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Value Correlates of Existential Fulfilment of a Person at Higher Levels of Education

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Abstract

Psychological well-being is of great importance for future teachers, as the psychological state of their students will largely depend on it. The foundations of psychological well-being are represented by the concept of existential fulfillment as a personal generalized evaluation of life in terms of its consistency with person's inner essence. The problem of the study is derived out of the lack of research about connectedness of existential fulfillment with personal values which define direction and decisions of a person's life. Ranking values by their importance and accessibility method and the existence scale were used to collect data from 118 postgraduate students aged 24-30 years. The results of statistical analysis showed that the level of existential fulfillment is generally independent from most personal values, and only some values are associated with existential fulfillment. Some values support high level of existential fulfillment, while others oppose it. Values of close relationships, namely love, friendship and a happy family life in their importance parameter are correlated with existential fulfilment. The more important these values are for a person, the higher his/her existential fulfillment is. On the opposite, the higher importance of the value "Wealth" and, to a lesser extent, the value "Freedom" the lesser is existential fulfillment. Some values were also identified, the high levels of the availability of which are also inversely related to the feeling of existential fulfillment, these include the values "Beauty of nature and art" and "Creativity".

Keywords: existential fulfillment, personal value, importance of value, availability of value, education.

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Introduction

The psychological health and well-being of students is an important criterion for the quality of education at all levels. This is particularly crucial for teachers, who play a significant role in shaping their students' psychological states. Fundamental to a person's psychological well-being is their sense of existential fulfillment. The concept of existential fulfillment can be viewed as a person’s deep, generalized assessment of his life in terms of its consistency with his inner essence (Frankl, 1963, 2014), which is emotionally experienced and associated with feelings of happiness and well-being.

Personal values are widely recognized as the main core that determines the direction of a person's life. They serve many different purposes: they create life guidelines, set the direction of choice in situations of making vital decisions, and determine the criteria for assessing the success of life (Leontiev, 2003; Salihova, 2009a). At the same time, there are no studies in psychology that reveal how personal values as well as their perception of the degree of realization of his/her values in life (Salikhova, 2013, 2015) relate to existential fulfillment. This gap in knowledge has set the problematic field of study and determined its goals and objectives.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to determine the correlation between existential fulfillment and various characteristics of an individual's value system. The following objectives were set for the study: firstly, to identify values that support a person’s sense of existential fulfillment; secondly, to determine values realization of which is associated with it.

Literature review

Psychological research has shown the great importance of existential fulfillment for various aspects of a person's life and psychological well-being. It has been found that existential fulfillment is a powerful resource for human self-realization and leads to a sense of self-fulfillment as a sense of real life lived by the person (Shtepa, 2021). The correlation between existential fulfillment and other measures of human well-being, such as life satisfaction and socio-psychological adaptability, has been widely studied (Danilenko & Nosova, 2020). Moreover, individual components of existential fulfillment act as positive predictors of the cognitive and emotional components of subjective well-being, as well as such an indicator of socio-psychological adaptation as emotional comfort (Rostovtseva et al., 2022). However, it has also been found that existential fulfillment is not limited to these parameters, and a high level of psychological well-being does not necessarily mean a high level of existential fulfillment.

As a separate area of research, one can single out the study of the role of existential fulfillment in a person's effectiveness in professional activities. It has been found that existential fulfillment affects the performance of civil aviation specialists (Pravdina et al., 2016) and is associated with the intrinsic motivation of professional activity, being higher for those who are intrinsically motivated for their profession (Larina & Shumskiy, 2022). For people working in helping professions, existential fulfillment is also associated with motivation for their professional activity (Popova & Popova, 2022). Existential fulfillment acts as an important resource that resists the emotional burnout of educators, so a low level of existential fulfillment is observed among teachers and school principals more often and is more pronounced (Tomic et al., 2004; Tomic & Tomic, 2008).

In another line of research, it has been shown that existential fulfillment itself depends on such psychological characteristics of a person as self-attitude (Tsahelskaya, 2020), self-acceptance and competence (Rostovtseva et al., 2022), self-control and systemic reflection (Larina & Shumskiy, 2022). It has been found that some parameters of self-attitude are more pronounced in individuals with a high level of existential fulfillment (Tsahelskaya, 2020).

According to Frankl (1963, 2014), the necessary conditions for gaining existential fulfillment are the presence of a person's inner spirituality, responsibility, freedom, and value system. In more detail, the concept of “existential fulfillment” is defined by Längle (2003). He considers four fundamental motivations of a person in life, one of which is a person's experience of their values. It is important to note that the existential fulfillment of life is considered by these authors not from the point of view of the hedonistic approach but from the perspective of the eudaimonic approach. This approach focuses on how life is filled with meaning, the richness and diversity of a person's values (Längle, 2003), and, most importantly, how much they are realized in their life (Salihova, 2009b; Salikhova, 2015).

