

## Peculiarities of Interpersonal Cooperation of Youth with Different Vision Levels

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### Abstract

The article contains results of the experimental analysis of cooperation peculiarities of young people with different vision levels (blind, visually impaired, with normal vision). Greater focus is placed on the statement that serious vision disorders depending on their kind and grade make the process of verbal and especially non-verbal means of communication mastering much more complicated. It has been established that young people with serious vision disorders have a low level of integration into social groups, are not active enough in communication, avoid close relationships with those who do not have any vision problems. The authors argue in favour of the importance of blind and sighted people's cooperation activity provision as an obligatory condition for the development of psychologically proper communication and for the formation of social maturity of a personality, regulating its process of social integration.

**Keywords:** *communication, interpersonal cooperation, communicative activity, integration, visual deprivation, blind and visually impaired people*

### Introduction

Communicative activity serves as an obligatory condition for the existence of any social and individual human life forms. Communication, as a kind of human activity, concerns the recognition and evaluation of individual self with the help of other people – grown-ups and peers. Communication helps a person to look

at themselves from the outside, to evaluate their outer appearance and behaviour, to build up an understanding of self-individuality and personal unity. Communicative activity is an important determinant of social maturity establishment, regulating the process of a person's social integration.

The process of social integration of blind and visually impaired people is complicated from the early childhood by a strictly restrained social circle and limitations in gaining social experience. Those who have lost their vision at a mature age have a broader social experience and connections, which they succeed to preserve later on. It is worth mentioning that serious vision disorders have a different impact on the mastering of verbal and non-verbal communication means. The mastering of non-verbal communication means, as a rule, is retarded and considerably reduced even by a partial vision disorder, whereas the mastering of verbal communication means is a unique capability of compensation of underdeveloped psychic functions of a person with serious vision disorders.

### **Research Focus**

L. Vygotsky emphasized the meaning of social factors in compensation of a defect in human psychological activity (Vygotsky, 1983). The peculiarities of interpersonal cooperation of blind and visually impaired people of different age categories became a research subject of foreign and native scientists. It is necessary to emphasize that communication with a grown-up is a determinative factor of the child's proper psychological development.

The main infant age communication difficulty of children having vision disorders is the inability to build up a response to the stimuli which are perceived with the help of eye-sight – mother's face or other relatives' expressions, colour of clothes, moving objects, etc.

A group of scientists (Nikulina, 2006; Feoktistova, 2005) established that the majority of blind and visually impaired children do not possess the main non-verbal means of communication at the moment of school enrolment, which is normally developed in sighted children at the age of five.

The communication of children with vision disorders is also characterized by specific difficulties at a young school age. Thus, it is necessary to coordinate the actions of the learning process participants, which is quite problematic under the conditions of vision deprivation. Visually impaired young pupils have difficulty concerning the solution of general problems quite often and their weak capability of the perception of a partner's non-verbal behaviour decreases their understanding of the sense and purpose of activity. According to G. Nikulina, the diffusive and local type of perception is characteristic of the majority of younger pupils

with vision disorders. This kind of disorder is notable for the global perception of the conversation partner, based on the distinction of expression. This is determined by underdevelopment of the emotional sphere as a result of a limitation or incapability to perceive such non-verbal means as sight, facial expressions, serving as a basis for communication. The appearance of a negative or inappropriate emotional background for a communicative situation limits a person's possibility to choose a suitable style of communication being in tune with the partner's mood and condition, to get rid of false behaviour models and to contribute to the communication situation (Nikulina, 2006).

The slowdown of the social-perceptive sphere of pupils with vision disorders can be observed at a later age as well. As a consequence, teenagers suffering from visual perception disorders may have difficulties describing the appearance elements of their classmates, i.e., they may make incomplete or inexact descriptions. It has also been established that the way of walking, gesticulation and voice of their communication partner have a significant meaning for visually impaired teenagers (Feoktistova, 2005).

