Postmodern Openings
ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387
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2022, Volume 13, Issue 4, pages: 472-496 | https://doi.org/10.18662/po/13.4/528
Submitted: May 16th, 2022 | *Accepted for publication:* June 21st, 2022

Ethical Consciousness of University Students in the Context of Postmodernism

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Abstract: The article describes theoretical views on the development of ethical consciousness in Ukrainian university students in the context of postmodernism, using the data from quasi-experimental psycho-pedagogical measurements. The article aims to specify the process of developing structural components of ethical consciousness in Ukrainian university students, who de facto (culturally and socially) are still gaining the experience of late postmodernity. The following methods were used at the propaedeutic, quasi-experimental and resumptive levels: theoretical-methodological analysis of relevant scientific-methodical sources; selection of relevant diagnostic methods; modelling of educational conditions; psychodiagnostic methods; methods of mathematical statistics; summarization. The necessary data were collected, with the observance of all ethical norms, at the premises of Ukrainian higher education institutions, with the participation of 280 students-respondents (Years 1-5) who major in the humanities and technology. The obtained results indicate a rather uneven personal development of students under all structural components of ethical consciousness. The main part of the article, as well as conclusions, clarifies the components of ethical consciousness, their dynamics and dependence on one's worldview and experience. The international relevance of the article lies in objectifying ethical consciousness of young people in the post-totalitarian environment. It will allow one to evaluate the interaction between traditional and postmodern systems, justify the prospects of such categories as "meanings" and "values" in the belated postmodern society. The results of the article may influence the modelling of the character-building component in new education systems in the post-cultural society.

Keywords: *ethical consciousness; components and levels; indicators of moral values; moral-ethical responsibility; attitude towards ethical categories.*

How to cite: Shevchenko, N., Shypko, M., Dolynska, L., Stroianovska, O., Gorban, G., & Temruk, O. (2022). Ethical Consciousness of University Students in the Context of Postmodernism. *Postmodern Openings, 13*(4), 472-496. https://doi.org/10.18662/po/13.4/528

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Introduction

The relevance of this research lies, first of all, in the sharp features of postmodernism in today's Ukrainian society since it has liberated from totalitarian oppression only at the end of the last century. Anyway, Ukraine is still struggling with irony, total intertextuality and "hyperreal" existence. A preliminary review of respectable sources shows that there are numerous psycho-pedagogical studies, whose main categories are values, behaviour, consciousness and reflection, considered as an internal resource of the pupil/student.

Ethical consciousness determines the nature of ethical relations, as well as one's moral position, actions and behaviour. Neither interaction with the world nor personal development is possible without a stable attitude towards the notions of good, evil, obligation, conscience, justice, honour, dignity, freedom, responsibility, happiness, life meaning and moral ideals (Annia et al., 2018; Palamarchuk et al., 2020; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020; Nerubasska, Palshkov, & Maksymchuk, 2020; Sheremet et al., 2019; Gerasymova et al., 2019; Onishchuk et al., 2020; Behas et al., 2019; Bezliudnyi et al., 2019).

In the context of current scientific advances, it is essential to study ethical consciousness of young people, in particular, university students. Indeed, the youth begins to play an increasingly important role in society, developing new cultural features and standards of thinking, demonstrating competitiveness and willingness to live and work in new conditions.

Many aspects of the problem in question have been covered by the leading Ukrainian and foreign researchers. These aspects are the following: developing ethical consciousness and self-consciousness (Bulakh & Aleksyeyeva, 2003); theoretical dimensions of ethical consciousness (Bezdukhov, 2013); moral and axiological spheres of student's consciousness and moral choices (Bezdukhov & Zhirnova, 2008); psychological mechanisms of ethical consciousness (Antilogova, 1999); ethical choice, identity and consciousness (Shang, 2011); early ethical development and education of children (Pollard, 2013); ethical consciousness of corporate lawyers (Moorhead & Hinchly, 2015) and entrepreneurs and leaders (de Brémond d'Ars, 2012); socio-ethical consciousness (Alves & Mello, 2016; Annia et al. 2018); an ethical paradigm of human consciousness (Ardelean, 2020; Shypko, 2016).

At the same time, psychology lacks both experimental research and theoretical concepts in terms of ethical consciousness dynamics. In

postmodern conditions, the problem of developing ethical consciousness in students is becoming rather significant. A student environment is characterized by the crisis of social, personal and spiritual identity, which leads to the loss of life meaning, a consumerist view of education, the exaggeration of material needs, the ignorance of social norms, as well as the emergence of moral conflicts in cyberspace.

