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A FREE-ASSOCIATIVE EXPERIMENT FOR IDENTIFYING THE FACTORS FOR THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

In the conditions of rapid changes taking place in the socio-economic life of Kazakhstan, much attention is paid to young people who are gradually taking active positions in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Young people are aimed at developing and promoting their initiatives, mainly starting to implement them during the professional training. In these conditions, the socio-cultural potential of the youth acts as a combination of qualities and capabilities of the younger generation, formed under the influence of certain factors and a professionally oriented educational environment. From this perspective, we should determine these factors in accordance with the realities of modern times and youth's point of view. The purpose of the research was to determine the structure of significant indicators for youth's socio-cultural potential development in the context of professional education via the free-associative method. It was considered how the different categories of respondents react to the incentive words and phrases such as "youth", "youth's socio-cultural potential", "socio-cultural environment", and "cross-cultural interaction". Interpretation of the obtained results allows us to divide associations based on keywords and the repeatability sums values of the mentions into groups that make up the semantic core for each definition. As a consequence, twenty cognitive paradigmatic signs with a positive connotation were identified. The scientific value and novelty of the work arrows in proving the possibility of using the free-associative method for the definition of the logical components of the concepts in accordance to the ideas of a certain social group about it.

The main conclusions of the research confirm that the youth of Kazakhstan, as a social group, has a formed structure of associations regarding the role and status of youth in society and the development of socio-cultural potential, including in conditions of intercultural interaction. The practical significance of the results provides a base for the determination of the socio-cultural potential of youth indicators in the professional study field.

Key words: associative method, frequent reactions, semantic core, socio-cultural interaction, youth.

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Кәсіптік білім беру мәнмәтіндегі жастардың жеке даму факторларын анықтау бойынша еркін-ассоциативті эксперимент

Қазақстанның әлеуметтік-экономикалық өмірінде болып жатқан қарқынды өзгерістер жағдайында экономикалық, саяси және мәдени салаларда біртіндеп белсенді позицияға ие жастарға көп көңіл бөлініп келеді. Жастар өз бастамаларын дамытуды және ілгерілетуді көздейді, негізінен оларды кәсіби дайындық кезінде іске асыра бастайды. Мұндай жағдайда жастардың әлеуметтік-мәдени әлеуеті белгілі бір факторлардың және кәсіби бағдарланған білім беру ортасының әсерінен қалыптасқан жас ұрпақтың қасиеттері мен қабілеттерінің жиынтығы ретінде әрекет етеді. Осыған байланысты біздің алдымызда осы факторларды қазіргі заман шындығына және жастардың көзқарасына сәйкес анықтау міндеті тұр. Зерттеудің мақсаты еркін ассоциативті әдісті қолдана отырып, кәсіптік білім беру мәнмәтінде жастардың әлеуметтік-мәдени әлеуетін дамытудың маңызды көрсеткіштерінің құрылымын анықтау болды. Респонденттердің әр түрлі категориялары «жастар», «жастардың әлеуметтік-мәдени әлеуеті», «әлеуметтік-мәдени орта» және «мәдениетаралық өзара іс-қимыл» сияқты ынталандырушы сөздер мен сөз тіркестеріне қалай жауап қайтаратыны қарастырылды. Нәтижелерді түсіндіру бізге ассоциацияларды кілт сөздер мен қайталанулардың қосындыларының мағыналары негізінде әр анықтаманың семантикалық өзегін құрайтын топтарға бөлуге мүмкіндік береді. Нәтижесінде оң коннотациясы бар жиырма когнитивті парадигматикалық белгілер анықталды. Жұмыстың ғылыми құндылығы

және жаңалығы белгілі бір әлеуметтік топтың идеяларына сәйкес ұғымдардың логикалық компоненттерін анықтау үшін еркін ассоциативті әдісті қолдану мүмкіндігін дәлелдеу болып табылады.

