The university teachers' professional ethics from the students' perspective

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Abstract. The article's purpose is to describe some results of the research of students' representations about the professional ethics of University teachers. The sample includes full-time and part-time students of psychological and pedagogical education. The diagnostic instrument was questionnaire "Customer Perceptions of professional ethics of the specialist". It was revealed that students mainly note the orientation of the teachers' professional ethics standards to their own professional interests, note the compliance of teachers' personal characteristics with ethical requirements, and consider the job instructions to be the basis for the content of ethical standards in the teacher's activity. Differences in the views of full-time and part-time students were found. Full-time students pay more attention to teachers' personal characteristics as proof of compliance with ethical standards. Part-time students give a higher evaluation of teachers' orientation to the professional community interests and needs of other ethic application objects (not only professional and client), as well as give a higher evaluation of law and universal values and culture as origins of teachers' professional ethics.

1 Introduction

Specialists in pedagogic professions are paid a special trust from the society. They are entrusted with responsibility for the life and health of their wards, their impact on the inner world, the personality development of children and youth, in general, their influence on the lives of individuals and social groups. In these professions, the role of creative activity of a specialist, the translation of their own beliefs and values is high, and the intensity of interpersonal interactions and personal inclusion is so strong that it is a risk factor for professional deformations. As a result, teachers belong to those groups of professions that are subject to increased requirements for the moral and ethical regulation of the professional duties performance. At the same time, ethical norms protect the interests of individuals or groups that are objects of professional activity, as well as ensure effective solution of professional tasks by a specialist, since they serve as a guide for decision-making in situations of uncertainty [Rogov et al. 2014].

In the process of professional education, students form ideas about the ethics of their profession. This happens both purposefully – through the content of academic disciplines and educational events, and spontaneously, in the process of communication in the educational

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and professional environment and observation of their teachers. Students see teachers as a model of a professional and a role model that is worthy of imitation more or less.

Socio-perceptual processes and phenomena that take place in the teacher-student interaction system are paid well-deserved attention from researchers. The phenomena studied in connection with students' perception of teachers are the external appearance and image of the teacher, personal and professional characteristics, experience and communicative style, successfulness and assessment of professional activity quality, description of unacceptable behavior patterns of teachers, attitude to students, socio-demographic characteristics of the teacher, ideas about the ideal teacher, determinants of students' emotional attitude. The following characteristics of the perception subjects in the interaction system student-teacher are considered as a background of interpersonal cognition peculiarities: the specialty, the course and form of education of students, their personal characteristics, ethnic, cultural, gender identity, learning success [Agranat et al. 2019; Chalykh 2009; Cheremiskina et al. 2019; Kashirskaya et al. 2015; Parfenova et al. 2015; Prokhoda 2015; Puchkova 2015; Ryabikina 1983; Semenov et al. 2020; Shlykova 1998; Zimina 2016].

As in any communication, the process and result of interpersonal perception are influenced by role expectations, social standards and stereotypes that are built and shared in the social group of students in relation to teachers. For the outside observer or recipient of professional services, only the outward side of professional behavior is available for perception. Real reasons and motives of specialist's activity patterns are not always clear. Sometimes specialists can give explanations of their professional behavior causes, but only if they want to do it, of course. Empathy, identification, and interpretation serve as mechanisms for knowing the reasons for certain actions of a specialist, but these mechanisms make possible some subjective misrepresentation. The experience of the subject of knowledge has a significant influence on the result of interpersonal cognition. Moreover the influence of experience is multi-sided and multidirectional. On the one hand, experience can make perception selective, setting up a kind of "filters", on the other hand, communication experience can contribute to the development of communicative competence. It is worth noting that communication distortions are inevitable in any interaction. The accuracy of interpersonal cognition is facilitated by the expressive and perceptual competence of both the communicator and the recipient.

Nevertheless, despite the possible inaccuracy in the knowledge and assessment of the personality and behavior of a specialist by a person-object of his work, we believe that psychological research in this direction is justified and necessary. Knowledge of the results of the client's perception and interpretation of the specialist's behavior allows us to promote effective mutual understanding between professionals and their clients. This is one of the goals of psychological support of professional activity.

