- identifying students' anxiety level using methods of tests, questionnaires and teacher observations, followed by a survey results' statistical processing.
- identifying students' stress level, and their general mental conditions; identifying students' self-concepts;
- identifying students' mental stress level and their level of personal self-development activities.

RESULTS

The diagnostic stage of the experiment

To identify the first-year students' anxiety level, we used 'State-Trait Anxiety Inventory', constructed by C. Spielberger (2007), which consists of 20 self-report items pertaining to anxiety affect. The study results are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: THE STUDY RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' ANXIETY LEVEL

<i>Nº</i>	<i>participants' initials</i>	<i>scores</i>	<i>level</i>
1	À.S.	52	severe
2	À.Yu.	43	moderate
3	B.Ye.	27	mild
4	B.Ê.	48	severe
5	B.V.	34	moderate
6	V.L.	40	moderate
7	G.À.	41	moderate
8	À.D.	37	moderate
9	K.V.	57	severe
10	K.D.	49	severe
11	L.À	52	severe
12	L.O.	50	severe
13	L.V.	34	moderate
14	M.O.	47	moderate
15	O.D.	40	moderate

contd. table 1

<i>Nº</i>	<i>participants' initials</i>	<i>scores</i>	<i>level</i>
16	P.Yu.	51	severe
17	R.V.	37	moderate
18	R.L.	48	severe
19	S.V.	42	moderate
20	S.N.	36	moderate
21	S.I.	56	severe
22	Kh.D.	53	severe
23	Ts.N.	47	severe
24	Ch.G.	35	moderate
25	Sh.L.	38	moderate

As we can see from the table above, 4% of the students (1 person) have a mild level of anxiety, 52% of the students (13 persons) - moderate, and 44% of the students (11 people) – a severe level of anxiety.

To measure the students' mental stress level, we used the questionnaire by T. A. Nemchina (2009), which is composed of 30 items. The study results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: THE STUDY RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' MENTAL STRESS LEVEL

<i>Nº</i>	<i>participants' initials</i>	<i>scores</i>	<i>level</i>
1	À.S.	50	mild
2	À.Yu.	47	mild
3	B.Ye.	38	mild
4	B.K.	72	severe
5	B.V.	54	mild
6	V.L.	62	moderate
7	G.À.	39	mild
8	E.D.	46	mild
9	K.V.	64	moderate
10	K.D.	56	moderate
11	L.A.	53	moderate
12	L.O.	59	moderate
13	L.V.	44	mild
14	M.O.	49	mild
15	O.D.	43	mild
16	P.Yu.	60	moderate
17	R.V.	71	severe
18	R.L.	63	moderate
19	S.V.	58	moderate
20	S.N.	50	mild
21	S.I.	51	moderate
22	Kh.D.	56	moderate
23	Ts.N.	58	moderate
24	Ch.G.	43	mild
25	Sh.L.	46	mild

As we can see from the table above, 48% (12 students) have a mild level of mental stress, 44% (11 students) – a moderate level of mental stress, 8% (2 students) have a severe level of mental stress.

In order to diagnose the first-year students' general stress level, we used the method proposed by C. Schreiner (2002), which consists of nine statements. The study results are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3: THE STUDY RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' GENERAL STRESS LEVEL

<i>Nº</i>	<i>participants' initials</i>	<i>scores</i>	<i>level</i>
1	À.S.	3	mild
2	À.Yu.	2	mild
3	B.Ye.	3	mild
4	B.K.	5	moderate
5	B.V.	1	mild
6	V.L.	6	moderate
7	G.À.	5	moderate
8	E.D.	4	mild
9	K.V.	6	moderate
10	K.D.	5	moderate
11	L.À.	5	moderate
12	L.O.	6	moderate
13	L.V.	5	moderate
14	M.O.	4	mild
15	O.D.	4	mild
16	P.Yu.	8	severe
17	R.V.	5	moderate
18	R.L.	6	moderate
19	S.V.	5	moderate
20	S.N.	6	moderate
21	S.I.	5	moderate
22	Kh.D.	5	moderate
23	Ts.N.	5	moderate
24	Ch.G.	4	mild
25	Sh.L.	4	mild

As we can see from the table above, 36% (9 students) have a mild stress level, 60% (15 students) – a moderate stress level, 4% (1 student) – a severe stress level.

