The Study of the Interrelation of Learners’ Personal Qualities and Their Attitude to the school Grade

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Abstract

The relevance of the problem under consideration is determined by necessity to aware the role of the school grade in educational process, psychologial conditions in the development of students’ attitude to the grade as a sign of positive performance in the course their studies. Assessment, to a certain extent, is a complicated and deep process that includes not only registration of quantitiative and qualitative indicators of the knowledge accumulated over the school years but also the ability to implement it in practice. Besides, assessment implies student activity, aspiration for learning, as well as motivation to study. The purpose of the study is to reveal the relationship between learners’ attitude of different educational levels to the school grade and their personal qualities. The key method of the research is empirical revealing the correlation of students’ attitude of different age groups to school marks, their personal qualities and anxiety level. The result of the research work proved the existence of quantitative differences in the ideas of students of different age groups about school grades, their understanding of the essence of estimating process at school. Besides, some significant interrelations between learners’ attitude to school grades and their personal features and anxiety level were revealed. The conducted study of psychological features of students’ attitude to school assessment has stated an urgent necessity of greater attention from the part of teachers and psychologists to the problem of giving marks and has justified the relevance to work out and introduce renewed criteria of school assessment.

Keywords: Assessment, assessing process, school grade, subjective attitude, personal significance, the outer component of a mark, the inner component of a mark, anxiety, personal features

1 Introduction

Traditionally one of the most topical problems of school training is the problem of formation of study motivation of learners where one of the impulses to get knowledge is assessment and a mark (3). One can’t exaggerate the fact saying that this current issue has still remained a burning pedagogical problem. The notions “grade” and “assessment” are basically different: the grade, or mark is an indicator of a learner's knowledge, its level, established by the national standards, while assessment is a characteristic of results of an undertaken activity achieved in the process of learning (4). The problem of assessment is in the focus of attention and is constantly discussed in pedagogical and psychological literature (2,4,6,28). On the one hand, the grade is part and parcel in an assessing effective activity, but on the other hand, it does not reflect quality of the learning process and can often perform a negative effect on children’s cognitive work (11, 24).

From the very beginning of schooling a child has to endure pressure of the mark as it hasn’t been a simple figure indicating the quality of a performed work, but has turned into a self-target (27, 32). And how a child worked, moved to the target, what knowledge he got, how he learnt and used all this in practice have lost its significance. Suffice it to mention L.S. Vygotskyy (25), once he noticed that the mark was so alien to the learning process that it began to dominate over
the whole studying and even ruined the cognitive work. As the result, a child begins to study for the sake of a good grade, not for getting knowledge (6). Psychological effect is aggravated by the fact that teachers are often unaware of how this or that student responds to a mark and how it affects his/her personal qualities (28-30).

The works of the researchers on the history of the grade (4) show that despite some attempts to abolish the mark system to assess knowledge, in Russian Pedagogy a more precise, reasonable and adequate way to evaluate results of students’ work hasn’t been found yet. At present, the school mark is not only a measure of learning school programs, but also it has a great impact on the emotional sphere of a child at school, as well as his self-estimation (23, 31, 33).

There comes a logical question: to what extent does the system of assessment affect modern children and how important is it for students to develop the ability to estimate acquired knowledge and understand the school grade as a result indicator of their learning activity? (12). The analysis of psychology-pedagogy literature and my own experience proves, without controversy, the existence of a close relation between successes achieved in learning and formation of a learner’s personality (5, 20).

Nevertheless, each age group is influenced by grades in different ways. That’s why the aim of the study is to find out the correlation between the attitude of students on different educational levels to school grades and their personal qualities. We suppose that there is relationship between students’ personal features and their attitude to school marks.