Зерттеудің негізгі қорытындылары Қазақстан жастарының әлеуметтік топ ретінде қоғамдағы жастардың рөлі мен мәртебесіне және әлеуметтік-мәдени әлеуетін дамытуға, оның ішінде мәдениетаралық өзара әрекеттестік контекстінде қалыптасқан ассоциациялар құрылымына ие болатынын растайды. Нәтижелердің практикалық маңыздылығы кәсіптік білім беру саласындағы жастардың әлеуметтік-мәдени әлеуетінің көрсеткіштерін анықтауға негіз болады.

Түйін сөздер: ассоциациялар әдісі, жиі жауап қайтарулар, семантикалық өзегі, әлеуметтік-мәдени өзара іс-қимыл, жастар.

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Свободно-ассоциативный эксперимент по выявлению факторов личностного развития молодежи в контексте профессионального образования

В условиях стремительных изменений, происходящих в социально-экономической жизни Казахстана, большое внимание уделяется молодежи, которая постепенно занимает активные позиции в экономической, политической и культурной сферах. Молодежь нацелена на развитие и продвижение своих инициатив, в основном начиная реализовывать их во время профессиональной подготовки. В этих условиях социокультурный потенциал молодежи выступает как совокупность качеств и способностей подрастающего поколения, сформированных под влиянием определенных факторов и профессионально ориентированной образовательной среды. В этой связи перед нами стоит задача по определению данных факторов в соответствии с реалиями современности и точкой зрения молодежи. Целью исследования было определение структуры значимых показателей развития социокультурного потенциала молодежи в контексте профессионального образования с помощью свободно-ассоциативного метода. Было рассмотрено, как различные категории респондентов реагируют на стимулирующие слова и фразы, такие как «молодежь», «социокультурный потенциал молодежи», «социокультурная среда» и «межкультурное взаимодействие». Интерпретация полученных результатов позволяет нам разделить ассоциации на основе ключевых слов и значений сумм повторяемости упоминаний на группы, составляющие семантическое ядро для каждого определения. Как следствие, было выявлено двадцать когнитивных парадигматических признаков с положительной коннотацией. Научная ценность и новизна работы заключаются в доказательстве возможности использования свободно-ассоциативного метода для определения логических составляющих понятий в соответствии с представлениями определенной социальной группы о нем.

Основные выводы исследования подтверждают, что молодежь Казахстана как социальная группа обладает сформированной структурой ассоциаций относительно роли и статуса молодежи в обществе и развития социально-культурного потенциала, в том числе в условиях межкультурного взаимодействия. Практическая значимость результатов обеспечивает основу для определения показателей социокультурного потенциала молодежи в области профессионального образования.

Ключевые слова: метод ассоциаций, частые реакции, семантическое ядро, социально-культурное взаимодействие, молодежь.

Introduction

In accordance with the course proposed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, it is necessary to develop traditions of dialogue and civic engagement, cultivating progressive values underlying internal Kazakhstan solidarity and unity. All of this is indicated as the most important factor for further progress. In the context of the development of the Knowledge Economy, vocational education training and

university education have a significant impact as the social institutions for reproduction of intellectual potential.

Following the state's policy, the young students' formation of worldviews in the context of professional training should be based on universal values. In this case, it will contribute to improving the global competitiveness of Kazakhstan education. In the current situation, the identification of conditions for youth's socio-cultural potential development is quite important as a factor of the global and

interdisciplinary competencies' formation. The 21-st century competencies include volunteering, civic and social responsibility, leadership, communication, research, and entrepreneurial skills.

Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

Young people as a demographic group, characterized by criteria such as age and social status and associated with the individual socio-psychological characteristics were considered by I. Kon (Kon, et al., 1970). R. Merton (1968) suggested the structural-functionalist approach, following which a systematic analysis of the current state and changes of this social group is assumed in close relationship with the surrounding reality and its ability to reproduce the social structure of society. Following this approach, young people are considered as a system of statuses or positions, depending on which individuals have specific social roles. T. Parsons identified the stages of socialization and the construction of youth culture within the framework of structural functionalism's concept. He designates the system of formal education as the main element of the internalization of a higher-order social organization system. F. Mahler proposed understanding the phenomenon of youth as a transitional state to the status of an adult individual under the influence of economic, cultural, and social conditions, based on the status-role representations.

P. Berger and T. Lukman's culturological approach considers the youth environment through subjective manifestations of personality – interests, motivation, and behavior (Berger, et al., 1966). The behavior of young people in terms of age characteristics and mental parameters while overcoming the "identity crisis" has a significant impact on the development of personality throughout life was analyzed by the psychoanalytic school's representatives Z. Freud and E. Erickson (1978).

A new sociological approach to youth as a social resource in close interaction with society was proposed by K. Mannheim (Casavecchia, 2017). At the same time, the dependence of the potential contribution of young people in the future is directly dependent on the expectations of society and, as a consequence, the content of education and training. Youth as a resource reproduced as a result of interaction can be based on the theory of structuration and the new rules of the sociological method of E. Giddens (1984).

Russian scientists also pay considerable attention to youth issues. According to V. Dobrynina, it

is necessary to analyze such characteristics as psychophysiological features, and economic and social status for understanding the youth's concept. In the works of A. Panarin, youth is interpreted as a specific socio-demographic group that contributes to the accelerated development of the latest professional, scientific, technical, socio-cultural, and territorial environment.

Kazakhstan scientists also paid a lot of attention to youth issues. Of considerable interest are the studies of A. Teslenko and M. Maulsharif devoted to the theoretical and methodological foundations of youth socialization and self-identification of students. The works of B. Mukhametzhano, T. Tsareva, G. Abdrayymova, E. Stolyarova, O. Nikolaeva, N. Biekenova are devoted to the issues of student youth, its value and ideological orientation, legal socialization, political culture.

The issues of youth, as a resource for the formation of human capital, the analysis of vocational education as a social institution, modernization processes were handled by B. Turlybekov, G. Aksakalova, R. Aralbayeva, I. Sarybayeva. The works of A. Ivashov are devoted to the problems of socio-cultural analysis of the Kazakhstan education system. Value orientations in the professional sphere and issues of youth self-determination are revealed in the works of N. Nysambayeva, A. Altynbekov.

Thus, the existing approaches allow us to consider youth as a social group from various sides, according to all aspects of its formation and interaction with the surrounding reality. That is, young people are a constantly renewing set of individuals who are in close interaction with society and are characterized by the following signs:

- specific social roles that regulate behavior;
- subjective manifestations of personality;
- age and social status.

The role and importance of youth in society are determined by their social status, ability, and desire to find their place. At the same time, the combination of the variety of views and values, intention to maximize personal potential is an integral part of social status. Thus, the formation of the socio-cultural potential of young people is one of the priority areas of scientific research.

Despite the steps taken, at the current time, Kazakhstan has not formed a comprehensive approach to the formation of the socio-cultural environment in professional training organizations, including a significant gap in approaches to the development of the socio-cultural potential of young people at various levels of professional

education. The current situation is connected with the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions and changes in the political structure of society. Despite the annual research, suggested, among other things, within the framework of the national reports “Youth”, to overcome the existing gap, it is necessary to introduce the practices of the world’s leading universities in accordance with the traditions of intercultural interaction that have developed in Kazakhstan society.

The purpose of the research was to determine the structure of significant indicators for youth’s socio-cultural potential development in the context of professional education via the free-associative method. *The object* of this research is youth, and *the subject* is the structure of stereotypical representations of young people about their role in society and the development of personal socio-cultural potential. *The hypothesis* of this study is the assumption that the analysis of the ideas of youth in the professional education environment within the framework of their life activities within the socio-cultural environment of colleges and universities will contribute to the identification of factors that are significant for the development of personal and professionally important qualities of youth, meeting emerging needs and realizing the potential of young people.