In addition, the need for research in the field of students' perception of teachers' professional behavior is determined by a modern approach to quality management in education sphere. The use of rating assessments of the teaching staff performance in modern universities includes the assessment of the teacher by students as one of the parameters.

2 Methodology

In order to study students' ideas about how ethical regulation occurs in the professional activities of University teachers, we conducted an empirical study. Its participants were students of the Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, studying in the area of study "Psychology and Pedagogical education". The sample consisted of 108 participants (50 full-time students, 58 part-time students). We assumed that there are general trends in students' perceptions of the professional ethics of teachers. And there are differences in these perceptions related to the form of students' learning – full-time or part-time.

Empirical data were collected using the questionnaire “Customer Perceptions of professional ethics of the specialist” (author A. Sheveleva, 2019), adapted to the goals of the study. The instruction prescribed the tested people to describe a collective image – “a typical teacher of your University”. For statistical verification of the results, the Friedman criterion was applied (the results were considered at a significance level of ≤ 0.001) and the Mann-Whitney criterion (the results were considered at a significance level of ≤ 0.08).

The questionnaire “Customer Perceptions of professional ethics of the specialist” enables to get results in accordance with the scales describing the content categories of the professional-ethical representations. Scales description is below:

- scales “*Due*” and “*Unacceptable*” (included in the Due/Unacceptable category. This category describes the perception of ethically approved and disapproved in specialist’s performance);

- scales “*Professional community*”, “*Consumers*”, “*Object-Me*” and “*Other*” (included in the Object (recipient) category. This category describes the ideas about those, whose interests are protected with professional ethics – individuals, social groups and communities or non-anthropomorphic objects – animals, cultural and historical objects etc.);

- scales “*Subjec-Me*” and “*Subject-other people*” (included in the Subject category. This category describes the ideas about persons who are expected to implement professional ethics);

- scales “*Attitudes, feelings*”, “*Behavior*” and “*Personal characteristics*” (included in the Modality category. This category describes the ideas about the forms of professional ethics standards implementation);

- scales “*Law*”, “*Job instructions*”, “*Universal values and culture*” and “*Role model*” (included in the Origin category. This category describes the ideas of what served as the basis for the formation of moral and ethical professional consciousness component of the assessed individual or social group].

For a detailed description of the questionnaire scales and the content of professional-ethics representation, see the works of A.M. Sheveleva [2015, 2016, 2019].

3 Results

The results of the study showed statistically reliable trends in students’ ideas about the professional ethics of University teachers.

It was revealed that, according to students, teachers implement professional ethical standards primarily to protect their own interests – to more accurately determine the scope of their duties and powers, to make correct decisions in ambiguous situations, and to respect ^{their} own labor rights (Fig. 1). In the second place – the interests of students as customers of teachers’ professional services. To about the same extent, the implementation of professional ethics standards by teachers serves less defined objects – for example society as a whole, interested persons who are not directly involved in the system of professional interaction, cultural and historical heritage (the scale “Other”). The least pronounced is the focus on the interests of the professional community – employees and colleagues – both members of the same labor collective and members of a conditional social group united by professional affiliation.

Fig. 1. Students’ ideas about the recipients of the University teachers professional ethics. (Category “Object (recipient)”). The results of the analysis according to the Friedman criterion, average ranks.

According to students’ ideas, the predominant form of teachers’ professional ethics is the compliance of their personal characteristics with ethical requirements (Fig. 2). These characteristics include individual psychological traits, communication manners, level of culture, education, experience, professionalism, etc. The results confirm the thesis that the personality of a professional is of great importance in pedagogical specialties. The next in descending order, the emotional component of the professional ethics standards implementation follows – in the form of attitudes to professional activity and all its components and feelings experienced in connection with the activity. The least, according to students’ view, is the professional ethics of teachers in the form of specific actions and behavior. In this connection, we can make an assumption about the ambiguity of students’ assessment of this parameter – either the behavior of teachers determined by ethical considerations is not always obvious to students, or in some cases students note unethical actions on the part of teachers, and these unacceptable actions spoil the overall impression.

