
Releasers as Factor of Student Ecological Focus Formation

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Abstract

The relevance of the issue under study is due to the need to research, form and develop ecological consciousness, its levels and components, characterized by a new type of human attitudes to nature, man to man and society as a whole. The problem of effective development of ecological focus by means of visual images, in particular of releasers, becomes more and more actual one. The purpose of the study: to study the main characteristics and regularities of releasers' presentation. To identify in the theoretical and experimental study the effectiveness of ecological releasers' impact on the student ecological attitudes formation. The Leading method for the study of this problem is the method of visual psych-diagnostics, which allows making a qualitative selection of releasers; the method of experiment, which allows establishing the features of the releasers' influence on the student ecological attitudes. Research results: the article presents a thorough and detailed analysis of the concept of the releaser, highlights the types and variants of the releasers used by social psychologists. The authors pay special attention to the analysis of releasers' influence on the formation of ecological focus. It is revealed that the use of releasers has a positive impact on the development of behavioral and cognitive (especially cognitive) component of student ecological attitudes. In addition, ecological releasers have a positive impact on the development of an ethical type of ecological focus and reduce the share of the pragmatic attitude towards nature. Practical significance: the data obtained in the work can be used in pedagogy, practical psychology, ecological psychology, sociology, as well as for the further theoretical development of this issue.

Keywords: students, releasers, ecological consciousness, ecological focus, types of ecological focus

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the world's population faces many local and global challenges that threaten the lives of millions of people. One of the most important and burning is the problem of the global ecological crisis and the relationship in the system *man-nature*. The most serious ecological crisis which has struck our planet, has brought essential adjustments to the relations of the person and the nature, has forced to rethink all achievements of a world civilization (Doctorov et al. 1992, Moiseyev 1998a, 1998b, Park 2002, Tsiolkovsky 1928, Yarullin et al. 2017). Approximately since the sixties of the twentieth century, when the problem of all

life's destruction in connection with industrial activity first became so acute for mankind, a new science – ecology began to form and as a consequence of this emergence, an ecological culture appeared (Khapai 2009, Maklyarsky 1995, Markovich 1999, 2001). There is a new concept of the relationship between humanity and nature, now nature is not understood as an object, but as a subject, which balances the human desire to meet their needs and the value of nature and the need for careful attitude to it. In connection with the global environmental crisis, it is necessary to find out what relations between man and nature can be considered harmonious, how human activity affects the

environment, and to note why ecological culture and ecological education are so important especially now (Vashchenko et al. 1990, Yanitsky 1999).

As a rule, in Russian educational institutions the process of student ecological education is associated primarily with their environmental and often simply biological education. At the same time, student ecological upbringing is considered as a mandatory consequence of environmental education. The logic here is so - if a person is sufficiently environmentally erudite, he/she will automatically be ecologically brought up (Cherdymova 2013).

However, the reality shows that ecological education is ineffective when it is based only on the giving to students the relevant knowledge, tips, instructions, etc. Fundamental decisions on the development of ecological consciousness are in a fundamental change in the nature of human relations to nature, and therefore of particular importance is the search for mechanisms and means of transformation of the motivational-need sphere of the individual, the relevant attitudes and goals in its transformative activity, in practical interaction with the natural sphere, the development of readiness for a certain understanding of it and behavior (Kalmykov 1999).

There are many ways to influence the development and formation of personality's ecological attitudes. One way is to use ecological releasers. Their advantages are in visibility, application and development of creative abilities, vastness of options of psychological releasers (Cherdymova 2011, Sztompka 2007, Zakharova 2008). A releaser is a key stimulus to which an animal or person responds with an unambiguous, genetically determined reaction. Psychological releasers are very diverse and can have an impact on three channels of formation of ecological consciousness and its levels: perceptual — in the process of constructing a perceptual image, cognitive — on the basis of processing the information received and practical — in the process of direct practical interaction (Yasvin 2000). The perception of releasers is accompanied by a number of focus effects, by which the impact of psychological releasers per person is established, which subsequently determines the nature of his/her new perception of natural objects. This is the *primacy effect*, *halo effect* and *novelty effect*. For the perceptual-emotional channel of particular importance is the *primacy effect*, which consists in the fact, that the first information about an object is unfamiliar. For the cognitive channel, the most significant one is the *halo effect* - the spread of

information about the object (in conditions of information lack about the object) on the perception of all factors and situations associated with this object. The *novelty effect* also acts on the cognitive channel, i.e. the latest information is most significant in relation to the known objects (Yasvin 2000).