The objectives of the study are: conducting a survey to determine the structure of associations of the youth within the framework of concepts that specify the role and status of youth in society and the development of socio-cultural potential, including in conditions of intercultural interaction; identifying semantic cores and periphery of each concept based on the frequency of respondents’ reactions; forming and analyzing a list of stereotypical representations based on associative connections the proposed concepts.

In this paper, we used the *sociological approach* to determine the objective nature of mass consciousness based on affective (emotions), cognitive (values and needs), and connotative aspects. A comprehensive assessment of the current position and society’s understanding of all the factors that directly affect to development of a socio-cultural environment in which the younger generation receives professional skills are the main factors of this approach. The first step for the assessment conducting is the formation of an interconnected set of the individuals’ opinions involved in the educational process. *The significance of the research* provides a base for identifying the structure of significant indicators for youth’s socio-cultural potential development in the context

of professional education based on using the free-associations method.

Scientific research methodology

The method of the free-associative experiment is one of the most popular and proven psycholinguistic methods, which consists in modeling the situation to get quick answers from the respondent, depending on the first word-reaction in response to the presented stimulating word. The results of the experiment can be used for identifying the content that carriers put into the proposed concepts. On this base, we can identify the largest number of cognitive features of the term, relevant to the current state of consciousness of individuals, including those belonging to a specific social group.

For the first time, the association method was presented by F. Galton for the personality assessment (Mülberger, 2017). This method is considered the forerunner of modern projective techniques. Subsequently, this method was applied as a diagnostic tool in C. Jung’s research (1910), and Kent-Rosanoff Word Association Test (Kent, et al., 1910), and it is still used in psychology. In sociology, this method has also become widespread in identifying stable characteristics of associations and determining their relationship with phenomena and processes in society. The application of this approach is based on the formation of an associative series, which is inextricably linked with the processes of socialization of an individual and his perception of the norms and values of society. Consequently, we can agree with the statement that the associations of an individual not only reflect the relationships within different situations but also project the personal experience and worldview of an individual as a reaction to the stimulus word.

During preparing the free-associative experiment, it is necessary to take into account all aspects related to the association of individuals, including the concept of implicit stereotypes by Hinton (2017), the possibility of free associations’ measurement (Nelson, et al., 2000), the dependence the associations from the mood-state of individuals (Weingartner, et al., 1977; Clark, et al., 1983), response process on stimulus words during the selective listening experiments (Broadbent, 1958). M. Zavalloni research based on free associations suggested the method of the social identity inventory, which was describing a person’s individuality (Zavalloni, 1971). Important in determining whether the associations obtained during the experiment are common to a social group is the B. Bettencourt

and D. Hume's work on identifying differences in people's cognitive representations of the group and personal identity (Bettencourt, et al., 1999). Creativity and inner diversity during learning have such components as a mixture of cognitive, social, and emotional elements in various lists of skills and personal traits that contribute to effective learning, both in formal and informal settings (Gordon, et al., 2015). The free-associative experiment was also discussed by W. Holloway and T. Jefferson as a method of qualitative research (Hollway, et al., 2000). S. Arkhipova examines the types, descriptions, and results of verbal-associative experiments and also the features of object perception in the mass consciousness (2011).

Thus, as a result of an associative experiment, the researcher receives a specific set of stereotypical knowledge formed by individuals belonging to the same social group. That is, associative connections, being influenced by a particular personality, also have a significant social component. At the same time, associations formed as a result of an individual's socialization can influence his worldview and behavior in general, including in cases when the conditions of reality that caused specific associations have changed dramatically.

