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Students and Income-Earning Youths: a Transformational Transition from Competition-Based Approach to Competitiveness*



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Abstract: Competitiveness as a personal characteristic is strategically important in daily and work activities. The article presents analysis of the process of formation of students' competitiveness (case study of high school students and students from secondary vocational and higher educational institutions) with further implementation of competitive strategies in the work of young workers. The youth socio-demographic group is considered as a battery of creative and competitive potential characterized by the desire to develop their own personality and transform the surrounding society. The article presents the assessment of personal characteristics of students and income-earning youths, analyzes the respondents' self-assessment of the level of competitiveness, value attitudes and desirable

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life characteristics in the long term. The empirical framework includes data of a representative mass questionnaire survey of the youth of the Tyumen Oblast. The sociological research indicates that high school students have a minimum level of competitiveness among all categories of youth and have the potential to improve it among students. The maximum level of competitive strategies is demonstrated by the income-earning youth with higher education. All respondents focused on competitive relations (among students and income-earning youth) count on their own efforts in labor activity and demonstrate the internal locus of control. Competitive income-earning youth value their own safety less, realizing that the implementation of competitive strategies involves a high degree of uncertainty and risk in labor and daily practices; they realize their willingness to resist the competitors. There is a correlation between the young people to participate in competitive interactions and the scale of planning horizons. The research results expand knowledge about young people's competitiveness, the processes of its transition to competitiveness and can be used by educational institutions in training and educational work, as well as all organizations when making personnel decisions.

Key words: high school student, income-earning youth, competition, competitive relations, competitiveness, competitive factors, competitive sustainability.

Introduction

Youth as a socio-demographic group is of strategic importance for any country. The age limits for determining young age vary widely from country to country. Thus, according to the UN Security Council Resolution, a young person is a person aged 18–29. In Russia, young people are citizens aged 14–30. During this period, a person will have to overcome the transformational transition from an inexperienced teenager with inherent social infantilism to maturity and social responsibility. In this age period serious social statuses such as a schoolchild, a student, a graduate student, a young specialist, a trainee and others are concentrated.

With total world population of 7.3 billion people, the world's youth population (aged 10–24) is 1.8 billion (25% of the world population)¹. In Russia, the same age group comprises 21.9 million people or 14.9% (aged 10–24) of the total country's population (as of the beginning

of 2017). Based on the Russian age limits for young people (14–30), 26.4 million people (18%) belong to this age group². The share of young people in Russia has never decreased so much before. For example, there is information from previous historical periods: in 1926 – 29%, in 1939 – 26.5%, in 1959 – 26.5%, in 1979 – 27%, in 1989 – 22%, in 2002 – 24%, in 2009 – 24%, and in 2013 – 21.3%³. We are not speaking only about the share of this age group in the population, which is declining due to changes in the age structure of the population due to increasing life expectancy, but also due to nominal quality of young people in the society. There are obvious socio-economic risks of this trend – the growing load on the working population and other consequences. However, traditionally, it is young people who accumulate creative potential, desire to compete, and development of their own

¹ *Global population in 2015*. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/RU-SWOP14-Report%20Rev-Web-update%2024%20Nov.pdf>

² Population distribution by age group. Official website of the Federal State Statistics Service. Available at: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/demo14.xls

³ *Ibidem*.

personality and society. In this regard, the reducing share of young people in the country is perceived as a serious threat not only to economic development, but primarily to social and cultural stability.

Research problem

The research purpose is to analyze competitive orientation of young people and the comparison of some elements of the sociological image of students and income-earning youth depending on competitive orientation in personal life, educational and professional activities.

Thus, the research **objectives** are: to consider the key factors in the formation of the competition-based approach; determine the criteria for its successful transition to competitiveness and maintaining long-term stability; establish a correlation between competitiveness and the list of individual's personal qualities, life values, and priorities.

In adolescence, which is the period when a schoolchild studies at high school, the process of social adaptation is intensified – even yesterday's child thinks about their place in the society, makes a decision about their future profession, independently or with the help of their parents. During this period, the initial attempts of personal self-determination and plans for the future are associated with preparing for the upcoming competitive interaction (in the framework of “adult life”) in the daily and work activity. Building up competitive potential continues during the whole life, being especially relevant in the information (post-industrial) society. This process occurs to a greater extent during the period of vocational training and is implemented in a workplace in the form of the accumulated competitiveness. After graduating from secondary vocational or higher educational institutions, young specialists enter, perhaps, the most intense competition in the

labor market, the most intense in their lifetime. It is the “entry” into a profession, employment in a company (or starting one's own business) that creates maximum competition between peers who also compete for the desired starting positions; as well as between employees who are already in starting positions (for example, previous years graduates), which creates a kind of career “jam”. Great ambition, efficiency, and companies' openness to young employees (mentoring programs, etc.) help competitive youth overcome this “jam”.