In the international context of such research, the article complements scholarly discourse on the moral and value dimensions of today's youth, particularly their behavior and needs in digital communication environments (Kim & Choi, 2018); critical consciousness in urban ecosystems (Delia & Krasny, 2018); the harmony of individual and national consciousness in developing societies (Kandov, 2022). In addition, the article continues the permanent discussion of the so-called "eternal values" and the attitude of the younger generation toward them, which has been a subject of study in philosophy and the humanities for many centuries.

The results of this article are of particular practical international significance for societies with a long historical experience of totalitarian statehood and on the border between moral national self-identification and the assimilation by young people of a critical postmodern experience that changes their system of values.

The article aims to study the process of developing structural components of ethical consciousness in university students.

Methodology. The methodological basis of empirical research involves scientific views on the structural organization of consciousness and its forms (Leontiev, 2005; Shevchenko, 2015), cognitive determination of ethical development (Piaget, 2015; Kohlberg, 1984) and conceptual principles of studying ethical consciousness (Bezdukhov, 2013).

Research methods are the following: theoretical-methodological analysis of the problem in question; systematization and synthesis of scientific psycho-pedagogical and philosophical sources on the problem in question; modelling of educational conditions; psychodiagnostic methods; methods of mathematical statistics; summarization (induction).

The 2019-2020 research, consisting of three stages, was conducted at the premises of Zaporizhzhia National University, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, The National Metallurgical Academy of Ukraine, Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Alfred Nobel University (Dnipro). The sample of the respondents participating in the ascertaining research included students (Years 1-5) majoring in the humanities and technology. The total number of the respondents is equal to 280 students, aged between

18 and 25 (Year 1 – 56 students; Year 2 – 54 students; Year 3 – 56 students; Year 4 – 60 students; Year 5 – 54 students).

The first stage of the research lies in analyzing relevant psychological literature, defining approaches to studying the problem in question and justifying the structural model of ethical consciousness in university students.

The second stage involves selecting effective diagnostic techniques, working with the sample and conducting empirical research on the development of ethical consciousness in university students.

The third stage consists of quantitative and qualitative analysis, interpretation of the obtained data and justification of methods for developing ethical consciousness in university students.

The psychodiagnostic toolset includes the following methods: methods of studying moral judgments (Kohlberg, 1984) to reveal how well moral norms and categories were learned; the "conscientiousness scale" (Ilyin, 2002) to find out whether students accept social norms and ethical requirements; methods of studying moral-ethical responsibility (Timoshchuk, 2003); methods of studying spiritual values (Kuznetsov, 2018); the "good and evil" method (Popov et al., 2008). Given that this article is primarily theoretical, it seems expedient to specify the obtained results without a detailed analysis of how psychometric data were obtained with the help of the above-mentioned methods.

It must be noted, however, that the obtained results were processed using Statistica 6.0, an advanced analytics software package.

Besides, the above-mentioned methods were employed to diagnose the necessary parameters of the respondents during the 2019-2020 academic year, in particular, between September and November. Since psycho-pedagogical measurements were conducted on different days and had different time intervals, 12 students out of 280 could not participate in such a diagnostic for various reasons. Nevertheless, this fact did not affect the representativeness of the sample and the reliability of the obtained results.

Research ethics. All the respondents voluntarily agreed to participate in the experiment and were informed about their right to quit it at any time. Ethics committees of participating universities also agreed on the quasi-experiment provided that there should be no negative consequences for students.

Research hypothesis. The research hypothesis assumes that ethical consciousness, as a holistic systemic quality, depends on the harmonious development of its components (values, meanings, sensory canvas) and requires further development in studenthood; the development of ethical

consciousness, as an inherent process of personality development, is characterized by certain specificity in each year of study.

Ethical consciousness in postmodernist and modernist dimensions

Ethical issues of postmodernism mainly concern the sphere of international and interethnic relations. At the same time, one seems to be aside from the established and structured ethical norms. The ethics of deconstruction, which is rather situational and topical, fails to elaborate universal norms or codes of conduct. It prefers localized and conditional responses to ethically troubling cases. Even though personal responsibility is inherent in postmodernism, it urges one to make personal decisions to respect the rights of others.

As shown by an overview of postmodern approaches to ethics, the latter is becoming an applied and interdisciplinary field. It is shaped by dilemmas and conflicts, including technological mobility and cultural complexity, social linear behaviour and institutional hierarchy, biological and social aspects in human or group behaviour (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 32). At the same time, the greatest dilemma is observed between real practice and idealized values on social justice. The main conclusion that can be drawn from the analyzed works is that the source of moral attitudes, values and modes of behaviour in the postmodern sense is the human. Moreover, those holistic moral meta-narratives (except for framework-defined rights) are impossible.