Vision loss results in a switch from the visual perception channel (with body language peculiar to it) to the channels of hearing, smell and tactile perception in the process of interpersonal communication (Gudonis, 2009). Such compensation, probably, will hinder visually impaired people from establishing contacts in the social and cultural sphere. This is determined by the fact that a blind person is not aware of their conversation partner's image, their features and expressions, eye and hair colour at the moment of communication. Instead of individual peculiarities of the partner of conversation, a blind person realizes an opponent in general, just a human figure standing in front of them. Out of all individual features of a conversation partner, there are only a couple possible to be distinguished by the blind – the name, head outline, shape and size of their hands. While sighted people perceive each other by their glances, blind ones may get additional information about the conversation partner through the micro motions of their hands (Feoktistova, 2005).

For years, psychologists have paid particular attention to the education of visually impaired children by verbal communication means. Still facial expressions, gestures and posture play a great role in the process of information transfer, which enables a person to understand the attitude of their conversation partner (positive or negative, concernment or indifference, doubt or confidence). Otherwise, a person expresses their thoughts not only by verbal but also by non-verbal means: facial expressions, gestures, motions, way of walking and mode of dressing.

People with vision disorders are considerably limited in many spheres of non-verbal communication. But this limitation shows itself differently, depending

on the level and character of visual analyser dysfunction, distant perception ability. The inhibition in the distant perception of a conversation partner's expressions and gestures leads to the inadequate perception of real characteristic features and conditions of a subject as well as causes difficulties in speech function formation. People deprived of the visual perception of surrounding reality, those who have not mastered any compensation means, have an inexact understanding of non-verbal signs, which in turn disturbs the process of interpersonal communication (Majewski, 2002). Along with this, interpersonal cooperation becomes psychologically proper only on condition of equal communication.

Eye-contact peculiarities can be defined as another important factor of communication. This, in turn, depends on another list of factors (level of the partners' familiarity, their sex, age, peculiarities of their relations). Eye contact is the most delicate indicator of relations being established between people. The glance exchange shows that partners are involved in a system of social cooperation, whereas interruption of such interactions (e.g., in the case of vision loss) makes the surrounding people be pushed out of personal space, thus a change in relationships is being in evidence.

The leavers of schools for children with vision disorders, among all the difficulties in communication, have prior difficulties – the establishment of contacts with sighted people and business terms keeping (Nikulina, 2006; Klopota, 2015).

Due to communication, the integration of people is implemented, behaviour and cooperation norms are elaborated. Based on the results of research analyses (Volkova, 2009; Gudonis, 2009; Kobilchenko, 2010; Klopota, 2015; Majewski, 2002; Hunt, Marshall, 2005) one may make a conclusion about the presence of communication failures and the lack of cooperation between teenagers with vision disorders and their peers, relatives and teachers. The vision level reflects the speed, volume and quality of the outside world perception. The social status of people with vision disorders depends on a person's individual-psychological qualities, their activity motives, self-image recognition as well as recognition of their possibilities and perception by their social environment.

Thus, considering the fact that a visual analyser plays a leading role in depiction of outside world objects, formation of another person's gestalt and understanding of their actual behaviour seem to be the study of perception peculiarities and understanding of a conversation partner under the condition of full or partial vision loss.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research General Background**

The subject of this research was the process of interpersonal cooperation between blind and visually impaired youth with sighted peers.

The purpose of the study were communication peculiarities of interpersonal cooperation of youth depending on their sight level.

The tasks of the research:

1. To reveal the direction of interpersonal cooperation of contemporary youth in the conditions of visual deprivation.
2. To define the main communicative orientations in the process of formal communication and the level of acceptance of other people by the youth in the conditions of visual deprivation.

The hypothesis of the research lies in the statement that a partial violation of vision or its complete loss has an impact on the communication process in interpersonal cooperation of youth.

### **Research Sample**

The experimental research was conducted in such cities as Zaporizhzhya, Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk, Kyiv, and Lviv.

The experimental sample consisted of blind and visually impaired respondents, the control group comprised sighted ones. The general sample included 128 respondents at the age of 18–25, among whom there were 14 blind girls and 12 adolescents (group Б – sight level by 0.2%), 38 girls and 26 adolescents with normal vision (group B).

