

The structure of students' personal competitiveness as a determinant of target setting formation in academic educational process

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract. Competition in the labour market provides the need for training specialists with both developed personal qualities and special professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. Competence and competitiveness are the fundamental qualities to achieve success at the beginning of their professional activity. Therefore, the study of personal competition in the system of higher professional education is very relevant. The issue of student professional competitiveness remains the one of the most important problems existing in education. It concerns with the logic of educational cognition and represents the driving force of personality development. However, the development of professional competitiveness cannot exist separately from personal development without individual's need for effective, purposeful activity. Therefore, self actualisation dwells on realising creativity and intellectual potential. Professional competitiveness is also effective mastery of knowledge and methods of working. Therefore, there is a need to develop personal competition skills in the process of studying at a university. The article presents the results of a study aimed at identifying the structure of competitiveness of university students and empirical substantiation of ways to improve the quality of personal competition skills, readiness to form a professional activity strategy in accordance with the objectives of academic educational process. The main task is to identify the relationship between the conditions of the local labour market and the target settings of the university's educational process in terms of university graduates competitiveness. The object of research were 1st-4th year students (Bachelors' Programme in Economics), Kostroma State Agricultural Academy, Kostroma, Russia and 1st-4th year students of Yaroslavl State Technical University, Yaroslavl, Russia (Bachelors' and Masters' Programmes, all institutes). We conduct a research by a survey using a Google form, the total sample size – 600 people.

Keywords: labour market; personal competition; personal competition skills; target orientation; personality development; work activity

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Introduction

In our unstable socio-economic reality, it is important to acquire professional competence, and adapt to constantly changing conditions in a competitive labour market, have competitive behavior skills. In this regard, professional relocation can be viewed through the prism of personal competition. In particular, the ability to quickly reorient in accordance with modern requirements for professional activity, independence in mastering new types of work, and expanding knowledge.

Professional and personal competitiveness is determined by economic factors, socio-cultural environment, life situation, and real opportunities. On the one hand, it is influenced by external conditions: the multifunctional nature of labour use, motivation, an imbalance of jobs and labour resources, an increase in unregulated labour movements, and an increase in natural staff turnover. On the other hand, the internal qualities of the employee: rapid entry into the production process, professional adaptation for crisis situations, flexible response to changes in demand in the labour market, interest in various innovations, a high degree of flexibility, etc.

The educational process plays an important role on in professional development and career choice. The education provides access to various social roles and statuses. Therefore, the need for educational services is constantly growing. Young people understand the importance of education for further professional activity. At the same time, the form and nature of the educational process are not of fundamental importance. Young people acquire knowledge and use it in the process of their entire active life. Acquired knowledge and skills become a working tool of professional work. And educational institutions provide opportunities for career growth. Vocational education influences the formation of fundamental social needs, value orientations, interests, beliefs, and also corrects individual personality qualities. It encourages people to act in a desirable, productive, meaningful direction and helps them to find a new effective application of knowledge and skills. An educated young man has more opportunities to realise his or her interests; it is easier for him or her to transfer from one activity to another.

However, we live in a world "where people have to change their field of activity often, where fundamental training is important, which would be aimed at ensuring that a person who has received an education can more or less freely change the areas of application of their activities and, accordingly, the realisation of their interests" [4, p. 58].

In Russian society, there is an increasing need for professionals ready to address non-standard problems, find individual solution, and capable of constant self-education. It is easier for educated young people to integrate into the professional structure of society and achieve career aspirations, respectively, interest in education does not decrease.

Therefore, according to Rosstat, the number of students in the higher education system has been stable since 2019 (more than 4 mln students). In 2022 it increased slightly and amounted to 4.1 mln students; 85.8 thousand more than in 2021 [11, p. 44]. The number of students enrolled in the middle-level programmes in 2019-2022 has grown from 2.36 mln to to 2.98 mln students [11, p. 42].

Education is one of the conditions for the formation of a specialist capable to choose a professional trajectory in changing market conditions. Professional training acts as a competent application of their knowledge and skills.

Market economic transformations in modern Russia cause the transformation of social processes. Social and labour relations are changing, the reproduction of market subjects is expanding, there is a free choice of life position and changes in standards of labour behavior, a revision of values, and revising of personal competitiveness understanding.