As a result of a free-associative experiment, an associative field is formed, which is a set of associates per word-stimulus, creating high-frequency (cultural and social) associations (core) and low-frequency and single associations (periphery). According to A. Zalevskaya (1998), the strategy of understanding a word can be identified through a situation, while the understanding of the formation of phenomena in the respondents' minds is based on the analysis of associative binomials representing pairs of agreed members of the same grammatical category.

Researchers propose several types of classification of results. G. Miller suggests classifying verbal associations, by contrast, similarity, subordination, generalization, assonance, part-whole, and complement, egocentrism, predication (1951). Ch. Osgood suggests using the semantic differential technique, in which semantic signs are important (1952). A. Klimenko also classifies associations by semantic sign: syntagmatic, paradigmatic, thematic, quotation, word-formation, grammatical, phonetic, accidental, refusals (Klimenko, et al., 2012). At the same time, paradigmatic associations are related to an established worldview and a rich lexical stock of individuals, while syntagmatic associations are inherent to children (Yachnaya, 2011).

The core of the associative field formed by the most common associations is of significant interest

since it allows us to determine the most common cognitive features of the concept. However, the unique associations reflect the social characteristics of the studied set of objects. At the same time, it is necessary to assess the general structure of the associative field, including the core density and the ratio of typical and unique associations, to identify the level of stereotypical perception of phenomena in the minds of individuals and analyze the factors influencing the "pattern" of responses.

Results and discussion

The research objectives of this experiment include identifying the sociological determinants of the associative field of individuals influenced by factors such as gender, age, and status in the vocational education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Sociological determinants include the role characteristics of youth and cognitive signs of its socio-cultural potential, also associations related with the socio-cultural environment, and the role of intercultural communication in professional education organizations. At the same time, it is necessary to identify the modification of associations depending on social positions.

We applied the productive technique of the free-associative experiment, the method of comparative analysis of the results obtained, and the classification method in the course of the research. Also, we used language material consisting of four incentive words and phrases for the respondents belonging to different ages and social groups for the survey: "youth", "socio-cultural potential of youth", "socio-cultural environment". To identify the factors influencing the relationships among young people in a multicultural educational environment inherent for higher education in Kazakhstan, the concept of "intercultural interaction" was added as an additional stimulating phrase.

Even though the proposed terminology is widely used and analyzed by various authors, such as Panarin (2007), Gordon (2008), S. Elishev (2017), Rudenkin (2019), Baigabylov, Beisembaev, Baigusheva (Baigabylov, et al., 2013), Behrnd & Porzelt (Behrnd, et al., 2012), etc., its understanding in the youth environment may include certain additional factors that were not analyzed previously; however, they have significant importance for understanding the needs and moods of this social group.

Using the Google Forms platform to form a questionnaire allowed us to receive and systematize the answers received using spreadsheet output and filtering settings in Microsoft Excel format.

The experiment was conducted using the “snowball” method, which involves interviewing subsequent respondents on the recommendation of previous ones. We have chosen this method due to limited access to specific social groups and distrust of various kinds of surveys. This fact also determined one of the most important criteria related to the age characteristics of the respondents. According to V. Belyanin (2009), to associative experiment should be involved individuals at least 17 years old, which is due to their psychological characteristics and the formation of vocabulary and language abilities.

In the process of a free-associative experiment, 128 respondents directly related to the system of professional education in Nur-Sultan and Karaganda were interviewed in the following categories:

1. Status in the system of vocational education:
 - University student;

- College student;
- Master’s student;
- Doctoral student;
- University teaching staff;
- College teaching staff;
- Head of department;
- Employee of the department.

2. Age:

- 17-18 years old;
- 19-35 years old;
- 36-45 years old;
- 46-63 years old

3. Gender.

The choice of categories for the associative experiment is due to the need to assess the understanding of the proposed incentive word and phrases by various social groups, depending on their age, gender, and status in the professional education system (Tab. 1).