To identify students' mental conditions, we used a questionnaire constructed by A. O. Prokhorov 'The mental conditions of students' (2004). This method allows us to identify students' mental conditions according to the following parameters: positive / negative behavior, positive / negative communication, positive / negative attitude to learning and teachers, positive / negative psychophysiological conditions, positive / negative emotional conditions, positive / negative volitional conditions, positive / negative intellectual conditions. The study results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4: THE STUDY RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' MENTAL CONDITIONS

<i>Nº</i>	<i>participants' initials</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>CC</i>	<i>ALT</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>EC</i>	<i>VC</i>	<i>IC</i>
1	À.S.	medium	medium	high	low	medium	high	medium
2	À.Yu.	high	medium	high	medium	medium	high	medium
3	B.Ye.	high	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	high
4	B.K.	medium	medium	low	low	low	high	medium
5	B.V.	medium	low	medium	medium	high	high	medium
6	B.L.	medium	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium
7	G.À.	medium	medium	high	low	high	high	high
8	E.D.	medium	medium	high	medium	high	high	medium
9	K.V.	medium	medium	low	low	medium	high	medium
10	K.D.	medium	high	medium	low	low	medium	high
11	L.À	medium	medium	high	low	medium	medium	high
12	L.Í.	high	medium	high	medium	medium	medium	medium
13	L.V.	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium
14	M.O.	high	high	medium	medium	high	high	medium
15	O.D.	high	medium	high	medium	medium	high	medium
16	P.Yu.	medium	low	high	low	low	medium	medium
17	R.V.	medium	medium	low	low	medium	medium	medium
18	R.L.	high	medium	medium	medium	low	high	medium
19	S.V.	high	medium	medium	low	medium	high	medium
20	S.N.	medium	low	medium	low	medium	high	medium
21	S.I.	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	medium
22	Kh.D.	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	high
23	Ts.N.	medium	medium	high	low	medium	medium	medium
24	Ch.G.	high	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	medium
25	Sh.L.	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium

Notes: BC - Behavior Conditions, CC - Communication Conditions, ALT - Attitude to Learning and Teachers, PC - Psychophysiological Conditions, EC - Emotional conditions, VC - Volition Conditions, IC - Intellectual conditions, high – high level, medium – medium level, low – low level.

As we can see from the table above, according to the parameter 'behavior conditions', 64% (16 students) have both positive and negative behavior conditions (a medium level), 36% (9 students) have mainly positive behavior conditions (a high level). According to the parameter 'communication conditions', 20% (5 students) have mainly negative communication conditions, 68% (17 students) have both positive and negative communication conditions (a medium level), 12% (3 students) have mainly positive communication condition (a high level).

According to the parameter 'attitude to learning, teachers' 16% (4 students) have a negative attitude to learning and teachers, 44% (11 students) have both positive and negative attitudes to learning and teachers (a medium level), 40% (10 students) have a positive attitude to learning and teachers. According to the parameter 'psychophysiological conditions', 56% (14 students) have negative physiological conditions (a low level), 44% (11 students) have both positive and negative conditions (a medium level). According to the parameter 'emotional

conditions' 16% (4 students) have negative emotional conditions (a low level), 68% (17 students) have both positive and negative conditions (a medium level), 16% (4 students) have positive emotional conditions (a high level). According to the parameter 'volition conditions', 48% (12 students) have both positive and negative conditions (a medium level), 52% (13 students) have predominately positive conditions (a high level). According to the parameter 'intellectual conditions' 80% (20 students) have both positive and negative conditions (a medium level), 20% (5 students) have positive intellectual conditions.