The transition to a market economy formed a transitive economic model and many issues requiring special preparation of higher educational institutions graduates. The transition to the labour market is characterised by a contradiction in balancing the demands of society and the state. Competition in the labour market provides the need for training specialists with both developed personal qualities and special professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. Competence and competitiveness are the fundamental qualities to achieve success at the beginning of their professional activity. Indeed, an education system should develop competitive skills, methods, tools, techniques, and technologies for professional training of graduates. Therefore, the study of personal competition in the system of higher professional education is very relevant.

A review of modern scientific research on competitiveness considers it as an integrative phenomenon because of multidimensional and complex nature (economic, organisational, social, psychological, pedagogical) at personal, educational, and social levels. All factors of higher educational institutions graduate competitiveness in the labour market can be divided into two groups: external and internal.

External factors include education, specialty, work experience, demand for the services of young professionals in a particular field, availability of vacancies, demand and supply of labour services, etc. To understand the level of influence of these factors on graduates competitiveness, it is necessary assess labour market conditions in terms of the higher professional education system. However, we analysed the local labour market as an external factor of competitiveness of Yaroslavl State Technical University graduates in [12]. Indeed, it is necessary to correlate the relationship between local labour market conditions and the goals of the university's educational process in terms of graduates competitiveness. The object of research were the students of Kostroma State Agricultural Academy, Kostroma, Russia (KSAA) and the students of Yaroslavl State Technical University, Yaroslavl, Russia (YSTU).

The internal factors of university graduate's competitiveness include personal qualities (both innate and acquired). It allows them to compete in the labour market.

The competitiveness of graduates is also related to the competitiveness of universities themselves. It includes the requirements for the organisation of various university activities, the quality of the teaching staff, and the entire history of its existence. The basic principles of the traditional state educational policy are also relevant. Therefore, the training of specialists should be concentrated mainly at the federal level ensuring the effectiveness of the country's development by providing highly qualified specialists to the labour market.

However, according to Rosstat data in 2020-2022, 76% of graduates' jobs were related to their specialty in the university; 24% do not work in their specialty [11, p. 133].

There are many reasons for graduates not working in their specialty. They are as follows: not always acquired knowledge and skills can meet modern demands. Also, there is an increasing disagreement between employers' requirements for potential employees, their knowledge, skills and experience, lack of experience, prevailing wages, leading to the outflow of highly qualified, educated young workers into unskilled labour activities.

Hence, to ensure the training of competitive specialists in terms of the requirements of economics and the labour market, it is necessary to apply an integrated, consistent approach to addressing this issue on the federal state. The concept of "competitiveness" should be the basis for the design of all educational activities. The development of student competitiveness and the formation of a competitive young specialist should be a priority task of modern higher education.

Many researchers consider the issue of the essence of competitiveness. For instance, R.A. Fatkhutdinov [13], N.V. Bordovskaya [3], V.N. Mezinov, S.V. Markova [8], L.M. Mitina [10], V.I. Andreev [2], E.V. Maximova [7].

According to these researches, a personal competitiveness management system promoting the self-development of graduates increases their competitiveness during their studying at the university.

Therefore, it is possible to identify some features of the management system of students' personal competitiveness as follows:

- university basic training system is variety of different types of training;
- interaction with the employers and the university;
- students conscientiousness in labour relations, correct distribution, and consumption of material goods.

Hence, the concept of "university student personal competitiveness" is students' ability to be able to provide himself or herself with high levels of knowledge and skills in the labour market in the conditions of increasing competition with the use of his or her capabilities and potential. One of the most important properties of a person's competitiveness is to determine an own system of individual personality qualities. Therefore, the study of this determination patterns should be considered as a fundamental direction in addressing the issue of forming a student's competitiveness [9].

E.V. Maximova identifies such signs of a student's competitiveness at a university: intellectual potential, a desire to self-actualise, a realistic assessment of the capabilities, self-study, developed leadership qualities, creativity, adequate value orientation, a desire for professional self-determination [7, p. 15].

