

Students' Social and Psychological Adjustment to Studying at the Pedagogical University

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper presents the results of the ascertaining stage of the experimental study and aims to identify the level of first-year students' adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university and the characteristics of successful social-psychological adjustment among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university. The authors identified the components of social-psychological adjustment (success in educational activities, success in communication) and the criteria for assessing the level of adjustment in first-year students, including their awareness of the new role of a student, a future teacher (manifests itself through educational performance) and interaction with fellow students and teachers (manifests itself through a student's individual behavioral style, the ability to express his/her opinion and take into account the opinions of others; the ability to support views and interests of his/her fellow students).

Theoretical Basis. The article presents a retrospective view of the phenomenon of adjustment, a comparative analysis of theoretical views on understanding the essence of the concept of 'adjustment'. This study is the first to clarify the concept of social and psychological adjustment among students of the pedagogical university, taking into account the process of communication of first-year students with their teachers and fellow students and the presence of a future teacher's individual behavioral style.

Results. The findings indicate the presence of high and average levels of adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university among first-year students, which enabled authors to formulate recommendations for organizing educational activities with first-year students at the pedagogical university to more rapidly coordinate their behavior in accordance with the requirements of the university.

Discussion. First-year students showed a high level of adjustment to the educational group and an average level of adjustment to educational activities. Consequently, in order to overcome difficulties in mastering certain academic disciplines, the educational environment should be favorable for self-evaluation of educational performance, asking questions for introspection, and developing the ability to self-organize individual activities.

Conclusion. The findings of this study are of direct practical relevance in the work of teachers with first-year students and may help choose the most effective forms of work, including interactive ones, contributing to successful adjustment to educational activities.

Keywords

adjustment, adjustment level, professional self-determination, independence, interactive methods, self-organization, first-year students, adjustment period, personality traits, professional requirements

Highlights

- ▶ The teachers working at the pedagogical university with first-year students should understand the essence of the adjustment process, the need to create conditions for the successful manifestation of their potential and personality traits for self-organization during the adjustment period.
- ▶ To successfully overcome difficulties in mastering academic disciplines among first-year students of the pedagogical university, teachers should develop students' independence and self-organization through interactive forms of education.
- ▶ Considering the period of study at the pedagogical university as a stage of professional self-determination, it is necessary to use the adjustment period to build up first-year students' professional development trajectory, taking into account the correlation between personality traits and professional requirements.

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Introduction

Individual life stage – from birth to death – goes hand in hand with a continuous process of adjustment (Roslyakov, 2003). Individual adjustment is a rather difficult process in the society of constant changes; a person does not always keep up with rapidly changing events (Nalchadzhyan, 2008). The modern world requires for individuals who are able to realize and understand their values, to use their inner potential most effectively (Koeslag-Kreunen, Van der Klink, Van den Bossche, & Gijsselaers, 2018). This largely depends both on individuals and their ability to quickly respond to changing conditions, and on external conditions, for example, the environment of the pedagogical university, the characteristic of which is that it is important for teachers to understand the mechanisms of building the learning process aimed at developing students' professional competencies (Cabello, Sorrel, Fernández-Pinto, Extremera, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2016).

According to Bredun et al., the effectiveness of modern students' education is determined by the degree of the development of metasubject competencies, the level of readiness and ability to self-organize individual activities (Bredun, Balanev, Vaulina, Krasnoryadtseva, & Shcheglova, 2020). Lazarev (2011) considers the conceptual model of the formation of professional skills, built on the basis of the principles of the activity approach, as an effective mechanism for effective learning at a university. However, the effectiveness of the educational process among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university is primarily influenced by their successful adjustment (Spaustinaitis, 2015). Therefore, the need for scientific understanding of the issue of social and psychological

adjustment of students to studying at the pedagogical university is obvious. By examining the criteria of social and psychological adjustment among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university, we need to clarify when the process of their adjustment may be considered successful. When considering this issue, we should bear in mind that the process of education at a university is understood by many scientists as a stage in the professional self-determination of future teachers (Pryazhnikova & Pryazhnikov, 2013).

Distinguishing adjustment and adjustment efficiency, Tolstykh (2011) refers adjustment criteria to the process and the criteria of adjustment efficiency to the result of this process. The researcher proves associations and interdependence between the level of first-year students' adjustment to studying at university and the efficiency of the system of adjustment measures. Moreover, the author suggests criteria for assessing the efficiency of the system of adjustment measures, including satisfaction with university education, education performance, activity in the educational and social life of university, and self-satisfaction.