Competition of the younger generation for social and professional position in the society is complicated by at least two factors: first, the desire of young people to be in demand due to increasing working life of a significant part of people (part-time retirement, retirees' active social position); second, automation and robotization of production processes.

Literature review

Let us turn to the theoretical analysis of key concepts associated with the competitive potential of the social group of young people conducted as a young person grows up and moves from the status of a “schoolchild” and “student” to an “employee”. Most interpretations of the concept of “*competition*” and other synonymous terms are presented from the point of view of economic position. The author's position is the importance of the social aspect of competitive interactions. In economic science (after A. Smith and M. Porter) competition is interpreted through the ratio of price of a good and its quality. R.A. Fatkhutdinov defines **competition** as “*a process of a subject's managing of their own competitive advantages to win or achieve other goals when competing against others for satisfying objective and subjective needs under the legislation or under natural conditions*” [1, p. 15]. From the **sociological** point of view,

priority is given to social relations arising during interaction of the representatives of different social groups and communities competing for rare benefits and limited resources (*the object of competition*), which can be, for example, vacancies, state-funded places, prizes at academic competitions in various subjects and other competitions. The main resource of employees' competitive potential is **social capital** and a set of competencies (as a result of training in an educational institution and/or self-education) [2]. A similar conclusion is reached by V. Menshikov (Latvia) who explored ways to optimize youth mobility to improve **competitiveness** in labor markets [3]. He marks that in modern conditions of emerging knowledge economy and services, an employee's competitiveness and economic success is defined by both human capital (professional and educational) and cultural capital (broad-mindedness, high level of intelligence, foreign languages). E.A. Seregina names education, work experience, social capital, abilities, and behavioral competence (*employability and marketability*) as key determinants of graduates' competitiveness in the labor market [4].

Competition, along with contest is one of the varieties of *rivalry* for rare and limited available benefits in relation to the need for them. M. Weber, a classic of sociology, interprets competition as "... *peaceful attempts to establish control over the opportunities and benefits that are also desired by others*" [5]. Contest (a form of competition) implies lack of constraints to the development of those who lose. When **contesting**, the participants struggle for a source of prestige, when competing – for a *condition to develop* (the defeated party is deprived of a possibility to further successfully develop – competition imposes restrictions on the rivals' ability to achieve the same goals).

Competition is a result of a long-term process of competition drilling, which, if successful, is characterized by competitiveness. It is the competitiveness that characterizes a perfect individual of the 21st century. **Competitiveness** is referred to as an ability to survive competition compared to similar objects in the market⁴; as well as "*a complex property inherent in an individual and consisting of psychophysical resources (health, age, appearance, level of intelligence) and moral aspects (values and their hierarchy, system of beliefs, personal prohibitions and restrictions). Property is based on high professionalism, psychological readiness to compete for existence, and individual's social characteristics*"⁵. It is also defined as an ability to use one's own advantages for achieving goals; an ability to survive competition and resist competitors [6, p. 264].

The sociological aspect of young people's **competitiveness** is expressed through the individual's interiorized need to fully manifest their abilities and competencies in the framework of activities based on creative, transformative activity and commitment, implying permanent self-development according to the socio-economic requirements and desire to defend (individually or in cooperation) their own position in competitive interactions.

V.I. Andreev interprets a **competitive personality** as "a creative person who, along with a highly developed creative potential possesses the following qualities: faith in their own strength, ability to make responsible, risky decisions, constantly striving for self-improvement and development; a person who does not despair in case of temporary failures

⁴ Kuleshova A.B. *Competition in questions and answers: tutorial*. Moscow: Prospekt, 2005. 256 p.

⁵ Parygin B.D. (Ed.). *Workshop on social and psychological training*. Saint Petersburg, 2000.

and difficulties, able to work hard, predict the course of events, focus on solving priority objectives and finish the job” [7, p. 97].

The development of a competitive personality is preceded by its competitive orientation, which is “*the result of complex influence of the external environment on the object of competition*” [8, p. 400]. Thus, when learning (at school, institution of secondary professional or higher education) an individual becomes “*an object of competitive orientation*” [9, p. 221]. An individual who aims to build their own competitive potential is determined through their willingness to learn the behavior, work methods, and development of personal qualities and properties characteristic of a competitive person. As a rule, it is the individual’s motivation to achieve success in a particular sphere, the desire to understand the way of living, building a future career, focus on self-education and presence of adequate self-esteem combined with the ability to adapt to socio-economic, cultural, and political changes. A competitive personality is characterized by a set of socially-oriented properties and qualities that provide leadership advantages in selected spheres of life.