Table 1 – Categories of respondents

Status in the system of professional education	Men				Women				Total
	17-18	19-35	36-45	46-63	17-18	19-35	36-45	46-63	
University student	8	10			7	16			41
College student	3	9			3	2			17
Master’s student		11				7			18
Doctoral student		2	2			3	4	1	12
University teaching staff		1	1			3	6	4	15
College teaching staff		4	4	1		1	3		13
Head of department		2	1			1	2	1	7
Employee of the department				1			3	1	5
Total	11	39	8	2	10	33	18	7	128

The analysis of the obtained associations allows us to explore the relationship between the understanding of the meanings of the incentive word and phrases. The logical chain proposed in the questionnaire provides an assessment of the relationship in the direction: youth – socio-cultural potential of youth – socio-cultural environment – intercultural interaction. As a result, 514 responses for the incentive words and phrases were received:

152 (130 – semantic core; 22 – periphery) – «youth»;

125 (98 – semantic core; 27 – periphery) – «socio-cultural potential of youth»;

116 (96 – semantic core; 20 – periphery) – «socio-cultural environment»;

121 (111 – semantic core; 10 – periphery) – «intercultural interaction».

We assumed the dependence of respondents’ responses on age and status in the vocational training system. The analysis of the responses shows that we can observe the expansion of the list of associations, their depth, and their connection with the stimulating phrase among respondents who are at a higher level of the vocational education system. Consequently, their reactions were influenced by personality, confirming that the pragmatic factor had a significant impact on the responses of this group of respondents. At the same time, college and university students the age of around 18, as a rule, offered associations related to the stimulus phrase at the

level of general linguistic features. The responses-reactions of men were more concise; most women suggested more than one association.

Grouping the obtained cognitive features into thematic groups allowed us to establish the types of associations grouped by connotation: positive, negative, neutral. Positive associations have a positive orientation; convey satisfaction, hopes for the best. For example, the following answers of respondents can be attributed to the category of positive cognitive signs of the concept «youth»: «the future», «the potential of the country», «innovation», «lightness», «flexibility», «purposefulness», etc. Neutral reactions include reactions that, according to the classification of G. Miller belong to the category of «similarity»: «society», «people», «life», etc. Associations with a negative connotation are low-frequency and express a certain degree of uncertainty: «stupidity», «inexperienced», «indecisive».

Interpretation of the results obtained allows us to divide associations based on keywords and the values of the amounts of repeatability into groups

that make up the semantic core in the analysis of the concept. The final resulting matrix does not present low-frequency reactions (less than four times), due to individual characteristics of the perception of some respondents, as well as a possible reaction to external stimuli. For example, the reaction «dad» has a frequency of one as an answer in the associative series of the phrase «intercultural interaction». The final resulting matrix of the free-associative experiment is shown in Figure 1.

As can be seen from the presented matrix, the reactions with the highest frequency of mentions in response to the stimulus word «youth» include such concepts as «young», «age», «juvenility», which have a dependence on similarity and occur in respondents belonging mainly to the contingent of students within the vocational education system. With a slight gap in frequency, the reactions «the future» and «the potential of the country» are presented, implying a deeper understanding of the term at the level of interrelationships. These reactions are typical for several respondents regardless of gender, age and status.

youth		socio-cultural potential		socio-cultural environment		cross-cultural interaction	
Reactions	Frequency	Reactions	Frequency	Reactions	Frequency	Reactions	Frequency
young, age, juvenility	25	opportunities	18	society	20	partnership, mutual development	30
the future, the potential of the country	23	development	16	the space of vital activity	14	integration, interaction	22
novelty, innovation, creativity	12	volunteering	8	communication in society	10	globalization	15
training, students	11	intelligence	8	the level of development of society's values	8	communication	13
flexibility, lightness, mobility	9	good manners	6	culture	6	tolerance	12
society, people	9	culture, preservation and development of culture	6	education and science	6	multiculturalism, mutual influence of cultures	7
fun, relaxation, positive	7	development through technology	5	creative environment	6	traditions	6
activity	6	youth as a resource, potential	5	environment & context	9	friendly relations	6
commitment	6	modernity, innovations, trends	5	communications on the Internet	5		
ambitious	5	driving force, contribution	5	professional environment	4		
freedom	5	aspiration	4	development	4		
opportunities	4	creativity	4	conditions for the formation of personality	4		
patriotism, prosperity of the nation	4	tolerance, support	4				
vital energy	4	future	4				