In the socio-psychological adaptation diagnosis, it is very important to identify students' self-concepts. The research by I. I. Boyko (2002) shows that a negative self-concept is a constant source of negative emotions, anxiety, stress, discomfort and psychological maladjustment. Therefore, to study first-year students' self-concepts, we used the following methods: the method of self-concept study by C. Rogers (to study cognitive and emotional components of a self-concept) and the test 'Willingness for personal self-development' by V. Pavlov (2009) (to study a behavioral component of a self-concept). The study results are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5: THE STUDY RESULTS OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE COMPONENTS OF SELF-CONCEPT

№	participants' initials	Emotional component		Cognitive component		Behavioral component		In total level
		Answers (%)	level	Answers (%)	level	answers	level	
1	À.S.	42	medium	33	high	B	high	high
2	À.Yu.	31	high	36	high	B	high	high
3	B.Ye.	28	high	39	high	B	high	high
4	B.K.	83	low	89	low	D	medium	low
5	B.V.	38	medium	44	high	D	medium	medium
6	V.L.	30	high	26	medium	À	medium	medium
7	G.À.	48	medium	39	high	D	medium	medium
8	À.D.	36	medium	42	high	D	medium	medium
9	K.V.	90	low	68	low	D	medium	low
10	K.D.	82	low	74	low	D	medium	low
11	L.À.	86	low	91	low	D	medium	low
12	L.O.	35	medium	28	medium	D	medium	medium
13	L.V.	30	high	26	medium	D	medium	medium
14	M.O.	31	high	27	medium	B	high	high
15	O.D.	17	high	35	high	B	high	high
16	P.Yu.	81	low	86	low	D	medium	low
17	R.V.	88	low	63	low	D	medium	low
18	R.L.	84	low	90	low	D	medium	low
19	S.V.	52	low	50	medium	D	medium	medium
20	S.N.	22	high	15	medium	B	high	high
21	S.I.	38	medium	42	high	D	medium	medium
22	Kh.D.	87	low	90	low	D	medium	low
23	Ts.N.	33	high	46	medium	D	medium	medium
24	Ch.G.	35	medium	29	medium	B	high	medium
25	Sh.L.	47	medium	39	high	D	medium	medium

As we can see from the table above, 32% (8 students) have a low level of self-concept development, 44% (11 students) have a medium level, and 24% (6 students) have a high level of a self-concept.

Based on the parameters studied above, we identified the following criteria (characteristics) of adaptation:

1. Positive behavioral conditions (gaiety, cheerfulness, thoughtfulness, concern, curiosity, hope, responsibility, joy) / negative behavioral conditions (anxiety, laziness, fatigue).
2. Positive communication conditions (gaiety, cheerfulness, interest, curiosity, hope, joy) / negative communication conditions (anxiety, fatigue).
3. Conditions associated with a positive attitude to learning, teachers (interest, hope, responsibility) / conditions associated with a negative attitude to learning, teachers (worry, anxiety).
4. Positive psychophysiological conditions (cheerfulness, burst of energy, cheerfulness) / negative psychophysiological conditions (fatigue, tiredness, exhaustion).
5. Positive emotional conditions (cheerfulness, interest, hope, joy) / negative emotional conditions (anxiety, worry).
6. Positive volitional conditions (responsibility, obligation) / negative volitional conditions (laziness, inactivity).
7. Positive intellectual state (thoughtfulness, concern, curiosity) / Negative intellectual state (sloth, laziness).
8. The level of a self-concept development (high, medium, low level).
9. Anxiety level (high, medium, low level).
10. Mental stress level (high, medium, low level).
11. General stress level (high, medium, low level).

Each of these parameters was evaluated on 3-point scale. Parameters ¹ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 are characterized by directly proportional dependence between the level and the number of points, i.e. the more points - the higher the parameter's level (the scale is represented as follows: 3 points - a high level, 2 points – a medium level, 1 point – a low level). Parameters ¹ 9, 10, 11 are characterized by inverse relationship between the level and the number of points, that is, the more points - the lower the parameter's level (the scale appears as follows: 1 point - a high level, 2 points – a medium level, 3 points - a low level). The basis for adaptation level measuring was description of different combinations of selected adaptation characteristics.