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The presented research required the application of the following psychognostic methods: “Diagnostics of interactive orientation of a personality” (N. Shchurkova, modified by N. Fetiskina), “Strategies of personal self-affirmation” (E. Nikitin, N. Harlamenkova), “Diagnostics of motivational orientations in interpersonal communications” (I. Ladanov, V. Urasaeva), “Diagnostics of the outer world acceptance” (according to Fay scale) (Fetiskin et al., 2005).

For the purpose of validation and credibility of the obtained results, mathematical and statistical analyses were applied: Mann-Whitney U-test and Spearman’s coefficient of rank correlation. The calculation was realized with the help of computer program Statistic 6.1.

## Research Results

In the process of cooperation orientation and self-esteem strategy study in the community of contemporary youth in the conditions of visual deprivation the following results were obtained:

On the Commitment to Personal (egoistic) Interests scale, the blind respondents demonstrated the following indexes: a high level – 56.24%, medium – 24.09 %, low – 19.67%, and among the sighted persons – 28.55%, 62.19%, 9.26% respectively. The existing differences between groups A and B –  $p < 0.02$ , as well as (B) and (B) –  $p < 0.05$  on the Mann-Whitney U-test accounts for the fact that blind and visually impaired youth is, to a large extent, oriented to the satisfaction of personal needs, level of ambition and wealth while cooperating with sighted people. Interests and values of other people are mostly ignored or observed in a practical context, which, in turn, leads to conflicts and to the complication of the integration process into the community of blind and visually impaired people.

According to the Commitment to Cooperation and Partnership scale, considerable differences were found between groups (A) and (B) on the Mann-Whitney U-test –  $p < 0.002$  as well as (B) and (B) –  $p < 0.03$ . This can serve as a proof of the fact that sighted respondents are more interested in the support of constructive relations, empathy and joint cooperation with other people, as compared to the interest of blind or visually impaired people. It is worth emphasizing that such results may point to an insufficient level of adaptation and integration into the community of blind and visually impaired youth.

At the same time, on the Marginal Orientation scale, indexes of group (A) are: high – 47.11%, medium – 33.82%, low – 19.07%. In group (B) – 15.21%, 51.37%, 33.42% – respectively. The considerable differences between groups (A) and (B) –  $p < 0.01$  on the Mann-Whitney U-test account for the fact that blind people tend to bend to circumstances. They can also show infantilism, uncontrollability of their deeds, imitating of someone's behaviour. Marginality is being characterized by internal conflict proneness, which arouses anxiety, wariness and detachment from their social environment.

As shown by the obtained results, the self-inhibition strategy is peculiar to 43% of the (A) group representatives, 37% of group (B), and 18% of group (B) on the Mann-Whitney U-test. Considerable differences between groups (A) and (B) –  $p < 0.01$  show that blind people display conformism behaviour in a group, hyper-responsibility, and are easily influenced by the leader.

In relation to the constructive strategy of self-esteem, the revealed considerable differences between groups (A) and (B) –  $p < 0.004$  and groups (B) and (B) –  $p < 0.02$  on the Mann-Whitney U-test show that it was the sighted respondents, to a large

extent, who exercised the skill of problem solution, propensity for reasonable risk and suddenness.

The propensity for aggressive strategy and domination in interpersonal relations were shown by 36.13% of the (A) group representatives, whereas in groups (B) and (B) this index was much lower (17.34% and 14.27% respectively). This is sufficient ground for a conclusion that blind people tend to demonstrate verbal aggression, create artificial obstacles and related conditions for other person's frustration, to preserve stability in self-evaluation. A positive correlation on Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation between the results of group (A) was obtained on the Marginal Orientation scale and self-inhibition strategy (0.6), and on the Commitment to Personal Egoistic Interests scale and aggressive strategy (0.5). This shows that blind youth may take the position of detachment from the group or dominating position in relations with other people much more often than sighted people.

In the process of the main communicative orientations definition, their harmony in the process of formal communication and revealing of the outer world acceptance the following results were obtained.