Figure 1 – The final resulting matrix of the free-associative experiment

Less common are reactions related to innovation, creativity, education, flexibility, and society, but this list is typical for respondents belonging to the system of higher professional education.

The most common reactions to the stimulus phrase “socio-cultural potential” are the answers “opportunities” and “development” reactions related to volunteering, education, upbringing, and culture are gaining half the frequency. This trend is also associated with the spread of synonymy of concepts with the word “potential”. However, the component of the incentive phrase “socio-cultural” is reflected in a much smaller number of reactions, also mainly typical for teachers and students of the university, as well as heads and employees of the departments.

For the stimulus phrase “socio-cultural environment”, the synonymous reaction “society” is also the most common. At the next stage, there are reactions with a frequency of mention slightly less – “the space of vital activity”, two times less – “communication in society”, “the level of development of values of society”. All of these reactions are also typical for representatives of both the vocational education system and higher education. The reactions “culture”, “education and science”, “creative environment” are less common and are mainly characteristic of teachers and students of universities.

Reactions to the additional incentive phrase “intercultural interaction” can be divided into groups, the most significant in terms of frequency of reactions, which are “partnership”, “integration, the interaction of cultures”, “globalization” and “communication”. Thus, the semantic core for the proposed concepts is quite dense. Consequently, we can suggest a high degree of stereotyping in respondents’ perceptions of concepts.

Considering the results obtained from the point of view of sociology, it can be argued that the semantic associations obtained are a reflection of the relationship between the individual’s response at a certain point in time to social phenomena and processes expressed by stimulus words and phrases. At the same time, the associations of each respondent include not only his personal life experience but also the social experience of the group to which he belongs. The high density of the semantic core to the proposed concepts proves the influence of stereotypes, traditions, and other factors formed in the social group on the perception of reality in the respondent’s mind. Thus, based on the analysis of associations, we get an idea of the structure of

associations as a reflection of the prevailing ideas about social phenomena and processes among respondents belonging to a specific social group.

Based on the above, we can say that the method of free associations can be used as a supplement to traditional methods in sociological research. For example, the author considers it rational to use the results obtained using this method in carrying out structural and factor operationalization of concepts related to the development of the socio-cultural potential of youth in the context of professional education.

Conclusion

The conducted experiment to identify the prevailing ideas about the development of personal socio-cultural potential in the youth environment of professional education organizations by the method of free associations allowed identifying groups of cognitive traits for the concepts proposed to respondents. At the same time, there are significant differences in the reactions received in response to incentive words, depending on the age, gender of respondents, and their status in the professional education system. As a result, four groups of cognitive features were obtained, characterized by a high density of semantic cores, which is proof of the possibility of using the results obtained during the interpretation of the concept of “socio-cultural potential of youth”.

As the most important factors for further research, the following cognitive signs were identified, obtained as a result of associations with a positive connotation and is paradigmatic: innovation, creativity, mobility, purposefulness, ambition, freedom, patriotism, development, education, volunteerism, education, science, culture, creativity, communication, multiculturalism, partnership and interaction, tolerance, development of values.

Thus, the analysis of the ideas formed in the professional education environment about young people in the framework of their life activities within the socio-cultural environment of colleges and universities allows us to identify factors that are significant for the personal development of youth, meeting their emerging needs and realizing their potential, which confirms the initial research hypothesis.

The obtained results will be used in further research related to the development of the young people’s socio-cultural potential during the professional education.

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