2 Materials and Methods

In the course of the study the following methods were used: theoretical (analysis; synthesis; concretization; generalization); empiric and diagnostic (the use of child adapted by E.M. Alexandrovskaya and I.N. Glyjasheva (1) 12 FLO-120 and teenage form 14 PF variant of person’s questionnaire; the test “The scale of person’s anxiety” of A.M. Prikhozhan (16) and the modified questionnaire of I.B. Umniashova (22) “The grade as learners see it”); methods of math statistics. All sample of the research: 180 students harmonized by sex (90 males and 90 females) took part in the study. All the tested, aged 9-17, study in the same secondary school. 60 students are doing in primary school (3-4 classes), 60 are on the middle stage (8-9 classes) and 60 are high school students (10-11 classes). To study the peculiarities of attitude of the pupils from different classes to grades we used the modified version of the questionnaire “The mark as school learners see it” worked out by I.B. Umniashova (22). The results of the questioning “The mark as school learners see it” are presented in table 1.

The analysis of the results given in table 1, states that school students’ attitude to the grade is different in different groups. Practically all the testees admitted that a school grade is necessary for assessing knowledge. In most cases they agree with the given marks, and a negative result (a bad grade) can be explained by their insufficient homework (14). Besides, on each age stage their attitude to school grades is changing. For example, primary school students orient themselves mostly to their parents’ or teachers’ opinions, because children due to their age, can’t fully aware of the criteria of assessing knowledge; thus they, to a greater extent, orient themselves to an outer component of the grade (8).

3 Results and Discussions

In the above studies it was shown that on the beginner level younger learners’ curiosity, their direct interest to the surrounding as well as desire to perform socially important jobs determine their positive attitude to studies and, consequently, their emotional experience regarding assessment (17). That is why student lag, bad marks can often hurt feelings, even drive students of this age to tears. Moreover, primary school students lay special emphasis on their intellectual abilities and on how they are evaluated by other people (26). And what is more, the children of this age group are longing for acknowledgement; it’s highly important for them that a good mark should be recognized and approved by all (18).

The study of the peculiarities was conducted with the method of child adapted by E.M. Alexandrovskaya and I.N. Glyjasheva (1) 12 FLO-120 and teenage form 14 PF variant of person’s questionnaire child and teenage versions. As the given variants differ in number of the scales and age standards, we made up our minds to remain only those scales which were presented in both versions without running a raw score analysis but by using wall values. The study of anxiety was made through the method of A.M. Prikhozhan “The scale of a personal anxiety”. The results of the correlation analysis with the use of non-parametric criterion made up by Spirmen (19) aimed at finding relationships between learners’ attitude to school marks, their personal features and anxiety level are presented in Table 2.

The situation starts to acquire another turn later, with years, in junior school, when personal value of grades is growing due to awareness that the mark does not rate a student, as an individual but the result of a job he did (15). Sh.A. Amonashvili remarked the decline of the status role of grades in junior school which is manifested in a formal attitude to marks (2). Graduates’ attitude to the school marks is basically determined by their professional views (plans). Because of this, they begin to see school subjects from the view point of their future profession and consequently, they start to differentiate marks they have. If they get a bad mark in a subject which is out of their professional interests, the attitude to them will be quieter than in necessary disciplines (5). Based on the data in Table 2 we may come to conclusion stating that between the attitude to the grade, psychological qualities and anxiety level there are authentic correlations.

The answers to question 2 “Do you find your marks unfair?” and the index “Anxiety and big concern” - scale O (r=0,384; p≤0,05). To our minds it may point to the fact that learners are rather inclined to see unfavorable sides of assessment, a small involvement of a teacher in the process, his/her subjectivity. The aim of assessment should be the formation of feedback between the student and the teacher, possibility to motivate learners, develop such qualities as desire to learn, the ability to self-improve, analyse and estimate their own performance, encourage cognitive activity (21).
The grade should be used as a means to prompt the student for an active job that is, to use the mark as an impulse, stimulus. Besides, the impact of the grade works well in case a student can rely on his teacher when the personality of a teacher, his expectations, general positioning, style to communicate with the class, ability to create the atmosphere of psychological comfort play a decisive role (13).
A good mark with favorable circumstances and magical forces;

3) The answers to question 4 “What do you hate when you get a bad mark?” and the following indexes school anxiety (r=0.666; p≤0.01) and the personal features “good faith and diligence” – scale G (r=0.395; p≤0.05). The data testify the fact that the more the students fear poor grades and punishment for them, the more they get frustrated and anxious. Though, it should be mentioned, in this case the features “good faith and diligence” are growing as children tend to do their best to avoid censure. Many researchers remark that some students are often afraid to fall short of people’s expectations; they may feel anxious about self-expressing or before their teacher (9). The biggest fear at school is fear of a situation before control works (7). If a student constantly gets a poor mark, the experience of failure leads to the lost of self-confidence and due to this, a low level of claims is growing. The chain of the consequences may end with forming negative attitude to study and the desire to learn is vanishing (10).