Fig. 2. Students’ ideas about the forms of professional ethics standards implementation by the University teachers. (Category “Modality”). The results of the analysis according to the Friedman criterion, average ranks.

As the most important background and basis for the content of professional ethics standards of teachers, students note job instructions (Fig. 3). The next in descending order is a personal example as a role model. Its’ source can be real and imaginary characters, persons with whom teachers could directly communicate or know about them from various

information sources. Indirectly, this confirms that the professional community of teachers is evaluated by students as a means of professional behavior regulating at the level of group norms acceptance through group pressure and conformity mechanisms. The importance of universal values and culture – universal humanistic values, beliefs, traditions, and postulates – for the formation of the University teacher professional ethics is only slightly less than that of a role model. To the least extent, legal norms are regarded as an origin of professional and ethical standards. Probably, legal norms may be attributed to universality in the need to comply with regardless of the profession.

Fig. 3. Students' ideas about the origins of the University teachers professional ethics standards. (Category "Origin"). The results of the analysis according to the Friedman criterion, average ranks.

As for the questionnaire scales, the manifestation of which does not differ at a statistically significant level, we believe that the reflection of their content in the views of the respondents has approximately equal priority. So, according to students, teachers are equally aware of both ethical regulations and ethical prohibitions in their profession (the "Due" and "Unacceptable" scales). They also make equal demands on professional ethics for themselves and for other people (the "Subject-Me" and "Subject-other people" scales).

Since interpersonal cognition is influenced by the subject of cognition experience, we assumed that views of different learning forms students differ. Full-time and part-time students differ mainly in their professional and educational experience. We also take into account the studied and described differences in the representations of ethics in their profession among students of different learning forms [Sheveleva 2014] 13 . The sample of part-time students who took part in this study is heterogeneous in age, so it can be assumed that they have different life experiences, both related to the profession and not related. Due to the wide range of age values in this sample, we used the mode as the average of the "age" value. The averages are 24 years for part-time students and 21 years for full-time students. Thus, the main contingent of subjects belongs to the same age group.

The found significant distinctions in different learning forms students' ideas about the teachers' professional ethics are illustrated in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4. The significant distinctions in different learning forms students’ ideas about the teachers’ professional ethics. The results of the analysis according to the Mann-Whitney criterion, average ranks.

For example, full-time students rate their teachers’ personal characteristics more highly in terms of meeting the requirements of professional ethics. Perhaps this is evidence of the idealization of teachers by those students who are in closer and more frequent communication with them.

In turn, the part-time students see more evidence that teachers implement professional ethical standards in favor of the professional community – their labor collective and colleagues in the broad sense – scientists, psychologists, teachers, university employees, etc. In addition, part-time students are more aware of the role of teachers’ compliance with ethical requirements in favor of other ethic application objects – society as a whole, interested persons, who are not directly involved in the system of professional interaction, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, etc. (scale “Other”). Also, part-time students attach more importance to such origins of professional ethics standards of the University teachers as law and universal values and general cultural norms. We believe that the more extensive professional experience of part-time students allows them not only to compare the ethics of different professions, but also to apply the social-perceptual mechanism of identification with teachers to a greater extent, thereby finding grounds for more holistic and generalized assessments.

4 Conclusion

Thus, the results of the study allow us to better understand the students’ point of view on how the norms of professional ethics are manifested in the activities of the University teachers. In the future, we plan to involve students of different specialties and different universities in such research, as well as to compare the professional and ethical views of teachers as subjects of professional activity and students as objects of their work. The practical significance of this work is related to the goals of professional education, organizational and psychological

support of professional and educational activities, the formation of organizational culture and professional behavior of employees of educational institutions, consulting specialists on their professional development and improving the skills of professional self-knowledge and reflection, especially in those areas where the most critical mutual understanding between the specialist and the client.

4 Declarations

Funding. Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests. The author declares no conflict of interest/competing interests.

Ethics approval. The study is conducted in accordance with requirements of the ethics committee of the Russian psychological society, Russia.

Consent to participate. Participants were informed on the aims of the study and gave informed consent prior to data collection.

Consent for publication. The author affirms that the participants provided informed consent for publication.

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