We share the opinion of Pryazhnikova & Pryazhnikov (2013) and consider the process of studying at a university as a stage of professional self-determination, which is characterized by the following: students' awareness of their new social role, awareness of the meaning of their future profession, correlation of their desires with opportunities, and awareness of the need for professional development. Therefore, during the adjustment period, teachers should create conditions that would contribute to the full manifestation of these qualities in students. When studying adjustment of first-year students, Verchenko & Grineva (2015) identified the following criteria: the level of entry into a new environment, behavior in an educational institution, knowledge about profession, and value orientations.

Keeping in mind our understanding of the content of the concept of social and psychological adjustment of first-year students in the pedagogical university and considering the process of education at a university as a stage of professional self-determination, let us distinguish the criteria and indicators for social and psychological adjustment among first-year students (Table 1).

<u>Adjustment components</u>	<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
Success in educational activities	Students' awareness of their new role as a student and a future teacher	Educational performance based on students' understanding that university education is a new stage in life and their search for new meanings in pedagogical work
Success in communication	Interaction with fellow students and teachers	Individual behavioral style based on confidence in a professional choice; the ability to express individual opinion, take into account opinions of others; the ability to support the views and interests of fellow students

Theoretical Basis

Currently, the issues of personal adjustment are urgent, especially concerning youth at the first stage of vocational training (Artunduaga, Munoz, & Rojas, 2018). In their previous works K. Rogers, R. Diamond, A. Bandura, G. Hartmann, A. Bass, L. Berkovitz, G. Eysenck, K. Levy, K. Lorenz, Z. Freud and other scholars considered adjustment issues. Various aspects of social and psychological adjustment are considered in the works of Russian psychologists, including A. G. Maklakov, S. V. Chermyanin, V. V. Grishchenko, N. E. Shustova, T. V. Barlas, A. G. Ambrumova, & A. G. Asmolov. When considering social and psychological adjustment, we rely on a number of concepts of personal adjustment. From the humanistic perspective, adjustment issues are analyzed in the context of the ideal human interaction with the environment (Beneyto-Seoane & Collet-Sabé, 2018). In the works of J. Allport, A. Maslow, K. Rogers, V. Frankl, the goal of adjustment is to achieve positive spiritual health and harmonize the values of individuals and society. Humanistic psychology presents the dispositions of the ideal personality-environment interaction in dynamics (Kim & Klassen, 2018).

Referring to the concept of interactive adjustment developed by L. Phillips, Osnitskii (2004) emphasizes that types of adjustment that meet minimum requirements and social expectations can be generated by environmental and intrapsychic factors.

Examining the behavior of individuals during the adjustment period, Hartmann (2010) puts forward the idea about relations of adjustment between an individual and the environment, which includes processes associated with the conflict-free sphere and conflict situations.

Adjustment efficiency can be represented by various criteria. Among the variety of criteria presented in the psychological literature, we are impressed by ideas of K. Mechnkov and O. F. Gefele, who distinguished the following criteria for effective social and psychological adjustment: commensurability, timeliness, conformity (Mechnkov, 1993) and moral orientation, the principle of interpersonal contacts, and neuro-psychic stability (Gefele, 2003).

Human activity is, in fact, transforming. Therefore, Markaryan (1971) considers the whole society is both an adaptive (similar to biological society) and an adaptive-adjusting system. Sharing the ideas of the American researcher W. Buckley, E. Markaryan believes that in the process of its development society as an adaptive-adjusting system acquires the ability to make significant structural and functional changes in order to preserve itself. The concept of adjustment is the key for understanding the laws of self-organization of all living systems and determining the criteria for evaluating the concepts of self-organization.

The level of adjustment is the result of the process of adjustment. Some authors distinguish these concepts. However, the others consider them synonymous. For example, considering the urgent issue of adjustment of students to new conditions, Sereva & Andonova (2016) distinguish two components of adjustment – social-psychological and vocational-educational.

Studying the characteristics of the process of adjustment among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university, Ermachenko, Zaitseva, & Sereda (2017) point to the necessity of considering numerous factors affecting the degree of adjustment, including individual psychological characteristics of students, personal, professional and behavioral qualities, value orientations, academic performance, health status, social environment, etc. The authors argue that when determining the levels of adjustment of first-year students studying at the pedagogical university, it is important to take into account the adjustment of students to the new education system and to a change in the educational regime.

