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### Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

# COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS A RESOURCE OF TEENAGERS` PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### *Abstract*

In modern reality, one of the actual issues is personal development and preservation of its vital resources. A subject uses the opportunities of life resources, and the effectiveness of using them depends on certain personal characteristics which allow a person to adapt to living conditions and make up his internal resources. In this research we will study such personal characteristic as communicative competence. As there is little information about communicative competence of teenagers the aim of this work is to study characteristic of the communicative competence of adolescents and its impact on saving their vital resources. A half of adolescents participating in the experiment have a low and below average level of development of communication skills. The results show that the majority of the participants with a low level of communicative abilities have aggressive and dependent types of behavior and negative attitude to communication. The data of the experiment help to make the conclusion that the higher the level of communication skills, the smaller the number of subjects choosing ineffective methods of interaction. It is shown that the maturity level of psychological defense mechanisms used by respondents also depends on the formation of communicative competence. It is noted that the formation of communicative competence will promote personal development of the adolescent, opportunities to attract external life resources and implement life plans with the help of effective communication.

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**Keywords:** Communicative ability, communicative competence, communication setup, mechanisms of psychological protection, vital resources of the individual.



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Personal life resources: types, features and conditions of development

In modern reality, one of the actual issues is personal development and preservation of its vital resources. In Russian psychological science, personality development is considered in the context of a person's activities and characteristics of his life path, the presence or absence of the position as the subject of his life (Tkachenko, 2009). The higher formations of the personality are formed during its development and they regulate and ensure the integrity of the life path; the personal becomes a subject as it develops. According to the concept of personality as a subject of life (Rubinstein, 2003), it is self-determined in relation to external conditions and being a subject of life actively transforms them. The development of the personality is an objective and regular process, in which a person acts not only as an object of interaction, but also as a subject of activity and communication.

The vital resources of a person are divided into two groups: internal and external. The ability to respond to adverse environmental factors appropriately and to overcome difficulties relying only on internal capabilities are person's internal life resources. These opportunities are somatic and mental resources related to different organizational structures of a person. A person is able to demonstrate the depth of his life resources (Antipov, 2002; Evdokimova et al., 2019; Semenova, 2011; Vasilyuk, 1984) in a problem, non-standard, difficult life or extreme situation. However, even the successful use of internal life resources allows a person, at most, to adapt to the situation, often changing himself for the worse, because of the exhaustion of the vitality supply. Psychological defenses are able to optimize the expenditure of human life resources, as well as to avoid their full expenditure. Though the fact that psychological defenses allow an individual to cope with a difficult situation, their use does not really contribute to the expansion of a person's resource potential, but only blocks its spending.

That is why in a situation when the person's internal life resources and psychological defenses cannot cope with arisen problems, it is necessary to attract external (social resources), objectively existing opportunities that are provided to the person by society to increase his vitality and ability to satisfy urgent needs (Semenova et al., 2017). At the personal level external (social) resources are manifested as socio-psychological support - emotional, informational, instrumental or functional. It has been established that social resources related to external factors of assistance to a person have a direct connection with their internal resources. Identification with a group, feeling of being part of it, i.e. appealing to external resources, contributes to the mobilization of human resources (Andreeva, 1998). Factors of the social environment are able to support self-esteem, adaptive potentials and energy resources of the body, and they also contribute to personal self-realization. The effectiveness of using external life resources depends on somebody's willingness to seek help, on the belief in social support (Sarason et al., 1986), i.e. on certain personal characteristics, which form internal resources allowing a person to adapt to living conditions. If a person does not have certain qualities (or internal resources), he is not able to attract external life resources. In our research, a communicative competence is a personal characteristic which allows a teenager to adapt to living conditions, makes up his internal life resources and promotes the use of external (social) life resources. We researched the characteristics of the communicative competence of a teenager as a resource of personal development.

## **1.2 Communicative competence as a predictor of personal development of adolescents**

Some scientists claim the teenage crisis is the most difficult period in human life. On the one hand, teenagers want to communicate with coevals, on the other hand, they have problems with emotional instability, the emergence of communicative barriers, increased conflictness, anxiety, dependence on peers, concern about gender issues, the search for one's "self", a sense of adulthood, reflections. In the process of communicating with peers, adolescents learn to build social relations, learn life values, moral standards and types of behavior (Salpagarova & Semenova, 2018).

Adolescents perceive and experience disorder of relationships with peers very hard. So, to attract attention and make friends sometimes adolescents violate social standards and come into conflict with adults.