The postmodern pedagogical concept provides many tools for developing one's moral toolkit. As noted by Cosgrove (2004), postmodernism encourages reflexivity and increases students' awareness of social justice issues. Additionally, postmodernism establishes a methodology for critical thinking and deconstruction to address ethical issues in the context of interdisciplinary interactions: intercultural psychology, personality theory, abnormal psychology, as well as other disciplines on foreign anthropology and biology (Cosgrove, 2004).

According to Mason (2001), the strength of postmodern ethics lies in its integrity. This ethics is inductive in nature and directed primarily at respect for the dignity and rights of others and responsibility for one's choices (Mason, 2001). The researcher advocates for the resource-based nature of postmodern ethics in education. A shared moral resource should consist of the unity of individuals who have found (or are gaining) "an authentic identity in the moral complexity of a globalized and pluralistic society" (Mason, 2001, p. 47). Such an approach can overcome both general

moral relativism and legal pressures on individuals through the hyper-value of any abstract moral responsibility.

Those researchers who evaluate postmodern moral models claim that most of them do not leave "the normative horizons" of the classical period, while the main category is human rights (Honneth, 1995). Therefore, one can assume that such classical ethical categories and meanings as justice, equality, tolerance and respect live on within postmodernism. However, their roots are still in "compulsive universalism" with its acceptance of "identity", "self" and "otherness".

Assessing postmodern ethics in the context of the 2020s, one can provide only general remarks. Bauman (2020) indicates fundamental differences between postmodernist and modernist ethics. Classical and modernist ethics did not regard human passions and natural desires as the pinnacle of ethical values, but rather the opposite. Their main mission was to improve and generalize one's moral capacity for normal cohabitation. Postmodernism has made only a key turn in this regard. Through a reflection (deconstruction) of universalized morality, it has proved its helplessness in the face of human diversity ("a motley collection of people") (Bauman, 2020).

In social practice and education, "the postmodern turn" launched a debate about the ethics of social work and the relationship with people. It became clear that human ethical consciousness included values, competencies, the ethics itself and, at the same time, was a dynamic, conditional and, quite frequently, uncertain actor (Hugman, 2003). Thus, it allows one to view ethical consciousness as "a living generator" of ethical meanings, their dynamics and development.

Numerous studies on ethical consciousness cover a wide range of phenomena. It is because ethical consciousness as a subjective side of morality reflects social life and shapes people's interaction with the socio-cultural environment. Besides, ethical consciousness can be considered as a form of consciousness, manifested in one's comprehension of morality, moral (social) norms and ability to shape one's views and beliefs.

The development of the consciousness concept (Leontiev, 2005) in the context of Shevchenko's theoretical principles (2017) allows one to consider ethical consciousness in the unity of three components, such as values, meanings and sensory canvas. The three-component structure of ethical consciousness reflects the specifics of individual ethics and morality. In particular, values are represented by moral norms and categories; meanings – by motives of moral behaviour and axiological orientations;

sensory canvas – by perception of moral norms and actions (Shevchenko, 2017).

A detailed analysis of relevant studies on ethical consciousness in philosophy (Guseynov, 2003; Koblyakov, 1979), pedagogy (Kapustina, 2006), psychology (Antilogova, 1999; Bezdukhov, 2013; Stroianovska et al., 2020) has made it possible to define ethical consciousness of university students as a dynamic mental quality filled with moral meanings, values and sensory content, dictated by the specifics of one's ethics and morality, as well as by social features of studenthood (self-realization; adoption of one's own ethical and moral concepts).

Therefore, neither the state nor the tradition can "measure" the diversity of citizens by "single human essence". One can always find the necessary ethical and moral resources in oneself, however, only if one strives to make sense of the ever-changing multimodal world that is gradually "erasing" the lines between the real and the virtual.

Statistical indicators and levels of ethical consciousness in university students

Metaphysical reflections and generalizations should be followed by a detailed analysis of empirical data, including the specifics of developing ethical consciousness in university students. Concerning quantitative and qualitative analysis, the obtained results are presented following the structural-semantic nature of ethical consciousness (see Table 1).

Table 1. *The structural organization of university students' ethical consciousness*

Ethical consciousness components	**Their content characteristics**	**Indicators of ethical consciousness development**
Values	Moral norms and categories	Moral judgments
Meanings	Motives of moral behaviour	Conscientiousness Moral-ethical responsibility Focusing on the good
	Axiological orientations	Terminal and instrumental moral-spiritual values
Sensory canvas	Perception of moral norms and actions	Individual values of ethics categories

As part of *assessing moral norms and categories* (the "values" component), it was important to analyze the respondents' moral judgments in the case of their solving moral dilemmas. In turn, moral judgments were distributed at three levels (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional). They consist of seven stages, described below.