Moreover, the researchers emphasise individual properties determining the competitiveness as

essential ones. However, individual competitiveness in educational and professional activities depends on the availability of knowledge, skills, and motivation. An important criterion for a student's competitiveness is the ability to identify, quickly and effectively use their advantages, special personal and professional qualities. According to V.I. Andreev, the competitive personality of a student is an integral characteristic including the following personality traits: hardworking, striving for a high-quality final result, stress resistance, the ability to overcome difficulties, a creative approach to business, academic and professional self-improvement, risk management, sociability, cooperation, and the ability to self-education, self-realisation and self-development [2, p. 377]. L.M. Mitina interprets competitiveness as a complex property with its own resources, such as age, mental and physical health, appearance, abilities, intelligence level, energy reserve, a system of values, beliefs, etc. [10, p. 236].

Hence, the main condition for the professional and social success of a student is an integral part of vocational training in universities. To form a student's readiness for personal and professional and self-development, it is necessary to acquire and develop professionalism, personal, socio-psychological, moral characteristics, the ability to cooperate and work in a team.

Main part

The issue of forming student's professional competitiveness is one of the most important problems of pedagogical science in terms of the diversity of contradictions existing in education. It concerns with the logic of educational cognition and represents the driving force of personality development. Scientists see the source of professional competitiveness of an individual in the social conditions of life, in the active essence of a person. However, the development of professional competitiveness cannot exist separately from personal development without individual's need for effective, purposeful activity. Therefore, self actualisation dwells on realising creativity and intellectual potential. Professional competitiveness arises on the basis of persistent actions of a person to address the creative tasks and mobilise attention and other psychological processes to search for new knowledge. Moreover, the interest in knowledge arises on the basis of conscious motivation is of great importance for the educational process. Therefore, to develop the professional competitiveness of students means to develop theoretical thinking, form skills and abilities of independent search for new knowledge, methods of their processing and application, the ability to perform targeted actions aimed at achieving the planned results [6]. Professional competitiveness concerns with the content and process of teaching, effective mastering of knowledge and ways of working to achieve goals, mobilising moral and volitional efforts, transformation of the surrounding reality, intensity of actions performed, effectiveness of activities, etc. Intensification and improvement of future specialist professional competitiveness effectiveness requires mutual and purposeful activation of cooperation between a teacher and a student, innovative changes in the organisation of the educational process, and the interrelationships of study, research, and design at the university. Therefore, a holistic approach only provides development of students professional and personal competitiveness, high creative potential, deep knowledge, and an active lifestyle. Hence, it is necessary to direct their efforts to stimulate students' interest in the profession, promote the development of a positive active attitude to study, independent cognitive activity in terms of the pedagogical conditions. According to literature analysis, the indicators of the personal competitive factor are as follows:

- knowledge, computer literacy, business communication skills, practical training;
- retraining, professional development, mastering additional specialties;
- receptivity to innovation, sociability, adaptability, criticality;
- integrity, effectiveness, creativity, self-development ability, organisation;

Therefore, there is a need to develop personal competition skills in the process of studying at a university. The article presents the results of a study aimed at identifying the structure of competitiveness of university students and empirical substantiation of ways to improve the quality of personal competition skills, readiness to form a professional activity strategy in accordance with the objectives of academic educational process.

We conduct a research by a survey using a Google form, the total sample size – 600 people.

Both universities are federal budgetary educational institutions under strict state regulation, and with

a low degree of self-autonomy.

The object of the study are students of the technical University and the Agricultural Academy. Therefore, the results of the study allow us to assess the competitiveness of graduates in the local labour market. The assessment of the opportunity to compete in the labour market dwells on the choice of an educational institution. Indeed, 32.3% of YSTU students and 10.4% of KSAA students chose a university considering it prestigious. However, before the submission, every third student at YSTU and every fifth at KSAA have already assessed the importance of personal competition in the labour market. At the time of the survey, 61.5% of KSAA students and 47.6% of YSTU students had not decided whether they would work in their specialty after graduation. We can note the lack of motivation to get knowledge in the chosen profession.

To assess professional competitiveness factor, we estimate some indicators of mastering professional competencies. Therefore, the one of the survey questions was: "What do you consider important / unimportant in your profession?"