As a result of the study, we identified three groups of the first-year students: I - students with a high level of adaptation - adapted (28-33 points), II – students

with a medium level of adaptation (19-26 points), III - students with a low level of adaptation - maladjusted (11-18 points), which is displayed in table 6.

TABLE 6: THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' ADAPTATION DIAGNOSIS

№	Participants' initials	Criteria											Σ	Level
		BC	CC	ALT	PC	EC	VC	IC	SC	A	MS	SL		
1	A.S.	2	2	3	1	2	3	2	3	1	3	3	25	medium
2	À.Yu.	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	28	high
3	B.Ye.	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	28	high
4	B.K.	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	16	low
5	B.V.	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	25	medium
6	V.L.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	22	medium
7	G.À.	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	26	high
8	À.D.	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	27	high
9	K.V.	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	19	medium
10	K.D.	2	3	2	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	2	20	medium
11	L.À.	2	2	3	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	21	medium
12	L.O.	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	23	medium
13	L.V.	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	25	medium
14	M.O	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	29	high
15	O.D.	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	28	high
16	P.Yu.	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	17	low
17	R.V.	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	17	low
18	R.L.	3	2	2	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	21	medium
19	S.V.	3	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	23	medium
20	S.N.	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	23	medium
21	S.I.	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	22	medium
22	Kh.D.	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	18	medium
23	Ts.N.	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	21	medium
24	Ch.G.	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	24	medium
25	Sh.L.	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	25	medium

Notes: BC - Behavior Conditions, CC - Communication Conditions, ALT - Attitude to Learning and Teachers, PC - Psychophysiological Conditions, EC - Emotional conditions, VC - Volition Conditions, IC - Intellectual conditions, SC – self-concept, A – anxiety, MS – mental stress, SL – stress level; 3 points - a high level, 2 points – a medium level, 1 point – a low level for parameters BC, CC, ALT, PC, EC, VC, IC, SC; 1 point - a high level, 2 points – a medium level, 3 points - a low level for parameters A, MS, SL.

As we can see from the table above, 12% (3 students) have a low level of socio-psychological adaptation, 64% (16 students) – a medium level, and 24% (6 students) have a high level of socio-psychological adaptation to a higher school environment.

The first-year students with a low level of adaptation have a medium level of behavior conditions, and negative parameters of communication conditions. As to the conditions associated with students' attitude to learning and teachers, in most cases they are negative. Psychophysical condition of these students is characterized

by fatigue, overwork. They often feel anxious and worried, they are rather responsible, thoughtful, they tend to show interest, but they can be described as lazy. They are also characterized by an insufficient level of self-concept (it is often negative or neutral).

The first-year students with a medium level of adaptation are characterized by a relatively high level of behavior and communication conditions (interest, curiosity, communication skills), a positive attitude towards learning and teachers, medium psychophysiological level of mental stress, positive emotional conditions, and a high level of self-concept. Their level of anxiety is adequate.

The first-year students with a high level of adaptation tend to have a high level of behavior and communication conditions, a positive attitude towards learning and teachers, a good psychophysiological state, positive emotional, intellectual and volitional conditions, they are responsible, with a strong sense of duty. They are also characterized by a high level of self-concept, a positive attitude towards themselves – they tend to describe themselves mostly with the help of abstract, generalized, emotionally positive categories, in some cases, they even overestimate themselves. They have a low level of mental stress, and an adequate level of anxiety.

DISCUSSIONS

The problem of human adaptation to an environment and its mechanisms has been widely studied in various aspects of philosophical, educational, medical and psychological sciences: Yu. A. Alexandrovskiy (1976), E. M. Alexandrovskaya (1988), S. A. Badoeva (1995), O. A. Belobrykina (2005), B. G. Ananiev (1998), A. M. Ananiev (1996), F.B. Berezin (1988), A. G. Moroz (1980), O. P. Sannikova (2009) and others. F. B. Berezin (1988) highlights the following adaptation components in his works: mental adaptation; social and psychological adaptation; psycho-physiological adaptation. Each of these components is subject to specific laws and performs a specific function in the overall system. The author considers adaptation as a system, which can be described as a universal scheme of adaptive activity at each functional level from biological to social.