The zero (egocentric) stage (the dominant judgment is "one does what one likes"). At this stage, the answers of the respondents did not show any attempts to solve a moral dilemma. This indicates their reluctance to cooperate, as well as their unwillingness to reflect on moral-ethical issues. The percentage of such answers was insignificant, demonstrating a decreasing tendency (3.12% – Year 1; 9.12% – Year 2; 3.91% – Year 3; 0.89% – Year 4; 1.02% – Year 5).

The first (heteronomous) stage (the dominant judgment is "the rules must be obeyed to prevent punishment"). The percentage of such judgments was the lowest in Year 1 (1.2%), the largest in Year 2 (5.8%), stable in Years 3-5 (2.6%; 2.68%; 2.3%). Similar answers may indicate the respondents' infantilism and ignorance of their responsibility to follow the rules.

The second (hedonistic) stage (the dominant judgment is "one must obey the rules for reward or personal gain). One could observe a gradual decrease in the number of such judgments (5.76% – Year 1; 4.42% – Year 2; 2.08% – Year 3; 1.34% – Year 4; 0.77% – Year 5).

The third (role-playing) stage (the dominant judgment is "one acts in the way others expect and avoids disapproval"). At this stage, the respondents' judgments belong to a higher (conventional) level. Concerning the specified age audience, however, they are quite immature. At the same time, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of such judgments as the respondents grew older (33.81% – Year 1; 3.87% – Year 2; 3.39% – Year 3; 1.35% – Year 4; 3.33 % – Year 5).

The fourth (normative) stage (the dominant judgment is "one acts as required by law, custom and established authorities; one avoids a further feeling of guilt"). Evidence suggests that such judgments remain dominant during higher education study (38.85% – Year 1; 30.67% – Year 2; 25.78% – Year 3; 29.08% – Year 4; 23.27% – Year 5). This can be explained by the fact that the respondents' moral judgments depend on the social environment in which they learn moral norms.

The fifth (rational-relativistic) stage (the dominant judgment is "one acts according to one's principles, respects others' principles and a democratically accepted law"). The obtained results demonstrate both a stable and significant increase in the number of such judgments (13.43% – Year 1;

39.5% – Year 2; 53.91% – Year 3; 57.72% – Year 4; 59.59% – Year 5). This proves that students gradually learn moral norms within the framework of the educational process, expand their boundaries of communication, try on new social roles and gain relevant life experience.

The sixth (spiritual-universalist) stage (the dominant judgment is "one acts according to one's conscience and universal principles of morality). The respondents' answers indicate the priority of one's capabilities over social norms and reveal prevailing views on ethical categories. Despite the small percentage of such judgments, one can trace an increasing tendency (3.84% – Year 1; 6.63% – Year 2; 8.33% – Year 3; 6.94% – Year 4; 9.72% – Year 5).

Table 2 shows the average values of moral judgments indicators, which demonstrate the levels of moral development in university students.

Table 2. *Average values of moral judgments indicators*

Indicators	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Moral judgments levels	3.69	3.79	4.23	4.35	4.43	3,24*

* $p<0.05$

Summarizing the obtained results under Kohlberg's method (1984), one can conclude that moral judgments of university students are usually at the conventional and post-conventional levels ("normative" and "rational-relativistic" stages). It follows that their socialization and intellectual potential are quite high.

It is also essential to consider the specifics of developing the "*meanings*" component, especially in the context of conscientiousness.

Findings show that conscientiousness is also represented by the lowest percentage among all the respondents. At the same time, the corresponding number of first-year students is the largest (10.71%). The reason behind it may lie in the fact that conscience as an internal moral imperative of behaviour is not yet freed from the mechanisms of external social control, given that such students are only learning to make independent moral decisions (Shang, 2011). In Year 3, this figure is the lowest (3.57%).

A high level of conscientiousness is characteristic of a fairly large number of students in all the years. These figures, however, increase slightly from year to year. Exceptions are the indicators of third-year students (32.14%). Such results can be associated with the expansion of communication, the awareness of civic duty, as well as the development of moral reasoning. Indeed, this is a period of the most active mental activity, with its constant search for absolute criteria of moral behaviour and the establishment of fair relations with others.

All the students demonstrate the average levels of conscientiousness. Besides, one can observe a certain increasing tendency (from 64.29% in Year 1 to 66.67% in Year 5). Table 3 shows the differences in the average values of conscientiousness by the years of study. As can be seen from the table, the indicators of conscientiousness are increasing from Year 3.

Table 3. *Average values of conscientiousness indicators*

Indicators	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Conscientiousness	12.76	12.72	14.94	14.15	14.38	2.72*

* $p<0.05$

Quite noteworthy are the results on moral-ethical responsibility (the "*meanings*" component).