Considerable differences on the Commitment to the Acceptance of the Partner scale between groups (A) and (B) –  $p < 0.003$  and (B), (B) groups –  $p < 0.02$  (Mann-Whitney) account for a low level of partner acceptance in interpersonal cooperation by visually impaired and blind people. On the Commitment to Adequacy of Apprehension and Understanding of the Partner scale, low fixed indexes of the blind respondents (51.24%) are determined by the fact that such youth has particular problems in the perception and understanding of communication partners. The results obtained on the Commitment to the Compromise Consumption scale account for the fact that blind people mainly use the strategies of self-inhibition or dominance in the process of interpersonal cooperation. Considerable differences between groups (A) and (B)  $p < 0.02$  can serve as confirmation of this conclusion.

The general summary index characterizing the harmony of communicative orientations can be expressed as follows. High level: blind – 16.42%, visually impaired – 29.25%, sighted – 41.21%. Medium level: blind – 36.12%, visually impaired – 42.38%, sighted people – 46.31%. Low level: blind – 47.46%, visually impaired – 28.37%, and sighted – 12.48% respectively. The obtained results confirm theoretical and practical studies on the hypothesis that vision loss causes limitations in the process of interpersonal cooperation of the partners.

It is worth mentioning that the experimental results of the Diagnostics of outer world acceptance method (in accordance with Fay scale) accounts for the fact

that blind and visually impaired youth have a deficient level of other partners' acceptance in interpersonal cooperation. Only 8.35% of the blind people and 15.6% of the visually impaired respondents demonstrated high indexes of other partners' acceptance, at the same time, low indexes were obtained by the blind and visually impaired people, i.e., 36.26% and 23.15% respectively. This shows that vision disorders have a negative impact on the level of communication partners' acceptance.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the research show that the vision level has a considerable impact on interpersonal cooperation. The analytical study of the blind and visually impaired young people's communication with their sighted peers shows that they are characterized by peculiarities related to: 1) experience and the specificity of cooperation activity and communication; and 2) individual and psychological qualities of a visually impaired person.

Credibility of the obtained results was validated with the use of mathematical and statistical analyses: Mann-Whitney U-test and Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation.

Youth with serious vision violation during cooperation with sighted people, to a large extent, seeks the satisfaction of personal needs and tends to bend to circumstances. Blind and visually impaired young people may display infantilism, uncontrollability of their deeds, copy someone's behaviour and create artificial obstacles within interpersonal cooperation with sighted people. At the same time, sighted people are, more than blind people, interested in the support of constructive relations and cooperation activity with other people. They show the ability to solve problems, and the reasonable appetite for risk and spontaneity in interpersonal relations.

Moreover, youth with serious vision violations has a low level of outer world acceptance and preferably uses strategies of self-inhibition or dominating in interpersonal cooperation, as a result of which there can appear particular problems in acceptance and understanding of communication partners. It has been established that the blind and visually impaired representatives of youth have a low level of integration into social groups, show a lack of activity in the process of communication with other people and avoid interpersonal familiar relations. Among the peculiarities of the visually impaired youth's interpersonal cooperation there are the lack of communication with sighted people and the limitation of such



communication. Young people with vision disorders are not always able to keep the conversation or to be good listeners. Mostly, they accept those statements of their communication partners which do not go against their own point of view. At this age, the available disorders in the communicative sphere of blind and visually impaired people, as a result of modern correction-developing absence, take on a form of stable social disadaptation, which is visible in the inadequacy of self-concept, uncompleted communicative skills and proficiencies, disability to defend a personal opinion, to tune the cooperation to social environment, in the absence of a possibility for personal fulfilment in different spheres of social life.

The results of the presented research prove the necessity of the interpersonal cooperation process ways and methods development for people with serious vision disorders, the ways of their integration into society in general. This assumes the development and implementation of programs, targeted at visually impaired youth's communicative and social competence improvement. Among them there is social and psychological training, targeted at the formation of efficient communication skills and successful interpersonal cooperation with sighted people in different life situations.

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