L.V. L’vova and O.V. Perevozova distinguish a significant criterion of a social subject such as “**competitive sustainability**” (presence of a stable competitive advantage, ability to remain competitive) – the willingness of a person to “*maintain their own professional competence, develop the level of competitiveness achieved, which helps resist potential and real rivals in the labor market, regardless of the performance and nature of changes under the influence of socio-economic, scientific, and technological factors*” [10, p. 52]. According to the results of the monitoring study of graduates’ educational and labor patterns, about three

quarters of them do not possess competitive sustainability, which is manifested in the fact that seeking employment by their profession after universities and demonstrating their initial focus on competition (that is, possessing competitiveness), they quit their jobs in the next 2–3 years leaving it to graduates of the following years [*Ibidem*].

The implementation of the process of young people’s socio-professional development takes place with the participation of many social institutions (with **education** being the core). At each further stage of social interaction an individual falls under the influence of many competitive fields (*E.M. Cherkashov*) [11]. Layering and intersecting, they define a complex pattern of socio-cultural and economic interaction, where a subject either fits into, or moves into the zone of attraction of other competitive fields.

In social interaction, **competitive orientation** is turned into competitiveness if an individual becomes socially mature and lacks a destructive feature such as “*social infantilism*”. Of course, social maturity does not correlate with age and the period of its formation is extremely individual. An integral element of personal competitiveness is professional (labor) competitiveness. **Labor competitiveness** is defined as an individual’s ability to meet the requirements of their profession, improving their competencies and demonstrating higher professional qualities compared with colleagues on a certain scale.

The author’s point of view on harmonization of terms is expressed in the following thesis: during the process of socialization and vocational education, an individual acquires a competitive orientation which can be implemented in practice in the form of competitiveness. With the favorable influence

of a set of factors (from personal motivation to social and professional environment) competitiveness can acquire stable characteristics (competitive sustainability).

There may be some debate related to the **range of competition**. Amid globalization, the belief in the existence of local competitiveness (city, region, country) is in most cases self-deception. Competition is becoming **global** as it is manifested in various social institutions. Economist V.L. Inozemtsev notes that “*nowadays, no industry can be competitive only within the country as foreign competitors have an opportunity to increasingly push it away from the market. <...> The challenge of improving competitiveness can only be addressed on a global rather than a national market scale*”⁶. Despite the fact that he considers competition only as an economic phenomenon, we see the prospects of extrapolating the statement on the social aspect of competition. The implementation of global competitive strategies takes place both in the educational process and at work. Each employer demonstrates maximum interest in employing competent employees who with professional skills at least at the national or global, rather than at the regional level. A good example of demonstrating professional skills is found in professional competency competitions (WorldSkills Russia and others). In everyday life, the worker’s aspiration to maintaining professional competence at a high competitive level remains relevant. “*It is not states or companies that are competitive, but people whose activities determine the success or failure of both*”⁷. Elaborating on this idea we can talk about intra-professional and personal competitiveness.

⁶ Inozemtsev V.L. The ghost of competitiveness. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. available at: www.ng.ru/ideas/2007-04-11/10_economic.html

⁷ *Ibidem*.

Globalization and evolution of knowledge economy has caused dramatic changes in the nature and functions of education (especially higher education). In the search for global competitiveness, many developing economies are improving their own systems of higher education. International comparative studies demonstrate that an increasing number of students in higher education does not always increase their social mobility and may increase inequality in education. Thus, the study of the correlation of global competitiveness and system of higher education is covered in a work by Ka Ho Mok (China) [12; 13]. It is noted that the country’s competitiveness is favorably influenced by the processes of massification and internationalization of higher education. Countries seek to develop their systems of higher education by providing more opportunities for learning and addressing educational demand through additional resources to internationalize student experience and improve the research quality, and transforming regional education centers into global universities. However, this trend provokes a serious problem of surplus of people with higher education and their difficulties with entering the labor market. The trend is particularly relevant in times of the economic stagnation of specific countries. The case of China confirms that the spread of higher education does not lead to an increase in professional prospects for young people or opportunities for upward social mobility. On the contrary, the strengthening of competitive positions among graduates reflects the growing social inequality.

Research methods and results

A field research “*Formation of competitiveness and competitive sustainability of young people in the Russian society amid modern socio-cultural dynamics*” was conducted in April–May 2017 by the staff of the sociological

laboratory of Tyumen State University among high school children⁸, students⁹ and income-earning youth¹⁰. The research method is a questionnaire survey. Statistical methods of a licensed version of IBM SPSS Statistics 23 were used to analyze the obtained data.