The results of correlation analysis, given in table 2 allows us to reveal the negative correlations between:

1) The answers to question 1 of the questionnaire “Why is the school grade necessary?” and the following indexes: interpersonal anxiety (r=-0.648; p≤0.01), general anxiety level (r=-0.302; p≤0.05), and also such personal features as “openness, good will” – scale A (r=-0.464; p<.01), “self-confidence, stability” – scale C (r=-0.581; p≤0.01), “Dominating, independent” – scale E (r=-0.518; p≤0.01), “Tend to be risky, careless” – scale F (r=-0.539; p≤0.01). The data may point to the fact that if students see a mark as a variant of an indicator of their knowledge, the interpersonal and general anxiety levels decrease. This phenomenon might be connected with the assurance – if they get enough knowledge, they will have a good grade – thus, there is no reason to worry, no one can condemn or criticize and their personal relationships will not go bad. Though, attitude to assessment at school as a determination of knowledge does not welcome the formation of openness, stability, independence and carelessness, because it involves a certain rivalry, subjective judgements and constant readiness to be assessed.

2) The answers to question 4 “Why do students want to get good marks?” and the following indexes: “self-evaluative anxiety (r=-0.438; p≤0.01) and the interpersonal anxiety (r=-0.316; p≤0.05), and also the qualities “openness, good will” – scale A (r=-0.319; p≤0.05), “self-confidence, stability” – scale C (r=-0.595;p<0.01), “Dominating, independent” – scale E (r=-0.278; p≤0.05), “tend to be risky, careless” – scale F (r=-0.419; p≤0.01).

The received data indicate that if a student gets a mark only for his knowledge, it may reduce his self-evaluative anxiety and, like in the previous example, it does not welcome the formation of openness, stability, independence and carelessness as it implies a certain competence, rivalry, subjective view-points and constant readiness to be assessed.

3) The answers to question 5 “What do you hate when you get a bad mark?” and interpersonal anxiety (r=0.485;p≤0.01) and the personal features “self-confidence, stability” – scale C (r=0.414;p<0.01) “dominating, independent” – scale E (r=-0.316;p≤0.05), “tend to be risky, careless” – scale F (r=0.468; p<0.01).

The received data show that the more the process of assessing acquires personal significance for learners, the less interpersonal anxiety they have to endure, as they stop to be dependent on outer circumstances while being assessed and can rely on their own efforts to receive a desired positive assessment. Such attitude to assessing process leads to reduction of formation of the qualities – independence, self-confidence, carelessness.

Thus, based on the conducted correlation analysis we can safely conclude that there exist considerable relationships between attitude of students of different age stages to the school grade, learners’ personal anxiety level as well as some personal features of theirs.

4 Conclusions

The conducted research of the psychological features of student’ attitude to the school grade allows us to make conclusion about the necessity of a great attention of school teachers to the problem of assessing. There are three urgent questions to be solved: -How should learning be evaluated at school? - What kind of assessment must it be? – What place must the grade take in the system of education?

We consider it sensible to refuse the traditional practice of assessing when the function of the grade is assigned to teachers and psychologists. The student should get involved in the process. Only then we will be able to form valuation activity of learners and develop objective self-assessment of the results. Such objective self-assessment must take into consideration the previous child’s achievements and it must be based on them. A student should learn to compare “what I could” and “what I achieved”, “how I have changed making progress”. It’s the result of a change that ought to be the basis of knowledge assessment and become a grade for knowledge in the final version. Only in this case a school mark will encourage study interest of a child, creating psychologically comfortable atmosphere, without causing negative personal changes and raising anxiety level of the child.

References