Adaptive abilities of individuals largely depend on their psychological characteristics, which determine the ability to adequately regulate the functional states of the body in various conditions of life. The high level of adjustment level is associated with high likelihood of normal functioning of the body and the efficiency of activity with an increase in the intensity of the impact of psychogenic environmental factors (Sveshnikova, 2019). According to Lyz & Shostak (2016), the efficiency of the adjustment process directly depends on studying conditions in a particular university.

Social and psychological adjustment to studying in higher education is determined by psychological characteristics of adolescence (Maltese, Simpson, & Anderson, 2018). At this age, it is important to form the ideal of the future profession and understand its nature (Cabello et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, we often observe a loss of trust in others, a lack of interpersonal support, and uncertainty about the future among young people (Fan, 2016). In this regard, the process of social and psychological adjustment to the university environment is accompanied by the following psychological difficulties: adjustment to the university education system – independent organization of study, learning more information, acquisition of new values, adoption of norms, and the lack of attention (Vlasova, 2009).

The definition of an individual's view of the world contains his/her social orientation, organization of life plans, formation of value orientations and individual intellectual research (Semmler, Uchinokura, & Pietzner, 2018). Therefore, we consider students' professional self-determination as a process that aims to manifest their individuality, develop the ability for self-education and the ability to make individual choices, and form their personal and professional qualities.

While developing personality traits, students strive for an independent life (With, 2017). They consider themselves adults and full members of society, participate in almost all types of social activities and fulfill many social roles, which initiates the process of adjustment to the pedagogical sphere, adoption of ethical norms, professional activities, professional communication, and awareness of the importance of the future profession and their participation in it (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2015).

We consider students' social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university as a process of internal changes in future teachers, which outcomes manifest themselves in effective communication with teachers and fellow students on the basis of their individual behavioral style. First-year students' social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university is associated with the success of professional self-determination, their awareness of meaning in chosen professional activities, and their needs for further professional development.

Keeping in mind our understanding of the essence of students' social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university, we examined its types, including students' adjustment to the conditions of educational activities, their educational groups, and their future profession (Taylor, 2017).

Results

To determine characteristics of social and psychological adjustment among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university, we carried out an ascertaining stage of the experimental study. The results of our diagnostic study are presented by the Students' Adjustment to University methodological toolkit (Dubovitskaya & Krylova, 2010).

This diagnostic technique is designed to identify students' level of adjustment to the university environment using two scales – (a) the level of adjustment to the educational group and (b) the level of adjustment to educational activities.

The empirical sample involved 104 first-year students of Surgut State Pedagogical University, Psychology and Pedagogy Faculty, which is 87 % of the total number of all first-year students at the faculty. We made the conclusions about the presence of reliable characteristics of social and psychological adjustment among first-year students studying at the pedagogical university on the basis of the percentage and quantitative correlations in the scales of the technique. Figures 1–4 show the results of our diagnostics.

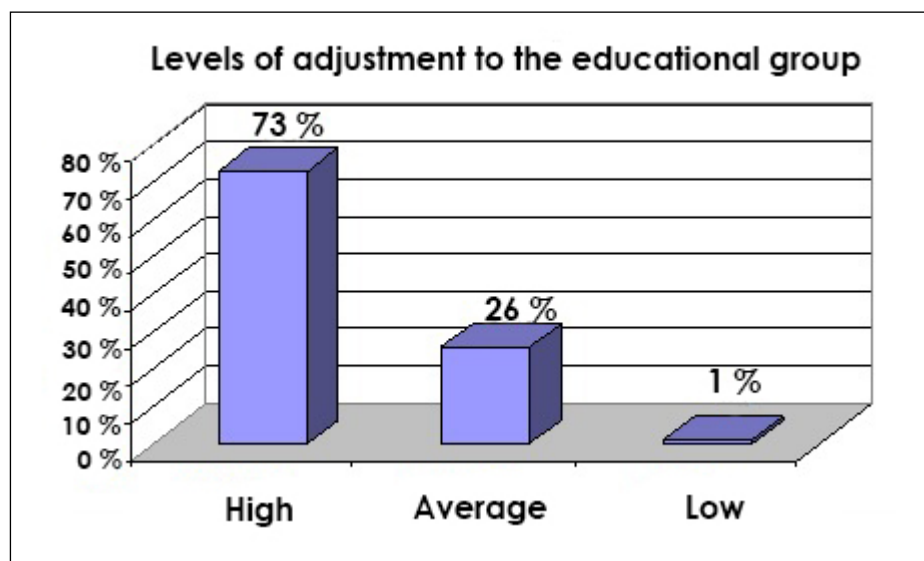


Figure 1. Distribution of the levels of adjustment to the educational group in the study sample