The lowest level of moral-ethical responsibility is characteristic of first-year students (53.57% of the respondents). Between Year 2 and 4, this indicator reaches the highest level. In Year 5, the distribution of students by moral-ethical responsibility levels is rather equal ($\chi^2_{\text{empirical}} = 0.727$, $p>0.05$).

Table 4 shows the differences in the average values of moral- ethical responsibility indicators among university students.

Table 4. *Average values of moral-ethical responsibility indicators*

Indicators	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Moral-ethical responsibility level	8.62	9.95	15.12	17.88	15.18	18.84*

* $p<0.0001$

Thus, the indicators of moral-ethical responsibility are lower than average among both first and second-year students. At the same time, they are expected to reach an average level in Year 3 and later on.

It is also vital to analyze the obtained results on focusing on the good (the "*meanings*" component). Table 5 shows the positive dynamics of its indicators among university students.

Table 5. *Average values of focusing on the good indicators*

Indicators	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Focusing on the good	94.73	96.60	90.58	95.71	95.65	1.85

The data obtained prove a gradual increase in such indicators during higher education study. At the level of the psyche and its external manifestations, both good and evil act as organic elements of attitudes, motives, goals, axiological orientations, ideas and categorical structures of consciousness. They characterize a certain level of personal development and awareness. Furthermore, they are manifested through one's attitude towards oneself and other people during communication and activity. Thus, good and evil, which are included in many personal values, are the strongest determinants of human development and behaviour (Popov et al., 2008).

It is also important to analyze axiological orientations of university students (the "*meanings*" component). It is personal values that underlie one's ethical development. Besides, ethical development itself can be viewed as the core of personal responsibility. As part of the research, the authors of the article aim to justify one's spiritual values under Kuznetsov's method (2018).

Table 6 shows numerical indicators of spiritual values among university students. The dynamics of most indicators (kindness, humanism, altruism, conscience, justice, tolerance, dignity, honour, respect, morality) is abrupt and non-linear. The value of the good is rather pronounced in all the years of study. Its significance increases from Year 1 to Year 4 and, subsequently, decreases slightly. The same tendency is characteristic of altruism and respect, whose essence is behavioural manifestations of kindness to other people.

Table 6. *Average values of terminal spiritual values indicators*

Terminal spiritual values	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Kindness	4.09	4.27	4.32	4.53	4.12	2.40*
Spirituality	3.46	3.50	3.45	3.85	3.98	3.48**
Humanism	4.25	4.19	3.61	3.93	4.38	7.57****
Altruism	3.80	4.00	3.23	4.18	3.83	6.35****
Conscience	4.00	3.71	3.34	3.83	3.72	4.29**
Justice	4.21	3.25	2.37	3.26	4.27	23.90****
Generosity	3.64	3.75	3.17	3.88	4.37	8.77****
Tolerance	2.63	3.06	2.98	2.92	3.50	2.68*
Compassion	3.68	3.60	3.55	4.42	4.80	13.26****
Dignity	2.12	3.58	3.96	3.11	2.40	19.13****
Honour	3.89	3.62	2.91	3.12	3.67	11.18****
Respect	3.34	3.54	3.01	3.82	3.68	7.61****
Morality	3.66	3.92	4.54	4.07	4.07	6.58****

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, **** $p<0.00001$

Table 7 presents the average values of instrumental spiritual values among university students. As shown by the obtained results, instrumental values demonstrate abrupt and non-linear dynamics concerning politeness, honesty, decency, conscientiousness, devotion, endurance, obligation, integrity, sincerity and uselessness. The significance of most of these values is significantly reduced in Year 3, which is characterized by the crisis of professional identity.

Table 7. *Average values of instrumental spiritual values indicators*

Instrumental spiritual values	Average values by the years of study (scores)					F
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Politeness	4.23	4.37	3.85	3.98	3.93	3.37**
Honesty	4.27	2.87	3.20	2.98	3.95	14.41****
Decency	4.20	3.10	3.36	3.01	4.05	11.70****
Condescension	3.79	3.94	3.59	3.58	3.75	0.93