The questionnaires compiled for each social group contain, in addition to specific indicators, universal questions about competitiveness and competitive sustainability. The present research is focused on comparing the responses of students and income-earning youth. To visually assess various personal characteristics we analyze the variables: *self-assessment of competitiveness; value attitudes, relevant personal qualities and desired life characteristics in the long term.*

⁸ The survey of 10 and 11 grade students was conducted among 852 high school students (10 and 11 grades) at general education institutions in the Tyumen Oblast – Tyumen (607 people), Tobolsk (158 people), and Ishim (87 people). The general population Number of high school students at secondary schools in the south of the Tyumen Oblast is: 11,496 people (5,945 people –10 grade; 5,551 –11 grade). Sampling error is 3.3%, which provides high data reliability.

⁹ The survey was conducted among 1,360 students of higher and secondary vocational education institutions in the southern cities of the Tyumen Oblast – Tyumen (963 people), Tobolsk (135 people), Ishim (98 people). Moreover, the sample includes students, participants of the all-Russian meeting of best groups (164 people) held in Tyumen in May 2017. The survey was attended by respondents enrolled in full-time education in institutions of higher education (1,146 people, 84%) and secondary vocational education (214 people, 16%). Research method: questionnaire survey at the place of training. Sample type: multi-stage, zoned, quota proportional. The sampling error is 3.1%, which provides high data reliability. The general population of the number of students of educational institutions of secondary vocational education in training programs for mid-level managers (full-time training) is 13,900 people, of higher education (full-time training) – 26,309 people (in Tyumen, Tobolsk, Ishim) as of the beginning of 2017.

¹⁰ The survey was conducted among 956 representatives of the income-earning youth in Tyumen, Tobolsk, and Ishim and rural areas of the Tyumen Oblast. The survey was conducted at the respondents' place of work – in 20 organizations of main economic sectors. Sample type: quota, zoned, cluster. Representativeness was determined based on: sex, age, form of enterprise's (organization's) ownership, average monthly wage. The sampling error is 3.2%, which ensures high data reliability.

The questionnaires of students and income-earning youth contain question of self-assessment of competitiveness with a similar wording: **“Do you consider yourself competitive?”** (Tab. 1). By combining polar assessments into a dichotomy – “I consider myself competitive” (answers “yes”, “rather yes than no”) and “I do not consider myself competitive” (“rather no than yes” and “no”) we see that the minimum level of competitiveness is marked among schoolchildren (80%, slightly higher among high schoolchildren of the premium gymnasium of Tyumen State University – 87%) and tends to increase in the social group of students (84%). The income-earning youth at the initial stages of their career demonstrate their own competitive strategies to the maximum extent (90%, among those with higher education – 93%).

Research conducted by Tomsk sociologists indirectly confirms that only a small share of students feel competitive and in demand in the labor market: only 16% believe that it will be easy enough to find the right job after graduation. When assessing the opportunities of future employment, students often believe that they have to work hard to find a suitable place (43%). They perceive employment as a rather complicated matter (which means that they are not sure of their own professional demand in the labor market) – 16% [14, p. 11].

Along with subjective assessment of the respondents' own competitiveness, the indicators of objective assessment of students' competitiveness by parents, university professors, and employers are of particular interest. Let us turn to the study conducted by S.D. Reznik and E.S. Konovalova: “56% of teachers, 88% of employers, and 48% of parents describe university students as insufficiently competitive and, as a consequence, uncompetitive in the labor market” [15, p. 20].

Table 1. Distribution of answers of students and the income-earning youth to the question “Do you consider yourself competitive?” (% of respondents, % per line)

Social group		Do you consider yourself competitive?			
		yes	rather yes than no	rather no than yes	no
High school children from	regular schools (city) (N=272)	29.5	47.8	18.7	4.1
	regular schools (rural areas) (N=235)	23.4	53.7	19.9	3.0
	gymnasiums or specialized school (premium schools) (N=320)	32.5	46.7	17.0	3.8
	the gymnasium at Tyumen State University (N=260)	31.1	56.0	12.1	0.8
	Average for high school children (N=1087)	29.5	50.7	16.9	3.0
Students	at institutions of secondary vocational education (N=214)	32.7	54.3	10.6	2.4
	at institutions of higher education (N=979)	22.5	61.4	13.1	2.9
	at Russia's institutions of higher education (participants of the all-Russian meeting of best groups) (N=167)	35.2	47.9	15.8	1.2
	Average for students (N=1360)	25.7	58.6	13.1	2.6
Income-earning youth	who graduated from institutions of secondary vocational education (N=219)	52.8	26.6	12.4	8.3
	who graduated from institutions of higher education (N=656)	58.8	34.5	5.1	1.7
	Average for income-earning youth (N=956)	57.3	32.5	6.9	3.3