All of this means that the concept of existential fulfillment is essentially connected to the concept of values. In addition, some empirical evidence for this relationship has been found in sociology (Mikhaylova & Dmitrieva, 2021). This allows us to put forward a reasonable hypothesis that a person’s value system and existential fulfillment correlate. This assumption can be further divided into two specific hypotheses. Firstly, existential fulfillment is associated with the characteristics of the hierarchy of values, which reflect the degree of importance of each value for a person in comparison with other values. Secondly, existential fulfillment is associated with a person's assessment of the degree to which they realize their values in life. An empirical study was conducted to test these hypotheses.

Methodology

The following methods were used to collect data: The Ranking of Values technique (Fantalova, 2001; Salihova, 2009b) was used to determine the characteristics of a person's value sphere, which is a modification of Rokeach's (1973) Value Orientations Survey. This technique involves a pairwise comparison of 12 terminal values based on their importance and accessibility. This allows obtaining three indicators for each value: the total number of preferences for this value according to the criterion of its importance (C), the total number of preferences for this value according to the criterion of its accessibility (D), and the difference between the first and second indicators (C-D). To determine existential fulfillment, the Existence Scale by Längle et al. (2003) was used, which was adapted in Russia by Shumsky et al. (2016). The questionnaire determines the main indicators of existential fulfillment (Self-Distance, Self-Transcendence, Freedom, Responsibility) and derived indicators (Personality and Existentiality).

The study was conducted at Kazan University with the voluntary participation of postgraduate students (n=118, 61 males and 57 females) aged between 24 and 30 years.

The study design involved comparing two contrasting groups: the first consisted of postgraduate students with a high level of existential fulfillment (n=50), the second – with a low level (n=50).

The statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, two-sample Student's t-test.

Results

First of all, the obtained data were analyzed in the total sample of respondents. Descriptive statistics (such as mean and standard deviation) were used to determine the rank of each value in the overall hierarchy of values according to the importance criterion (I) and to the assessment of each value by the criterion of its availability (A). After that, the difference between the importance and the attainability of values (I-A) was calculated. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 1. Results of ranking values according to the criterion of importance (I) and availability (A).

Values	Importance of values (I)		Attainability of values (A)		Difference between importance and attainability of values (I-A)	
	ā (σ)	rank	ā (σ)	rank	ā (σ)	rank
Active life	3.74 (1.83)	10	5.69 (2.17)	6	-1.95 (2.60)	10
Health	8.02 (2.36)	2	5.85 (2.88)	4	2.17 (3.47)	3
Interesting job	5.43 (2.38)	9	6.48 (2.72)	2	-1.03 (2.68)	8
The beauty of nature and art	2.00 (1.92)	12	5.47 (2.68)	7	-3.09 (3.21)	12

Values	Importance of values (I)		Attainability of values (A)		Difference between importance and attainability of values (I-A)	
	ā (σ)	rank	ā (σ)	rank	ā (σ)	rank
Love	6.88 (2.89)	3	5.71 (3.54)	5	1.22 (3.36)	4
Wealth	5.56 (2.69)	7	3.22 (2.56)	12	2.34 (3.28)	2
Close friendship	6.08 (2.84)	4	6.13 (3.43)	3	-0.04 (2.79)	7
Self-confidence	5.53 (2.47)	8	5.36 (2.76)	8	0.17 (3.52)	6
Cognition	5.86 (2.64)	5	8.03 (2.65)	1	-2.08 (2.84)	11
Freedom	5.65 (3.36)	6	5.14 (3.14)	9	0.47 (3.95)	5
Happy family life	8.44 (3.15)	1	4.50 (3.98)	10	3.94 (4.17)	1
Creativity	2.48 (2.85)	11	4.15 (3.32)	11	-1.60 (2.82)	9

Legend: ā – average, σ – dispersion.

The study also examined the relationships between the parameters of importance and accessibility of values and the components of existential fulfillment. The results of the correlation analysis between the components of existential fulfillment and the value importance parameter are presented in Table 2, which includes only those correlation coefficients that surpassed the minimum threshold of statistical significance.

Table 2. Relationship between the parameters of value importance and components of existential fulfillment.

Components of Existential Fulfillment	Values				
	Love	Wealth	Close friendship	Freedom	Happy family life
Self-Distance	**.252****	**-.271****	.137	**-.268****	**.297****
Self-Transcendence	.157	**-.276****	.023	-.093	**.222***
Freedom	.095	**-.269****	**.183***	.030	.144
Responsibility	.060	**-.251****	.161	.071	.046
Personality	**.221***	**-.316****	.074	**-.181***	**.287****
Existentiality	.083	**-.280****	**.185***	.055	**.101**

Legend: * – p<0,05, ** – p<0,01.

Statistically significant values of the correlation coefficients of the components of existential fulfillment with the availability of values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Statistically significant values of the correlation coefficients of the components of existential fulfillment with the availability of values.