Modesty	3.89	3.69	3.61	3.71	3.83	0.58
Patience	2.82	3.06	3.45	2.97	3.37	1.92
Dignity	4.02	4.17	3.80	4.13	4.10	1.33
Consciousness	4.21	3.31	3.62	3.02	4.13	11.25****
Responsibility	3.66	3.79	3.77	4.07	4.05	2.04
Spirituality	3.23	3.68	3.25	3.37	3.43	1.10
Appreciation	3.27	3.48	3.54	3.73	3.55	2.13
Devotion	2.98	3.52	2.80	2.70	3.46	7.07****
Tenderness	3.16	3.83	3.68	3.42	3.40	2.36
Endurance	2.93	4.21	4.29	1.00	3.70	87.38****
Liability	3.52	3.73	4.46	3.93	4.07	6.67****
Sincerity	3.50	3.81	3.26	3.50	3.42	1.37
Integrity	4.25	3.19	3.60	3.03	3.80	9.69****
Mercy	3.68	3.12	3.09	3.38	4.00	7.11****
Uselessness	2.45	3.46	3.84	1.73	2.47	25.16****

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, **** $p<0.00001$

Finally, it is crucial to analyze the specifics of developing the *"sensory canvas"* component. The respondents were offered to evaluate a set of eight stimuli-concepts, determined taking into account empirical research and scientific views on the main ethical categories (Antilogova, 1999; Bezdukhov, 2013; Guseynov, 2003). These categories are the following: *good, loyalty, obligation, dignity, responsibility, truth, conscience, justice*.

Below are the results of qualitative analysis in terms of scale- and factor-based indicators of individual values for each stimulus-concept.

1. Good. This category is the highest value of ethical consciousness. Good is a form of relationship between people that promotes spiritual connections between them (friendship, fellowship, brotherhood). In the moral sense, good is a selfless help for which one does not expect any rewards. According to the assessment factor, the highest scores are observed in Year 5 (9.59). In terms of the strength and activity factors, first- and

fourth-year students demonstrate the highest scores: 5.61 and 4.7, respectively. Thus, only the assessment factor is characterized by some positive dynamics.

2. Loyalty. This category extends to everything associated with human intentions. In particular, one can have stable or unstable beliefs or goals. Students in Year 5 show the highest scores under the assessment factor (8.93) and students in Year 3 under the strength factor (5.82). It must be noted, however, that the assessment factor is characterized by certain negative dynamics. The respondents, from year to year, assess the variability of loyalty increasingly negatively over time (from 3.18 in Year 1 to 2.22 in Year 5).

3. Obligation. This category is associated with general views on a proper form of specific requirements for one's position and situation. Its scores are found to be the lowest among other stimuli under all the factors. Both the assessment and strength factors show the highest scores in Year 2 (4.26; 3.63) and the activity factor in Year 1 (2.93).

4. Dignity. This category affirms the fundamental value of an individual as a human being, determining moral standards of one's self-esteem. The highest scores under the assessment factor are characteristic of Year 3 (8.54), under the strength factor – of Year 2 (5.81), under the activity factor – of Year 3 (4.93). At the same time, the assessment factor is dominant in all the years of study.

5. Responsibility. To what extent one fulfils or does not fulfil one's duty is the issue of one's moral responsibility. As shown by the assessment and strength factors, the scores of third-year students were the highest (7.79; 6.46) and by the activity factor – those of fifth-year students (4.48).

6. Truth. This category reveals and defines special relationships between human ideas and reality, outlined by a spiritual perception of knowledge. Truth determines the relation of objective reality to human notions of existence. One can observe some positive dynamics under the activity factor (from 3.39 in Year 1 to 4.26 in Year 5). However, in terms of the assessment and strength factors, the scores of second- and third-year students turned out to be the highest (8.07; 4.44).

7. Conscience. This category implies one's inner spiritual understanding of one's integrity in the context of fundamental moral assessment. Interestingly, third-year students demonstrate the highest scores of the conscience category under all the factors (7.79; 5.79; 4.29).

8. Justice. This category lies not only in assessing one or another phenomenon (good or evil) but also in correlating several points, between

which one should establish ethical correspondence. The highest scores under the assessment and strength factors are found among fourth-year students (7.87; 5.77). As shown by the activity factor, the highest scores are characteristic of students in Year 5 (4.89).

The dynamics in ethical consciousness components during higher education study

As it was planned, the obtained results have confirmed the postmodernist position on the multimodality and dynamism of ethical consciousness (its nature and components) (Bauman, 2020).

When using Kohlberg's method (1984) to study how students learn moral norms and categories *(the "meanings" component),* the authors of the article found that moral judgments of university students are mostly associated with conventional and post-conventional levels ("normative" and "rational-relativistic" stages). At the spiritual-universalist stage, however, such judgments were never formulated in their pure form: the answers to certain questions always contained an appeal to the values of pre-conventional and conventional levels. In turn, this indicates dependence on social and role-playing statuses, as well as insufficient maturity of moral judgments. At the same time, evidence suggests that the respondents' moral choices gradually become more morally correct and appropriate to the situation from year to year. Furthermore, their views on the preferred norms and values are now characterized by certain universalization.