Let us return to the results of the sociological research. The distribution of responses by sex demonstrates that women are more likely to doubt their own competitiveness (75% chose the answer options “rather yes than no” and “rather no than yes”) than men – two-thirds of them (64%). In turn, it is men who more often (definitely and with confidence) consider themselves competitive (“yes”) – 33%, which is 1.4 times higher than women (23%). Among students of junior courses (first and second) 18% consider themselves non-competitive, of senior courses – 8%, mainly due to acquiring competence required for further employment. In the sample of the income-earning youth, 57% of respondents are competitive (“yes, *I am competitive*”) (see Table 1). The research results demonstrate that the maximum level of competitiveness is shown by single childless men with higher and post-graduate education with an average monthly income of about 36,000 RUB (average income in the sample – 32,000 RUB). The data confirm the validity of the statement: “the sphere of higher

education determines the level of pro-activity and competitiveness of the society in the long-term future”¹¹.

We can assess the competitiveness of the income-earning youth by the dichotomy of statements aimed at determining the effectiveness of competitive strategies: “*as a rule, I always successfully defeat my competitors*” and “*I rarely manage to win a competition*”. Almost a half (48%) supported the first statement, the second – only each 10th (10%), 42% remained undecided. Using this question as an example, let us check if there is correlation with the respondents’ answers about self-assessment of their level of competitiveness. Thus, respondents who consider themselves competitive (“yes”) in 78% of cases have successful competitive strategies. Among income-earning youth doubting their own competitiveness (“*rather yes than no*” and “*rather not*”) and non-competitive respondents the share of successfully competing is only

¹¹ Efimov V.S. (Ed.). *The future of higher education in Russia: expert view. Foresight-research – 2030: analytical report*. Krasnoyarsk: Sibirskii federal’nyi universitet, 2012. 182 p.

52%. Correlation analysis indicates strong dependence of these variables (correlation index = 0.811**, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level). The obtained data indicate, first, the methodological viability of the applied method of assessing competitiveness through self-identification; second, competitive respondents confirm their own status by objective assessments of success in competitive interaction.

The higher the income level of the income-earning youth, the more often they prefer the statement “*as a rule, I always successfully defeat my competitors*”. This statement was supported by 41% of respondents from a low-income category (less than 29,000 RUB of monthly income), 50% of respondents – earning from 30 to 69 thousand RUB a month, and 52% – from a high-income category (more than 70,000 RUB).

Maree K., Ebersohn L. and Vermaak B., analyzing the correlation between unemployment rate and the type of career preferred by young people, come to a conclusion that they are determined by a set of characteristics of self-confidence, competitiveness, interpersonal cooperation, and initiative. An important role in competitive relations belongs to **academic performance** as a double indicator of respondents’ quality of knowledge and ambitions. Income-earning youth, who mostly had excellent marks in professional educational institutions (if there were several of them, then in the last one) most effectively applies competitive strategies which help them successfully withdraw from most competitive interactions (80%). For comparison, we present data for those with good (64%) and satisfactory (57%) marks. Respondents regularly engaged in self-education are also more successful in competition. Among them, 81% say that “as a rule, they defeat all competitors”; among

income-earning youth only “occasionally” devoting time and effort to self-education – 65%, and of those who “never” practice self-education – 51%, which is record low.

The most effective **means of ensuring victory** in professional competition also differ significantly depending on the respondents’ self-assessment of competitiveness. Competitive respondents give priority to “belief in the right cause” (92% chose the answer options “very important” and “important” against 76% of similar answers from non-competitive respondents) and “intellectual advantage over competitors” (92% and 81%), “help of influential friends and acquaintances” (84% and 75%), “life-long training” (91% and 84%), and “personal high moral qualities” (81% and 74%).

The respondent’s personal competitiveness is a determinant that identifies the vector of perception of competition as such. Thus, representatives of the income-earning youth who consider themselves competitive generally perceive the phenomenon of competition more positively, characterizing it as “*useful*” (91%, against 80% according to the estimates of non-competitive youths), “*necessary*” (88% and 76%), “*effective*” (86% and 70%), “*explicit*” (62% and 48%), “*fair*” (48% and 32%) and “*honest*” (51% and 41%). The negative connotation of the process of competitive interaction is mainly expressed by respondents who think they lack competitiveness. The higher the respondent’s competitiveness, the more successful experience in applying competitive strategies, the more positive is the perception of competition and the less unjustified are stereotypes and terrifying are the illusions about it. This conclusion is reasonable to extrapolate to young students. Thus, high school students who consider themselves competitive (“*yes*” and “*rather yes than no*”) in 68% of cases agree

with the statement: “Competitiveness (success) is an important quality of an individual in modern Russian society” (answer options – “yes”). Non-competitive high school students agree with this statement 1.5 times less (43%). Only 5% of competitive and 15% of non-competitive high school students express strong disagreement with the statement. 60% of competitive high school students find it important to be successful and seek recognition, against only 39% of non-competitive – only one third.