Components of Existential Fulfillment	Values			
	The beauty of nature and art	Love	Self-confidence	Creativity
Self-Transcendence	**-.190***	**.327****	.017	-.143
Freedom	**-.196***	.142	**.181***	**-.218***
Responsibility	-.169	.014	.145	**-.190***
Personality	-.153	**.312****	.034	-.121
Existentiality	**-.196***	.083	.175	**-.220***
Existential Fulfillment	**-.196***	**.203***	.126	**-.195***

Legend: * – p<0,05, ** – p<0,01.

We then divided the entire sample into two contrasting groups. The first group included respondents with the highest values of existential fulfillment, and the second group included respondents with the lowest. A similar division of the sample into contrasting groups was carried out for each component of the existential fulfillment questionnaire. In total, there were 7 pairs of contrasting groups. The resulting contrast groups were then compared in terms of the importance and availability of values using an independent two-sample Student's t-test.

Comparison of groups differing in measured importance and accessibility of values did not reveal statistically significant differences between them in terms of existential fulfillment. Statistically significant differences on the criterion of importance and accessibility of values were observed on only individual scales. Significant differences were obtained for different levels of the "Personality" indicator (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of values indicators in groups with low and high levels of the "Personality" indicator.

Values	Two-sample Student t-test	
	t	p
Interesting job (I-A)	**2.887**	.009
Self-confidence (I)	**2.608**	.017
Self-confidence (I-A)	**2.946**	.007

Additionally, significant differences were obtained for different levels of the "Existentiality" indicator (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison of indicators of values in groups with low and high levels of the indicator "Existentiality".

Values	Two-sample Student's t-test	
	t	p
Health (I)	**-2.570**	.018
Love (A)	**-2.199**	.043

Discussion

As the obtained results show, the value "Wealth" has the most connections with existential satisfaction and its components, and all connections are inverse. This means that the higher the importance of this value, the lower the level of existential fulfillment, indicating a contradiction between the high importance of wealth and existential fulfillment. This finding is consistent with the results of Popova and Popova's (2022) study on the motivation of helping professions, where the motive for life support in professional activity also corresponded to lower levels of existential fulfillment. At the same time, in the studied sample, this value is the most inaccessible of all.

In contrast to the "Wealth", the value "Happy Family Life" is positively related to existential satisfaction, which suggests that its high importance supports a person's sense of existential fulfillment. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, the values "Love" and "Close Friendship" also act. These values each found two positive connections with the components of existential fulfillment. It is interesting that the connections between the importance of the value "Freedom" and some components of existential fulfillment are inverse, although freedom itself is one of its components.

As the results show, the feeling of existential fulfillment is supported by the values of close relationships with other people, while the high importance of individualistic values, on the contrary, opposes this feeling. This can be linked to the tasks that are central in life at the age of the group studied, namely, achieving closeness (Erikson, 1968). The validity of this explanation is also confirmed by the place of these values in the general hierarchy of values in this sample - they occupy the highest positions (Table 1).

Somewhat different values turned out to be interconnected with the components of existential fulfillment according to the parameter of assessing the availability of values in life. Thus, four inverse relationships were found for the values of natural beauty and creativity with different components of existential fulfillment. This means that those who assess these values as more accessible to themselves have a lower level of existential fulfillment. Note that these values also have the lowest ranks in the hierarchy of values

according to the criterion of importance. Among the values that are more important in this sample, only the assessment of the availability of the value of love turned out to be positively related to existential fulfillment (3 relationships). One significant direct correlation was found for the value of self-confidence with such a component of existential fulfillment as freedom.

As we see, in the overall picture of the relationships between the studied parameters of personal values and existential fulfillment, the central place is occupied by the value of love. The high importance of this value and the high assessment of its availability support a higher level of existential fulfillment. Conversely, the value of "Wealth" occupies the central place in the inverse relationship between existential fulfillment and different parameters of values. Both the high importance of this value and the high assessment of its availability are opposed to a high level of existential fulfillment.

It is interesting that the value hierarchy and the assessment of the availability of values in groups opposite in existential fulfillment do not differ. Consequently, existential fulfillment can be high or low with different value structures of a person.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that, in general, existential fulfillment has little to do with a person's value structures and how he or she evaluates the degree to which his or her values are realized in life. People with different levels of existential fulfillment do not differ in the hierarchy of values and the assessment of the realization of their values in life. However, some values contribute to an increase of the level of existential fulfillment. These include the values of close relationships with people, namely the importance of the values "Love", "Close friendship", and "Happy family life". The more important these values are, the more a person feels existential fulfillment. Values that oppose existential fulfillment have also been discovered. Among them, the most prominent is the value "Wealth": the more important this value is for a person, the lower the level of his or her existential fulfillment, and vice versa. To a lesser extent the value "Freedom" also opposes existential fulfillment.

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