The obtained data indicate that as students grow older and learn the profession, their level of moral development increases. It implies transferring from hedonistic and role-playing to normative and rational-relativistic stages of moral development. At the very beginning, university students mainly strive to be popular and not to feel ashamed because of their correct behaviour. Later on, however, they are more aware of moral rules and laws and can interiorize moral motives of behaviour. Besides, moral behaviour of certain students becomes more independent and their worldview more humanistically oriented.

Evidence shows that all the respondents mostly demonstrate average levels of conscientiousness as an indicator of young people's acceptance of social norms and ethical requirements. It follows that moral development of most students does not undergo any significantly qualitative changes (moral autonomy, profound moral reflection) (Milts, 1990), even though some of them might accept certain social norms and ethical requirements.

Concerning moral-ethical responsibility, its scores are lower than average among first and second-year students. They start to increase only from Year 3 and later on. The obtained results correspond to those shown by Golovina et al. (2014). In particular, the level of moral-ethical responsibility is characterized by some positive micro-age dynamics. From year to year, students show an increasing tendency to reflect on moral-ethical issues, situations and conflicts, which may be due to the newly acquired experience of social relations, independent living, as well as a growing responsibility for it. The growth of moral-ethical responsibility in late adolescence and youth mainly lies in the increasing role of existential responsibility, given that a significant shift in altruistic emotions, intuition in the moral-ethical sphere and moral-ethical values within a short period is rather questionable. However, the age-related dynamics of moral-ethical responsibility is not significant (Golovina et al., 2014).

As for axiological orientations, one can observe positive trends in spirituality, except for some decline in Year 3. Such a decline is also characteristic of humanism. It must be noted that the crisis of "the third year" is mainly associated with difficulties in forming a professional identity (Bezdukhov & Zhirnova, 2008).

Interestingly, many second- and third-year students might question their choice of university, profession or specialization. They often struggle with a cognitive conflict associated with the discrepancy of their vision as applicants and a more realistic vision of the profession. "The third year" crisis can be solved by encouraging students to have a more responsible attitude towards professional training and focus on personal and professional development. These circumstances can explain the increasing scores in terms of spiritual values (humanism, altruism, compassion, conscience, justice) from Year 4. However, the third year of study marks the crisis of professional identity, which may lead to the reassessment of spiritual values. At the same time, the dynamics of generosity and tolerance scores may seem quite positive. One can assume that higher education study nurtures feelings of patience and tolerance, thus teaching students to respect the differences of others (Bezdukhov & Zhirnova, 2008).

In the context of *the sensory canvas component*, the findings intersect with those obtained by other scholars (Bezdukhov, 2013; Popov et al., 2008).

The category of "good" turned out to be the most significant for third and fifth-year students. Besides, positive dynamics of stimuli-concepts can be observed only concerning the assessment factor. It follows that university students realize the importance of this category in human life and,

yet, cannot assess the strength and activity of their manifestations of good. Thus, the idea of good implies direct moral significance when it is understood as a factor in determining one's volition, i.e., something that one perceives as a driving force of one's choices, as well as the source of one's obligations (Shang, 2011). Thus, the idea of welfare is transformed into the idea of good.

The category of loyalty is the most significant for first- and third-year students. As they grow older, however, the degree of loyalty dynamism decreases. It means that loyalty is one's determination to achieve a certain goal or accomplish a certain task, in the context of love or enmity, respect or contempt, concerning other citizens, the state or any social association. Any kind of loyalty, since it is the continuity of the mind, is always one's stability concerning oneself.

The category of obligation turned out to be the most significant for second-year students. All the factors show a certain decrease, which indicates an extremely negative emotional attitude towards this stimulus. Obligations signify one's moral awareness of what appears to be an urgent practical task. Young people do not feel their subjective involvement in the accomplishment of this task since they are not sufficiently aware of their own potential.

The category of dignity is the most popular among fifth-year students. Similar to the results obtained for other stimuli, the assessment factor is dominant in all the years of study. This can be explained by the fact that the respondents are aware of their limited opportunities to show dignity, given that the specificity of dignity as an ethical category lies in its imperative-evaluative nature. One must behave with dignity, that is, not to be humiliated and not to allow others to humiliate oneself, no matter what life situation can be. One can strengthen, defend or lose one's dignity only in such an extremely broad perspective as the projection of oneself on universal potentials, values and ideals.

Evidence suggests that the category of responsibility is the most significant for third-year students. The scores of third-year students are the highest under the assessment and strength factors and those of fifth-year students – under the activity factor. One might assume that first- and second-year students still do not feel independent enough to take responsibility for their own lives. Once they feel ready for this, the corresponding indicators start increasing.