Socio-psychological aspects of adaptation of a person were studied by such scholars as G. A. Ball (1989), B. F. Lomov (1984), A. G. Moroz (1983), O. P. Sannikova (2002), O. G. Solodukhova (1998) and others. A. G. Moroz (1983) emphasizes the problem's importance and argues that adaptation is closely connected with the processes of socialization, education, and life in general. This is a process of a person's adapting to a new social environment in order to cooperate and change both an individual and an environment. However, the studies have not always taken into account an important issue of psychological support of the adaptation process.

Social and psychological adaptation is a process when objectives and values of a group and an individual become increasingly concurrent, when an individual

learns the group's rules, traditions and culture and joins the role-structure of a group. Considering the process of a person's adaptation to a teamwork, A. G. Moroz (1983) points out that the adaptation process is not a passive adaptation to a team, but a creative communication process in which an individual, facing difficulties, develops new ways of interacting with different elements of a new social environment. According to the author, social and psychological adaptation includes two interconnected aspects: adaptation to a specific type of activity and adaptation to a new team.

O. P. Sannikova (2009) views adaptability as an individual's sustainable trait, and studies its structure and parameters' components. The author conducted differential-psychological analysis of the adaptability in the system of psychological adaptation phenomena and personality's traits.

The literature analysis allows us to conclude that adaptive behavior of any individual, including first-year students, depends on both subjective mental and socio-psychological factors. When under the influence of psychogenic factors, physiological, social and psychological defense mechanisms of an individual are exhausted and do not work properly, an individual faces a situation of a psychological maladjustment.

Despite a wide variety of research in this area, in our opinion, there are many issues, which were not fully investigated. Higher school has specific tools and mechanisms of influence, they are already described in the literature, but evidence on the issue of social and psychological adaptation of first years' students is insufficient.

Therefore, our experiment on measuring the first-year students' adaptation level to a higher education institution environment revealed that students with a low level of adaptation are characterized by negative parameters of communication conditions; their attitude to learning and teachers is also negative. Students of this category tend to feel fatigue, tiredness, worry, their level of anxiety is high, and all these symptoms can lead to a psychological maladjustment.

The literature and educational practice analysis allows us to conclude that the first-year students adaptation process and activities for preventing a psychological maladjustment tend to be neglected. Not all higher education institutions have psychological services, which could take some measures to prevent a psychological maladjustment of the first-year students. Teachers are mainly focused on the educational process, without paying enough attention to the adaptation process. Teachers are not always aware that the educational activity success depends largely on students' effective adaptation to an educational environment of a higher school. At the same time, theoretical analysis and several higher educational institutions' experience have shown that psychological services' activities, cooperation of teachers, students' curators and tutors enable professionals to achieve a higher level of first-year students' adaptation and

prevent their psychological maladjustment, and that that will positively affect an educational process in general.

CONCLUSION

We have established the fact that the most effective measure for preventing first-year students' psychological maladjustment is timely identification of risk group students. The literature analysis on social and psychological adaptation problems of students allowed us to select and test a set of psycho-diagnostic techniques applicable for measuring first-year students' social and psychological adaptation to a higher school environment. Each of these techniques has its own diagnostic focus but at the same time, they complement each other and compensate each other's drawbacks and limitations.

This set of psycho-diagnostic techniques, measuring the level of anxiety, mental stress, general stress, mental conditions, and the level of emotional and cognitive components of self-concept makes it possible to measure a student's level of adaptation to a higher school environment, to identify ways of enhancing their adaptation process, and to correct their psychological maladjustment symptoms.

The research results presented in this article can be used by teachers–students' curators, tutors, psychological services of higher education institutions, students who adapt to new social conditions – to learning in a higher school, by any psychological support professionals in higher school institutions.

In the course of our research, we have found new problems and issues to be studied. Further research should use the results obtained in the diagnosing stage of the study; it should focus on developing and testing a psycho-correction program aimed at neutralizing first-year students' adaptation difficulties, and at developing students' skills of solving different adaptation problems.

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