The reorientation of communication from parents and significant adults to peers makes the problem of relationships very significant and painful for adolescents, and psychological literature (Bozhovich, 1968; Lichko, 1985) claims that the number of students complaining about lack of experience and communication skills is growing sharply. The lack of such skills and poorly developed abilities for self-disclosure and empathy prevent a teenager from meeting the need for recognition, emotional response and understanding, so it leads to loneliness (Gordin, 1983). To transform loneliness into a positive experience, propose to change some external conditions and create certain internal ones, providing the teenager with the necessary communicative knowledge, skills and abilities. In other words, it is necessary for teenagers to form communicative competence, since it allows them to make contact with strangers, to get people to like them, mutual understanding, and achieve goals. The lack of communication competence can reveal itself in the instability of the teenager's self-esteem, lack of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, a low level of personal self-regulation, inability to listen to communication partners, distorted perception and understanding of other people and can lead to inadequate choice of communication forms in various situations of communicative interaction. It complicates the communication processes of adolescents and creates difficulties in preserving vital resources.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In 2019-2020, we conducted a study aimed at studying the communicative abilities and communication skills of 13-14 years old adolescents. 96 students of 7-8 grades took part in the experiment. The results of the research of communication skills showed that 23% participants have a low level, 23% have communication skills below average. That means that 46% of respondents prefer to spend time alone; it is difficult for them to establish contacts, defend their opinions; they try to avoid self-sufficient decisions and hardly orient in a difficult situation. 19% have an average level of communication skills, which allows them not to limit the circle of their acquaintances, to defend their opinions, to plan their work. But at the same time, there are situations when it is not possible to establish contact with new friends.

The remaining 35% showed a high (22%) and very high (13%) level of communication skills. As a rule, they are the students who always initiate the organization of various events, who can make an independent decision in a difficult situation, they do not confuse in a new situation, easily find new friends and are always ready to help close people.

Continuing to study the communicative competence of adolescents, we made a “Test of communicative skills” (Gilbukh, 1995). Its results showed which types of behavior are typical for most participants of the experiment. It turned out that 67% of respondents have a competent type of behavior, 17% - aggressive type, 9% dependent one and 7% have mixed type of behavior, which may indicate unstable behavior of teenagers and their dependence on the situation.

At the same time, the test “Your communicative attitude” (Boyko, 1996) showed that 56% of the participants have negative communicative attitude, which negatively affects not only the communication process, but also each participant’s self-perception.

An additional examination showed that half of the participants have problems interacting with both peers and adults, and it negatively affects the formation of the individual, as intimate-personal communication is the leading type of activity at this age.

Based on the obtained data, we have decided to determine whether the level of development of communicative abilities affects communicative competence and the characteristics of teenagers life resources preservation.

### **3. Research Questions**

Studying the characteristics of teenagers communicative competence raises the question of what affects a person competence in communication and the features of preserving life resources.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

- 4.1. The influence of communicative abilities of adolescents on communicative skills and communicative attitude.
- 4.2. Factors which effect the formation of adolescents communicative competence and features of the vital resources conservation.

We assume that the communicative competence of adolescents and their conservation of vital resources are affected by the level of development of communicative abilities.

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#### *Participants*

The survey involved 88 respondents. They were teenagers of 13-14 years old. The research was in 2019-2020. All participants agreed to participate in the work.

### **5. Research Methods**

Test "Communicative and organizational inclinations" (Batarshv at al., 2006);

Test of communicative skills of L. Michelson (translation and adaptation of Yu. Z. Gilbukh) (Gilbukh, 1995).

Test “Your communicative attitude” (Boyko, 1996)

Methodology “Life Style Index” (Wasserman at al., 2005)

## 6. Findings

Continuing the study of the communicative competence of adolescents, we decided to determine whether the level of development of communicative abilities affects communicative skills, methods of behavior during communication, attitudes to the process of interaction and the characteristics of psychological defenses used by adolescents. To achieve this goal we formed an experimental group, which included four groups of 13-14 years old teenagers (22 people in each one) with different levels of communication skills (low, below average, high, very high). The experimental group consisted of 88 people. The first three groups were formed from those adolescents who took part in the first stage of the research. A group of teenagers with a very high level of communication skills was formed from the beginning, since only 10 teenagers from 96 showed a very high level of communication skills.

To determine the level of communicative competence and the quality of the formation of basic communicative skills we used the L. Michelson Test (translation and adaptation by Yu.Z. Gilbukh) (Gilbukh, 1995), and to determine the features of the communication attitude we used Test V.V. Smartly “Your communicative attitude” (Boyko, 1996). The results are shown in table (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Percentage ratio of communicative settings and adolescents with different kinds of behavior in communication

Level of teenagers communication abilities	Methods of communication behavior (number of people %)				Communication setup (number of people %)	
	Competent	Aggressive	Dependent	Mixed	A Negative Attitude	The Absence Of Negative Attitudes
Low	36	41	23	0	68	32
Below average	55	14	32	0	55	45
High	64	27	9	0	18	82
Very high	86	0	0	14	59	41

The research showed that 36% of respondents from the group with a low level of communication skills had a predominantly competent type of communication, 41% had an aggressive type and 23% had an dependent one. That is, 64% of adolescents have difficulty while communicating, they react sharply to the provocative behavior of the interlocutor; they cannot make contact with another person, support them and accept peer sympathy. In this group of adolescents more than half of the respondents choose ineffective methods of communication. According to the test results 68% of this group confirmed a negative attitude towards communication and 32% confirmed an absence of a negative attitude.