Our findings indicate that the majority of the faculty students (73 %, $n = 76$) showed a high level of adjustment to interaction in the educational group. Students feel comfortable, can easily seek help from fellow students, actively express their opinions, which enables them to take the initiative in the group. Students of Psychology and Pedagogy Faculty are able to support the views and interests of their fellow students.

The average level of adjustment was observed among 27 individual participants (26 %) of the study group. The characteristics of adjustment include a relatively comfortable feeling. In addition, students tend to show restraint in relationships and find it difficult to make decisions in certain situations.

Only one individual participant (1 %) had a low level of adjustment to the educational group. This student is restrained in communication, cautious, does not share the rules adopted by the group. Accordingly, his fellow students do not share his views; he finds it difficult to seek help from them. Working with such a student requires more attention from the psychological service, the curator, the student group, and teachers. The teacher should pay attention to the content of the situation in which such a student found himself in the university. The reasons may be as follows: (a) an insufficient level of knowledge and skills necessary for mastering academic disciplines and professional competencies and (b) an insufficient level of the development of skills of independent work, self-organization, inability to plan individual actions. This leads to the student's misunderstanding of

the meaning of educational activities necessary for mastering a future profession, emotional stress, insufficiently serious attitude to the performance of educational tasks, divergence in the views and interests with his fellow students, and disappointment in the professional choice. Such a student requires assistance which can be provided from the psychological service, fellow students, when performing tasks in groups in training sessions, from the curator of the educational group, who may include the necessary information on the time management of his own activities in the subject of curatorial hours, and from the teacher, who should be given clearer instructions when organizing students' independent work.

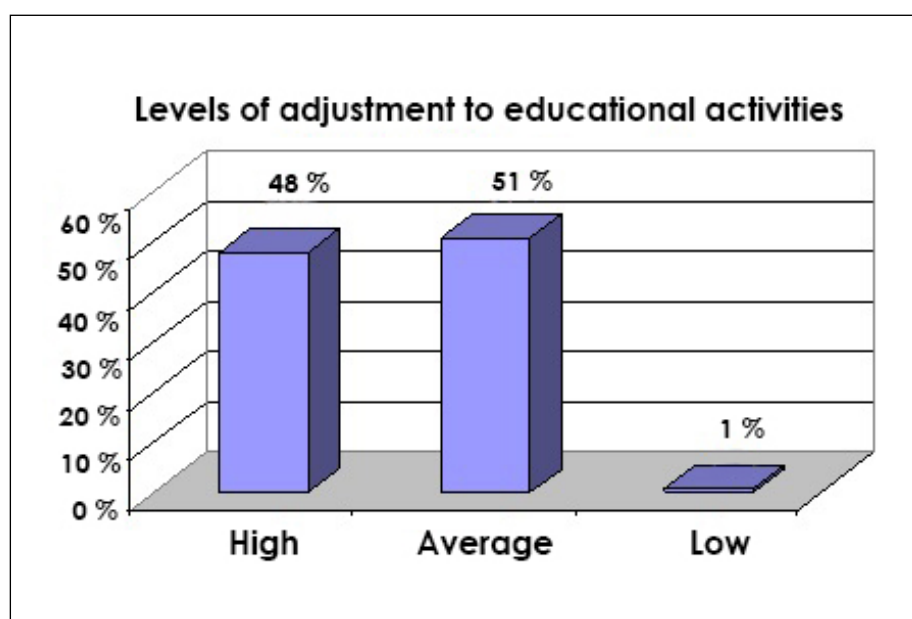


Figure 2. Distribution of the levels of adjustment to educational activities in the study sample

One of the most important conditions for students' successful social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university is their satisfaction with the organization of the educational process, which makes it possible to fully acquire pedagogical knowledge.