Value orientations of students and income-earning youth

The transformational transition from a competition-based approach to actual competitiveness is also determined by young people’s value orientations. Values are interpreted as “cognized” needs directly depending on the culture, environment, and mentality of a particular society. In order to assess value priorities, the respondents were offered the Sh. Schwartz questionnaire [17] developed in 1992 and repeatedly tested in international studies. The questionnaire is based

on the theory dividing all values into *social* and *individual*. Opposite statements are presented at the poles of the scale. Depending on the importance of a statement for the respondent, the statements on the left and on the right were assessed on a ten-point scale (1–5 points – on the left and 6–10 points – on the right). For convenience of further data analysis we only pay attention to one of the scale poles. When comparing the estimates of students and income-earning youth we will prioritize the difference in estimates within these groups among the respondents depending on self-assessment of the level of competitiveness.

Table 2 presents data on the share of respondents who agree with the above statement, depending on their competitiveness. We trace the performance of value orientation transformations within these categories of students and income-earning youth.

The attitude to competition as such is more positive among competitive income-earning youth – 87% of them agree with the statement that “competition is good, it encourages people to

Table 2. Distribution of respondents’ answers to the question: “Which of the statements is a priority for you?” (% of respondents, % on line)

Option	Do you consider yourself competitive?			
	Students		Income-earning youth	
	“yes” and “rather yes than no”	“rather no than yes” and “no”	“yes” and “rather yes than no”	“rather no than yes” and “no”
Competition is good, it encourages people to work hard and be creative	81	76	87	71
Ultimately, hard work is rewarded and leads to success	82	73	77	59
People can only become rich at the expense of others	32	36	23	33
Freedom is something without which life loses its meaning	77	73	83	66
Most moral standards of the past are now obsolete	48	52	43	64
In a just society, citizens’ incomes depend on their abilities and performance	77	75	67	57
The family should have a hierarchy between husband and wife, parents and children	51	48	48	38
Each person should be treated with respect, attention, and understanding	86	87	91	75
Living in a constantly changing society is interesting, though difficult	79	68	86	80
A person’s life, first of all, depends on the circumstances, rather than on their own efforts	31	41	20	36

work hard and be creative, develop new ideas"; non-competitive youth agreed only in 71% of cases (a 16% gap). The trend in such difference is only emerging among students – the statement is supported by 81% of competitive and 76% of non-competitive students. It is noteworthy that the absolute majority of respondents from the best students groups in Russia were much more likely to agree with this statement (92%) than students at Tyumen universities (80%) and students at secondary vocational institutions (62%).

Can **hard work** help a person improve their financial situation, social status and lead to success? Competition-oriented respondents (among students and income-earning youth) in the vast majority trust their own efforts in labor activity, agreeing with the proposed statement. However, competitive income-earning youth are able to practically assess the impact of hard work on their quality of life and standard of living – 77% agree with the statement, 59% – among non-competitive.

Dependency turned out to be alien to income-earning youth – only 23% agreed with the statement that “people can only become rich at the expense of others”, which is 10% less than among non-competitive income-earning youth. This gap is statistically insignificant among students. Also, competitive income-earning youth know the price of **freedom**, 83% support the statement “freedom is something without which life loses its meaning”; only 66% of non-competitive income-earning youth agreed with it (a 17% gap). The differences in students’ assessments are also statistically insignificant.

Non-competitive respondents are more likely to demonstrate an external locus of control, agreeing with a number of statements, the first of which is: “a person’s life, first of all, depends on the circumstances, rather than

on their own efforts” (41% of students and 36% of income-earning youth). Competitive respondents supported this statement by 10% and 16% respectively less – showing confidence that responsibility for their own lives and events taking place in it lies solely on themselves (*internal locus of control*). Once again the students of best Russian universities more often agreed with the statement (48%) than students from secondary vocational institutions (34%) and universities (29%). Let us consider another statement reflecting the correlation between competitiveness and internal locus of control – “*in a just society, citizens’ incomes depend on their abilities and performance*”. 67% of competitive income-earning youth and 77% of students supported this statement. This share among students of best groups of Russian universities is 83%, among students of Tyumen universities – 77%, technical schools/colleges – 70%.