The category of truth is the most valuable for third-year students. Certain positive dynamics under the activity factor may indicate the respondents' readiness to comprehend their own truth. This, in turn, proves

that they now view their own lives as an act of self-knowledge and will and can evaluate themselves adequately. Such awareness serves as the basis for self-change and self-development. Therefore, the category of truth can be seen as the principle of creating the real world under the image of the proper world.

The category of conscience evokes the greatest emotional response in third-year students. Such results are completely consistent with the data obtained under the "conscientiousness scale" method. This stage of higher education study coincides with the period of the most active mental activity, the justification of such categories as good and evil, the establishment of relations with others. One experiences moral norms following from the objective need to address the priority social and moral challenges faced by society.

Fourth-year students are most emotional about the category of justice. Such an increase in the scores may be evidence that as students grow older, they begin to wonder whether they should comply with moral standards while others often neglect them, and how fair this is. Along with the categories of obligation, responsibility and justice, morality is embodied in such problematic concepts that stimulate subjective mental search, excluding the very possibility of prepared answers, compulsory imperatives and schemes.

Conclusions

The article presents the results of a quasi-experimental study of how to develop ethical consciousness in university students. Quite noteworthy are the dynamics of all structural components of ethical consciousness (values, meanings, sensory canvas) during the whole period of study in higher education institutions. For instance, the indicators of ethical consciousness development under individual variables of these components demonstrate some differences in all age groups of students. Despite gradual changes in students' consciousness, numerical indicators of all the respondents remain in the same range, most frequently at an average level. In particular, moral development of students (Years 1-5) corresponds to conventional and post-conventional levels (the "values" component).

According to the "*meanings*" component, the number of students with a low level of conscience and moral-ethical responsibility increases from the third year of study. The dynamics of *terminal* (kindness, humanism, altruism, conscience, justice, tolerance, dignity, honour, respect, morality) and *instrumental* (politeness, honesty, decency, conscientiousness, devotion,

endurance, obligation, integrity, sincerity, uselessness) indicators is abrupt and non-linear, characterized by a decreasing tendency in Year 3.

As shown by the "sensory canvas" component, individual views on an ethical space among all the students rely on semantic load under the assessment factor. This indicates the instability of moral beliefs, values and qualities.

Thus, one can conclude that the development of moral principles is a rather slow process during higher education study. Besides, some moral norms and categories do not have any real personal meaning for students.

Further research should aim to specify the levels of ethical consciousness in university students and improve psychological methods for their development.

In addition to the conclusions on the purpose of the article, we can note such important epistemological results that contribute to the scientific-theoretical as well as practical progress in the field of research:

1. The data obtained showed that during the entire period of study at the university there is a certain personal development of students in all structural components of moral consciousness - meanings, senses, sensual substance. At the same time, despite the presence of gradual changes occurring in the consciousness of young people, the numerical indicators of all courses remain in the same range, most often in the range of the average level of development.

2. The article experimentally confirmed the divergence between established social values and the individual intensions and prerogatives of today's youth, who in their own way understand the traditions of the categories of *conscience, responsibility, belonging*, etc. This will make it possible to adjust the educational process in institutions of higher education, to revise the content of university courses on ethics and professional deontology.

3. The authors came to the conclusion that young people's assessment of their own behavior, events, and objects of the world around them occurs not so much through rationalization and mental intelligence, as through emotional intelligence, through the "sensual substance". In this regard, the actual and instantaneous has more value than the former metaphysical.

4. The evaluation factor during the experimental measurements appeared dominant in all courses (compared to the activity, strength factors measured by multimodal stimuli). This indicates an assessment of thinking, instability of moral beliefs, values and qualities. The results of the study showed the instability and slowness of the process of developing university

students' own moral principles; some moral norms and categories have not acquired real personal meaning for young people.

Acknowledgements

The authors of the article would like to express their gratitude to the administrations of the universities, whose premises they used to collect factual data and conduct the quasi-experiment (Zaporizhzhia National University, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, The National Metallurgical Academy of Ukraine, Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Alfred Nobel University (Dnipro)). It must be noted that all the authors have equally contributed to writing this article. In particular, Olena STROIANOVSKA and Galyna GORBAN were responsible for statistical sampling and quantitative measurements; Maiia SHYPKO studied and summarized the views of foreign and Ukrainian scholars on ethics and postmodernism; Nataliia SHEVCHENKO elaborated methodical aspects of identifying the dynamics in structural components of students' ethical consciousness; Olena TEMRUK considered the obtained results in the context of a subject-specific discussion; Liubov DOLYNSKA summarized the obtained results and acted as the chief editor of the article.

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