For the scale of adjustment to educational activities we observed high diagnostic results among 50 individual participants (48%). Our findings indicate that these students can easily master academic subjects, complete tasks in academic disciplines on time and successfully, find it easy to seek help from the teacher, can freely express their thoughts and show their abilities.

The average level of adjustment to educational activities was observed among 53 students (51%). This is manifested in the fact that they find it difficult to master certain academic disciplines; they cannot express their thoughts and find it difficult to answer in the classroom.

A low-level adjustment to educational activities was characteristic of 1 student (1%), which indicates his difficulties in interacting with teachers and mastering academic disciplines. As a result, the student feels himself uncomfortable during classes and needs additional consultations. It is necessary to plan individual work with such a student, since he cannot show his abilities in the classroom.

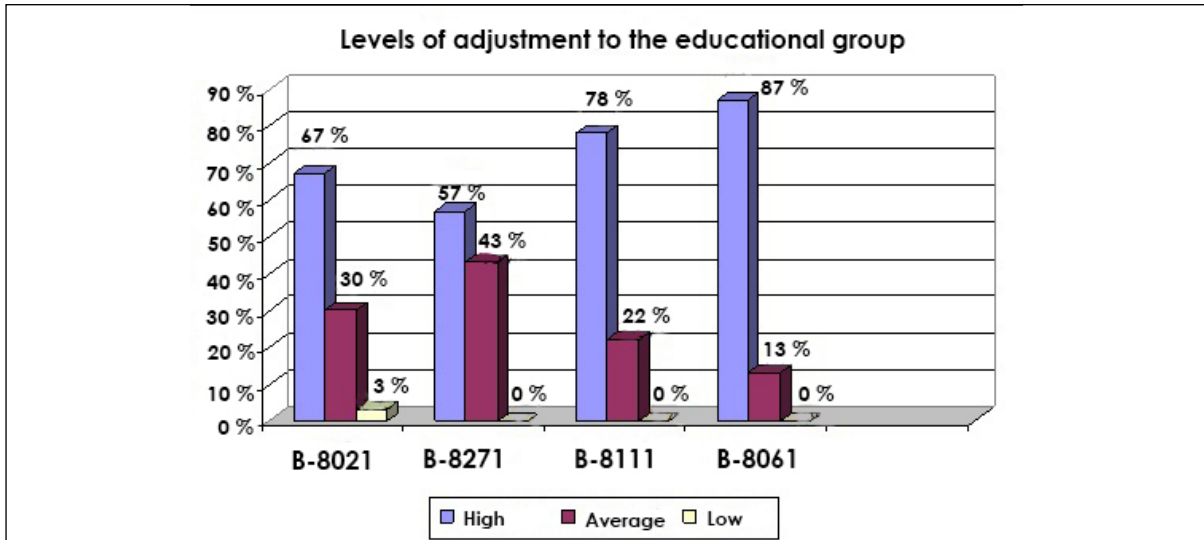


Figure 3. Distribution of the levels of adjustment to the educational group in different groups

The highest level of adjustment to the educational group was observed among students of group B-8061 (educational direction of Preschool Education). Group B-8271 (educational direction of Psychological and Pedagogical Education) showed the lowest scores by the high level of adjustment to the educational group and the highest scores by the average level of adjustment to the educational group.