Table 1 – Assessment of professional competencies by KSAA, Kostroma, Russia students (% of the number of respondents)

Competence	Important in the profession	Unimportant in the profession
Knowledge of the acquired specialty	94.9	5.1
Career growth	84.7	15.3
Interest in the work	92.4	7.6

Source: composed by the authors

Table 2 – Assessment of professional competencies by YSTU, Yaroslavl, Russia students (% of the number of respondents)

Competence	Important in the profession	Unimportant in the profession
Knowledge of the acquired specialty	89.9	10.1
Career growth	94.4	5.6
Interest in the work	96.7	3.3

Source: composed by the authors

An important criterion for a student's competitiveness is the assessment of their personal qualities. It allows them to effectively use their advantages in a competitive environment. To get a self-assessment of personal qualities related to competition, the survey contains a question: "Which of the following personal qualities would you need to develop for yourself, since you are not good enough at it yet?"

Table 3 – Self-assessment of personal qualities according to the "need to develop" index of YSTU and KSAA students (% of the number of respondents)

Indicator	YSTU	KSAA
Professionalism	89.3	76.9
Selfintroducon	71.6	53.8
Self-actualisation	70.0	35.8
Self-confidence	64.6	48.7
Initiative	64.3	51.2
Efficiency	57.5	28.2
Communicative skills	55.8	28.2
Purposefulness	51.8	20.5
Leadership	43.5	33.3

Indicator	YSTU	KSAA
Duty	41.8	33.3
Responsibility	39.3	30.7

Source: composed by the authors

The result shows the difference in the self-esteem of students. This difference in arranging the results hierarchically.

Table 4 – Comparative hierarchy of students' self-assessment, YSTU and KSAA (% of the number of respondents)

YSTU	KSAA
Professionalism	Professionalism
Selfintroduction	Selfintroduction
Self-actualisation	Initiative
Self-confidence	Self-confidence
Initiative	Self-actualisation
Efficiency	Leadership
Communicative skills	Duty
Purposefulness	Responsibility
Leadership	Efficiency
Duty	Communicative skills
Responsibility	Purposefulness

Source: composed by the authors

The revealed difference may be related to the strategy of professional activity implementation in accordance with the objectives of the education. The purpose study was to get students' ideas about the labour market. A block of questions was created for this purpose. We use the same technique: comparing the results for two universities.

This block of the survey contains the question: "What difficulties can you face when applying for a job?"

Table 5 – Correlation of students' perceptions about local labour market in two universities (% of the number of respondents)

Options	YSTU	KSAA
Absence of self-presentation skills	38.9	25.6
Lack of professional knowledge	47.1	33.3

Source: composed by the authors

This block of the survey contains the question: What do you think employers pay the most attention to when applying for a job? (you could choose three options; amount is more than 100%).

Table 6 – Students' view of employers' requirements in terms of personal competitiveness (% of the number of respondents)

Options	YSTU	KSAA
Professional knowledge	82.8	87.2
Grades in the diploma	4.2	10.3
Communicative skills	65.0	64.1
Ability to perform at your best	67.2	48.7
Self-confidence	76.8	82.1

Source: composed by the authors

This block of the survey contains the question: How do you assess the level of competition for young professionals in the labour market in your city?

Table 7 – Students' assessment of the level of competition for young professionals in the local labour market (% of the number of respondents)

Options	YSTU	KSAA
The competition is high, it is difficult to get a job in the specialty	47.8	48.7
The competition is not high, it is possible to get a job in the specialty	48.3	51.3

Source: composed by the authors

Conclusion

The results of the empirical study made it possible to identify the structure of YSTU and KSAA students personal competitiveness and assess the differences. The interpretation of the obtained data made it possible to formulate a fundamentally important position in terms of the purpose of the study: the formation of personal competition skills and readiness to build a professional activity strategy should correspond to the target settings of the educational process of the educational institution. For the formation of personal competition skills in the process of studying at a university, an empirical justification of the educational process is necessary. It will improve the quality of personal competition skills formation.

The structure of YSTU and KSAA personal student's competitiveness includes:

- personal component (knowledge of the specialty, the ability to communicate with others, the ability to show your best side, self-confidence);
- motivational (professionalism, diploma grades, dedication);
- activity component (ability to win, diligence, efficiency).

The formation of professional and personal competitiveness should be considered in terms of graduate readiness for independent activity. It involves mastering professional knowledge, methods of competitiveness self-development, independent cognitive actions, the development of personal qualities, communication skills, etc.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Irina V. Popova – writing – original draft.

Marina B. Abramova – data curation, formal analysis, validation.

Alexey V. Zorin – conceptualization, project administration, writing – review & editing.

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