Among teenagers with a lower level of communication skills 55% of respondents choose a competent type of communication, 14% choose an aggressive type and 32% prefer a dependent one. Thus, 46% of adolescents from this group choose ineffective methods of communication. 45% of them do not have a negative attitude to communication, and 55% of the participants in the experimental group confirm a negative communicative attitude.

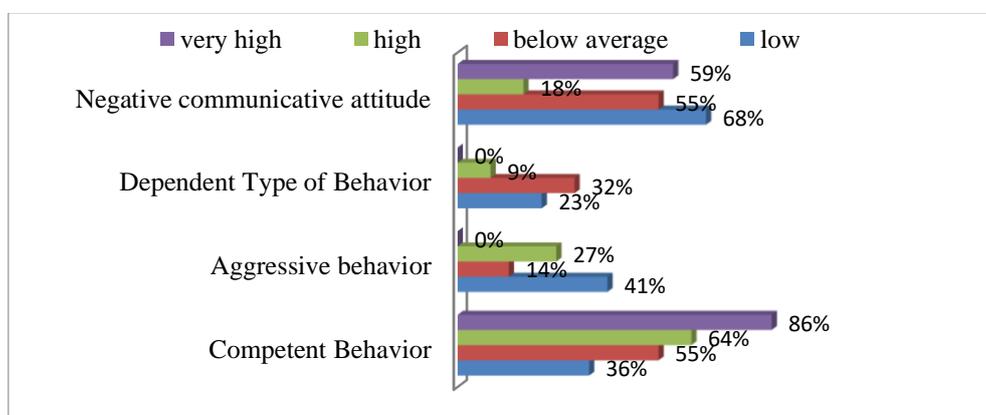
At the same time, 82% 13-14 years old teenagers with a high level of communication skills confirmed the absence of a negative attitude which prevents from effective communication. And only 18% of them retain a negative attitude towards communication with peers, which is reflected in the choice of the method of behavior in communication: 27% of respondents in choose an aggressive type of interaction, 9% prefer a dependent type. More than half of them (64%) are prone to a competent type of communication behavior and this allows them to show and receive attention from peers, competently, ask other people for something and make contact with people.

86% adolescents with a very high level of communicative abilities use a competent type of communication behavior and 14% teenagers prefer a mixed type: in different situations 5% demonstrate either competent or aggressive behavior and 9% demonstrate competent or dependent type. Most of the respondents in this group can build effective relationships and demonstrate a competent type of communication skills.

We were surprised studying the peculiarities of the communication attitude of a group of teenagers with a very high level of communicative abilities: 41% of them have no negative communication attitude, and 59% have a negative communication attitude. We suppose that more than half of the teenagers in this group are not satisfied with the quality of communication with peers, as they told negative things about other people and grumbled. All this contributes to a negative attitude.

In general, the dynamics of choosing effective and ineffective methods of communication among adolescents shows that the higher the level of communication skills, the smaller the number of participants choosing ineffective methods of interaction. 64% of participants have low level of communication skills, 46% have below average level, 36% have high level and 14% have a very high one.

Adolescents with a high level of communicative abilities show a decrease of negative attitude to communication, 68% of adolescents showing a low level of communicative abilities have a negative communicative attitude was, 55% have below average level and 18% have a high level of communicative abilities. When the level of communication skills is very high, adolescents increase their requirements for the interlocutor and the process of communication, and the result is dissatisfaction and negative attitude (Figure 01).



**Figure 01.** The dynamics of the percentage ratio of adolescents with different behaviors in communication and communication settings, depending on the level of development of communication skills

So, can be noted that the characteristics of the communicative competence of adolescents depend on the level of their communicative abilities. But returning to the initial results of the experiment, we see that almost half of 13-14 years old children (46%) have a low or lower average ability to communicate, which leads to underestimated self-esteem, self-doubt, fear of contacts, conflicts and anxiety, and that makes using both internal and external vital resources impossible. These adolescents are always in stress, and it can lead to a break of social contacts, to burnout and loss of health. In some cases, adolescents use psychological defense mechanisms, their purpose is to reduce emotional tension and prevent disorganization of behavior, consciousness and psyche.