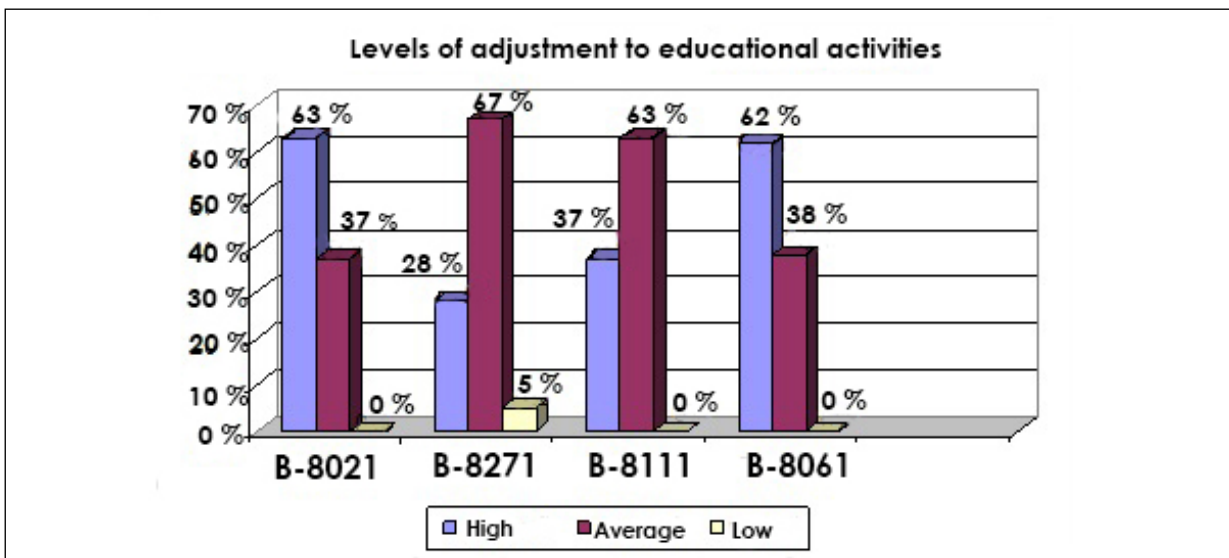


Figure 4. Distribution of the levels of adjustment to educational activities in different groups

Students of groups B-8021 (educational direction of Primary Education) and B-8061 (educational direction of Preschool Education) demonstrated the highest levels of adjustment to educational activities. The lowest levels of adjustment to educational activities were observed among the students of group B-8271.

Thus, our findings indicate that the first-year students of the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy showed generally high and average levels of adjustment to the educational group and educational activities. These students are active during classes, ask questions, and actively engage in classroom dialogue. This result is explained by the fact that the educational group is a group of individuals having common professional interests. Therefore, they are interested in academic disciplines, easily interact with each other, and try to present themselves in a professional field. The diagnostic indices for adjustment to the educational group are generally higher in comparison with those for the adjustment to learning activities. However, there are students with a low level of adjustment. For these students additional work is required to activate internal resources and increase the level of adjustment, which should be organized, first of all, by the curator of the educational group in order to involve students in active interaction with fellow students through curatorial hours, controlling their educational activities.

Discussion

The use of diagnostic techniques during our experimental work enabled us to confirm the characteristics of the process of students' social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university, associated with adjustment to educational activities and the educational group. Therefore, students' adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university manifests itself in their ability to construct their individual behavioral style. Students are confident in their professional choice and actively search for meaning in chosen professional activities. We should note individuals search for meanings in work throughout their lives. However, a psychological support should be organized with first-year students during the adjustment period, which may help them understand the meaning of professional self-determination.

1. Students' adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university is the result of social and psychological adjustment, which manifests itself through a positive attitude towards profession and self-organization.

2. High and average levels of students' social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university are most important for their self-organization.

3. With students' successful social and psychological adjustment to studying at the pedagogical university, teachers should use interactive forms of interaction in the educational process, which enables students to search for their individual meanings in chosen professional activities, increases internal motivation to the pedagogical direction of training and independence in decision-making (Rotova, 2018).

4. Successful social and psychological adjustment is characterized by students' effective communication with teachers and fellow students based on their individual behavioral style. In our opinion, this indicates the degree of students' awareness of individual attitudes towards their professional choice. During the adjustment period, a teacher observes communication among first-year students, analyzes the likelihood of their self-realization in the chosen profession, and, consequently, the nature of motives for future professional activity.

5. Successful social and psychological adjustment forms students' ability to self-organization and to overcome difficulties in educational activities.

Conclusion

Consequently, the process of professional self-determination of students in the pedagogical university depends on the success of the process of social and psychological adjustment. Social and psychological adjustment, which has its structure and logic of development and success factors, activates the potential of students' personality traits and influences the organization of educational activities in the pedagogical university. We propose the following measures to increase the level of adjustment among students in the pedagogical university: (a) first-year students' involvement in the work of student associations; (b) involvement in volunteer activities; (c) coordinated work of the curators and the psychological service of the university; (d) conducting trainings by specialists of the psychological service to unite first-year students; (e) involvement of co-curators from among senior students; (f) conducting thematic curatorial hours on time management and effective communication; (g) use of interactive forms of education (Sedova, 2017); (h) first-year students involvement to active career-guidance work with high school students as a part of career-guidance activities, such as master classes during the Open Days, which will help overcome difficulties during the adjustment period.

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