However, competitive income-earning young people are far from **nihilism** and **rejection of classic values** – only 43% of them and 64% of non-competitive young people agree that “most moral standards of the past are now obsolete” (a 21% gap). It is expected that this gap is maintained when income-earning youth assess the statement: “the family should have a hierarchy between husband and wife, parents and children” (48% of competitive and 38% of non-competitive young people). The differences in estimates of are statistically insignificant as they are not married (in most cases).

Relevant personal qualities

Analysis of whether a respondent possesses certain personal characteristics is possible through their identification with an abstract individual endowed with these qualities. When assessing the extent to which the proposed descriptions of people match the respondents, **some** characteristics increase

the gap in estimates of competitive and non-competitive respondents, **others** – decrease in the assessment distance, the **third** – lack statistically significant dynamics. Consider the first two groups of descriptions applied to students (high school children and students).

The first category includes the following statements: “it is important to live in a safe environment; avoid anything that might threaten their **safety**”. This statement was mostly supported by non-competitive respondents; the assessment gap among schoolchildren was 6% (43% – competitive; 48% – non-competitive), while the gap among students reached the maximum – 13% (45% and 58%, respectively) (*Tab. 3*).

Modesty and conformism (the statement “it is important to be humble and modest; not to attract attention”) is more relevant for respondents who position themselves as non-competitive (50% of high school students and 56% of students). Competitive respondents are less likely to be humble and modest (37% – schoolchildren, 42% – students).

It is expected that competitive respondents identify themselves with the following two descriptions illustrating the willingness to take **risks**: “they are looking for adventure and like to take risks; they want to live a life full of events” (52% – high school students, 42% – students) and “they like surprises, it is important for them to try many different things in life; they always try to find new hobbies” (59% – schoolchildren, 54% – students). However, with respect to both statements, the maximum gap between the assessments of young people focused on competition and avoiding it is observed in the older (student) age.

In **the second category** of statements there is a **reducing** gap in assessments of competitive and non-competitive respondents. For example, students focused on competition

more often than their non-competitive peers note the priority of **traditions**, identifying themselves with the description: “they appreciate traditions, try to follow religious and family customs” (34% against 19%). The share of respondent students who chose this option is increasing, but the gap is reducing depending on self-assessment of competitiveness.

The importance of third-party assessment (**respect, social recognition**) is also higher in the school environment – every second competitive student notes that “it is important for them to be respected; they want people to do what they say” (49%), this indicator is reduced more than twice (23%) among non-competitive students. This indicator is consistently high among university students regardless of their competitive position. Competitive students demonstrate a great importance of **public opinion** and assessment of a reference group (the statement “it is important for them to be very successful; they hope that people recognize their achievements”) – 64% against 43% of non-competitive colleagues. Among students, the gap is 53% and 41%, respectively.

The following statement reflects the personal characteristic of “**independence**” (“it is important for them to make decisions about what to do and how; they like to be free and independent from others”). The vast majority of high school students focused on competitive strategies identify themselves with this description (78%), while this share among their uncompetitive peers is only 63% (a 15% gap). Among students, the share is 65% and 58% respectively (a 7% gap).

Life prospects in the estimates of young people

What image of the desired future are the respondents focused on? The third question which was included in two questionnaires (for school children and students) concerned the

priority life characteristics of respondents in the long term. Respondents were asked to imagine their life in ten years and describe it. The positive characteristics offered to respondents as criteria for future life were more often mentioned by respondents focused on competitive strategies. Competitive young people plan to achieve **financial independence** in ten years (70% of schoolchildren and 64% of students, which is twice higher than the same indicator among their non-competitive peers); have **opportunities for recreation** and entertainment (58% and 57% respectively), lead a **healthy lifestyle** (61% and 62%); have an **interesting, creative job** (53% and 54%) and take up **leadership positions** (38%).

Of course, the desired characteristics will not be achieved without the respondent's proper action. Specific plans for a certain period of time are necessary. Therefore, we further look at the following quality of a competitive personality – *“the distance of goal-setting expressed through medium- and long-term planning of career prospects and life in general”* [18, p. 107]. Analysis of results of sociological research helps identify trends in planning horizon expansion depending on the respondent's age and competitiveness. In the short-term planning range (*for the next year*) the most active are **high school students**, which is largely due to lack of life goals and value priorities. It is schoolchildren who more

often than other categories of respondents note complete lack of plans for the future. In older age groups, medium-and long-term planning ranges prevail.