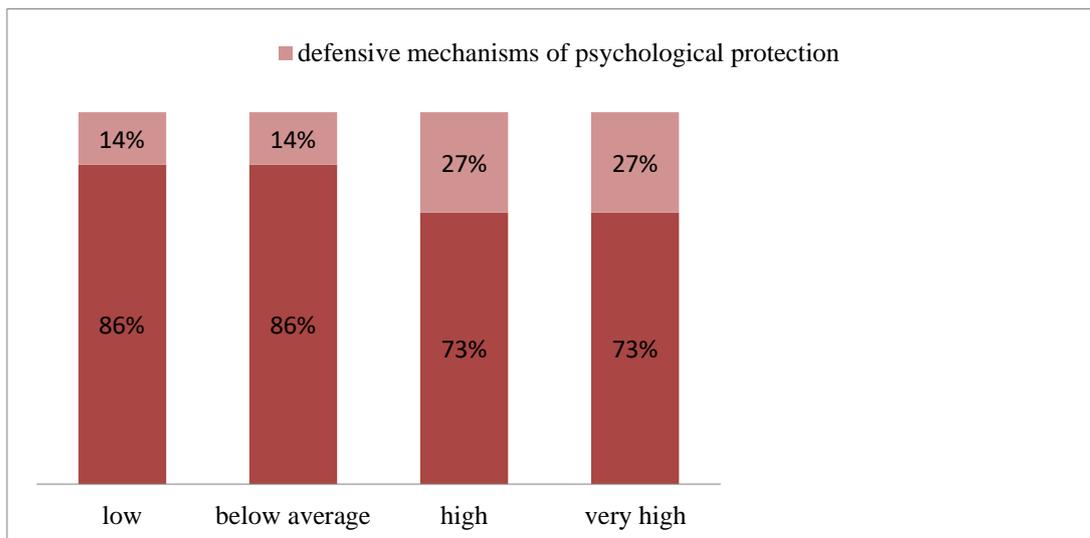
The mechanisms of psychological defense are divided by maturity level into protective (repression, denial, reactive formation, regression) and defensive (rationalization, intellectualization, projection, isolation, identification, sublimation).

The next stage of our research was identifying patterns of the using of psychological defense mechanisms with different levels of communicative abilities. The results can be seen in table (Table 02).

**Table 02.** Percentage of teenagers using various mechanisms of psychological protection

Mechanisms of psychological protection	The level of communication skills of teenagers (number of people %)			
	Low	Below average	High	Very high
<b>Protective</b>				
Negation	9	18	23	4,5
Displacement				
Regression	14	5	9	9
Compensation	5	5	9	5
Substitution	14	5		36
Suppression	27	32	32	18
Reactive formation	18	23		
<b>Defensive</b>				
Projection	5	14	27	
Intellectualization	9			27

It can be noted that the higher the level of communicative abilities, the lower the percentage of adolescents who in a stressful situation use primitive protective psychological defense mechanisms that do not allow conflicting traumatic information to enter their consciousness, and the higher the percentage of those adolescents who rely on defensive mechanisms that allow adolescents to interpret negative information in a “painless” way (Figure 02).



**Figure 02.** Dynamics of the percentage of teenagers using various mechanisms of psychological protection

The obtained data allow us to conclude that the level of maturity of psychological defense mechanisms used by our respondents depends on the formation of communicative competence. It can be noted that to increase vital resources and develop a teenager's personality it is necessary to implement the program of forming their communicative competence, allowing to expand the boundaries of self and to discover other people's world.

## 7. Conclusion

The recognition of the mediation of personality development as a system of social relations is established in Russian psychology. A person gets a quality to be an individual in society. In fact, a formation of personality is based on the relations with other people. A person learns himself with the help of another person, similar to him because those other people are individuals. Communicative competence is a certain level of communicative knowledge, skills and abilities, mediated by a set of personal qualities, traits, properties and behaviors and they all are realized in the process of communication (Karunnaya, 2008). Communicative competence is the life resource of a teenager, as a low level of its development leads to violations in the personal sphere and the launch of psychological defense mechanisms. According to the position of Sullivan (1999), the psychological defense mechanisms are integral elements of a person, they are triggered by conflicts caused by inconsistencies in relationships.

Psychological defenses in situations of overcoming various types of difficulties impact on the development of personality differently. On the one hand, they affect the development of personality; projection and introjection provide the interaction of the individual with the environment, create a sense of identification necessary for his socialization; repression affects the formation of the motivational-value sphere of the personality; sublimation and reactive change of self-ensure the socialization of the personality. Thus, psychological defenses protect the individual from the negative influences of the environment, give him the opportunity to maintain a normal mental status. On the other hand, there is danger in protective

mechanisms because efforts necessary to support the protective system deplete the energy and activity of the self necessary for productive purposes (Tkachenko, 2009).

To make a conclusion the formation of communicative competence will contribute to the emergence of the possibility to attract external life resources and to the implementation of life plans through effective communication.

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