The obtained data on unformed life plans of the majority of young people correlate with the results of studies conducted by S.D. Reznik and E.S. Konovalova – modern students “do not have sustainable life guidelines, they often think in terms of short-term need pass tests, exams, and get a diploma of higher education, rather than in terms of further effective vocational employment” [15, p. 18]. However, a small range of planning prevents the respondent from building effective strategies for formation, improvement, and preservation of their competitiveness, especially in a changing labor market [20]. Among the categories of respondents under review, there is a pattern – competitive youth have broader planning horizons: 29% of schoolchildren, 33% of students, and 36% of income-earning youth have plans for two or three years ahead; 29% of high school students, 26% of students, and 30% of income-earning youth plan their life for five years or more (*Tab. 3*).

Note that the working lifetime (from the first job to retirement) in Russia is 33.8 years for men and 32.1 years for women. The researchers note that the life expectancy of Russian men is the shortest in Europe and North America and is 11.4 years less than in

Table 3. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: “How would you describe your life planning horizons?” depending on self-assessment of the level of competitiveness (% of respondents)

Plans	High school students		Students		Income-earning youth	
	Competitive	Non-competitive	Competitive	Non-competitive	Competitive	Non-competitive
no plans	9.9	19	9.1	15.6	4.2	5.5
for 1 year ahead	32.2	39.8	25.4	24.6	25.8	33
for 2–3 years ahead	29.3	22.7	33.2	28.1	36.4	28.6
for 5> years ahead	28.6	18.5	25.9	19.6	29.9	21.9
undecided	-	-	6.4	12.1	3.7	11
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Japan, the leading country in this indicator [19, p. 607]. When starting work, young people, as a rule, do not think about the forecast of socially significant statistical indicators such as “life expectancy”, “working lifetime”, etc. Nevertheless, the readiness of young people to invest in long-term life strategies, focus on self-education, and plan their own social and professional development largely depends on subjective assessment of expected working lifetime and life expectancy in general. Absence of state guarantees related to life expectancy and high quality of life in different age periods is fixed in the culture and makes people (more often unconsciously) avoid investing in their development and “live one day at a time”.

Summary

Considering the multi-dimensional structure of the socio-economic phenomenon of **competitiveness** and determining its level in a single socio-age group is an effective tool for social modeling and forecasting. There is intensified effectiveness of the process of formation of competitive orientation among high school students with subsequent development during their transition to a social status of a university student. The accumulated competitive advantages (and, what is important – the ability to maintain their own personal and professional competitive potential at a high level) are **implemented** in the daily social and labor interactions of an individual (income-earning youth).

An attempt to study the transformational transition from competitive orientation to competitiveness justifies the novelty of the theoretical and applied research and concludes the following: in most cases, income-earning youth aware of their own competitive potential demonstrate a greater gap in value priorities compared to non-competitive peers than students (students and high school children).

This is evidenced by the division of people in the student environment, who feel their own competitiveness, consciously work to improve competitive advantages, compared to peers who do not prioritize strategic development of their own potential. As a result, the “route” of personal and professional development planned as a student is implemented in the short term after graduation from a secondary vocational or higher educational institution. Accordingly, competitive income-earning young people in their assessments contrasts with their peers who are not focused on competitive interaction and are satisfied with the existing position and social status.

Competitive orientation of the youth is determined by high academic performance, self-education, and regular qualification, which is an evidence of their readiness to accumulate professional potential with its subsequent implementation, including in terms of competitive strategies.

It is noteworthy that young people successfully involved in competitive interaction and practicing competitive strategies, more positively assess the phenomenon of competition, without negative stereotypes. This category of young people also appreciates hard work, independence, activity, and freedom and is characterized by an internal locus of control; they demonstrate conservatism (traditions and classical values) and do not avoid risk.

Attention is drawn to the scale of competitive imbalance between students and income-earning young people. Young students, depending on their own competitiveness, demonstrated only emerging differences in the number of values that are fully manifested in the responses of income-earning young people. Competitive respondents have a clear image of the desired future and broader planning horizons (*material wealth, interesting*

work, healthy lifestyle). High school students demonstrate an idealized image of their future. It is noteworthy that it is they who have the narrowest planning horizon, which indicates underdeveloped life orientation and competitiveness. Thus, when it comes to the social group of high school children we can only speak of the initial stages of competition, which increases during studentship and is implemented in the form of competitiveness when entering labor relations. The expected result of high level of competitiveness of

income-earning young people is an increase in incomes. In the future (throughout the career path) the respondent's priority lies in maintaining competitiveness.

The research results can be used in pedagogical, educational, and career-oriented activities of educational institutions; in the educational process in institutions of secondary professional and higher education; to develop educational programs and on-the-job training for students, as well as in the process of labor adaptation of young professionals.

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