Summarizing all the above mentioned, it should be emphasized that the ecological releaser is a specific incentive that is associated with a natural object and determines the direction of the formation of a subjective attitude to this object. Releaser affect through three channels: perceptive, cognitive, and practical. One can select visual, audio, tactile and other types of releasers. The proper use of releasers causes personality's empathy and identification that leads to the development of sympathy with respect to the natural object and the environment.

The formation of ecological attitudes is one of the most urgent tasks for the state. One of the most promising ways to influence the attitudes is the use of ecological (permissible, psychological) releasers. Although the most effective is considered the work with releasers with younger students, but the use of ecological releasers has no age limits. Psychological releasers can be applied in the senior student group, having provided the diversity of the educational process and utilizing the creative abilities of all students.

Ecological education and upbringing should give people a clear and reasoned knowledge of the basic principles and laws of interaction between people, society and nature. However, the ecological education existing today could not change the nature-destructive motives in the Outlook of a large part of the population. If schools and universities are now sufficiently verified teaching knowledge about the laws of nature and society, the teaching of knowledge about the laws of compatibility, the interaction of society and nature as a whole system is virtually absent (Gur'yev 1997, Kochergin et al. 1987).

Such education cannot form a high level of ecological consciousness of the individual, to develop positive ecological attitudes towards natural objects, which in turn ensures a low level of ecological culture of the population, indifference to environmental problems and worsening ecological crisis (Suravegina 2000).

The understanding of the need to change the dominant ecological consciousness in order to solve environmental problems has led to the interest of many

Table 1. The development level of the environmental focus affective component (percentage of respondents, N=68)

The level of development	Share (%)
high	89.1
medium	10.9
low	0.0
in total	100

Table 2. The dominant type of student ecological focus (as a percentage of the number of responses, N=766)

Type of ecological focus	Shares (%)
Aesthetic	41.8
Cognitive	14.9
Ethical	19.5
Pragmatic	23.8
in total	100

scientists in the problem of ecological consciousness and its components. Ecological attitudes and methods of their formation are increasingly becoming the subject of research specialists in the field of social psychology (Bassin 1973, Uznadze 1966, Yadov 1975).

The possibility of using new methods for the formation of ecological attitudes and adjustment of existing ones is the most important areas of modern science. Releasers are considered to be as one of the effective and fully encompassing ways to influence the ecological attitudes.

THE METHODS OF RESEARCH

The following methods were used in the research process:

1. The method of visual psycho-diagnostics, allowing doing a qualitative selection of releasers.

It was found that releasers can be visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory-gustatory and vital. The most effective releasers are under the influence on three channels: perceptual - in the process of building a perceptual image, cognitive - based on the processing of the received information and practical - in the course of practical interaction.

2. Ascertaining psychological and pedagogical experiment, which revealed the level of development of student ecological focus depending on the course of study.

After the primary test, we obtained the following results. The cognitive component of ecological focus among students is mainly at the average level of development – for 51.5% of respondents. A third part of respondents (30.9%) have a highly developed cognitive

component, the remaining 17.6% show a low level of cognitive component.

Such a high rate of emotional component is most likely due to the fact that this age (respondents are at the age of 18 to 21 years) is characterized by the active formation and development of the emotional component of the personality, emotional experience.

The dominant among students is the aesthetic ecological focus (41.8%), the second place belongs to a pragmatic ecological focus (23.8%), the third – ethical (19.5%), the fourth – cognitive (14.9%) (see **Tables 1** and **2**).

With a significant advantage, the dominant type of ecological focus among students has become aesthetic, characterized by the perception of nature as an object of beauty. The second most popular was the pragmatic type, which is characterized by the perception of nature as an object of benefit. The ethical type is less pronounced – the perception of nature as an object of protection, only among the one in five respondents it is dominant. The least pronounced type of ecological focus is cognitive (perception of nature as an object of study).

RESULTS

After the experiment (work with releasers) the repeated test was made in order to capture and identify changes in the structural components of the ecological focus, possible changes in the types of ecological focus were revealed.

The second test on the cognitive component in the experimental group gave the following results: more than half of all respondents (52.9%) showed a high level of development of the measured component. The third part (30.9%) showed the average level of development, and the low level remained among 16.2% of respondents (see **Fig. 1**).

Comparing the results obtained before and immediately after the experiment, it can be seen that the proportion of respondents with a high level of development of the cognitive component of the ecological focus has increased significantly – from 30.9% in the first section to 52.9% in the second. The share of respondents with the medium level of cognitive development decreased from 51.5% to 30.9% (respectively from the first to the second test).

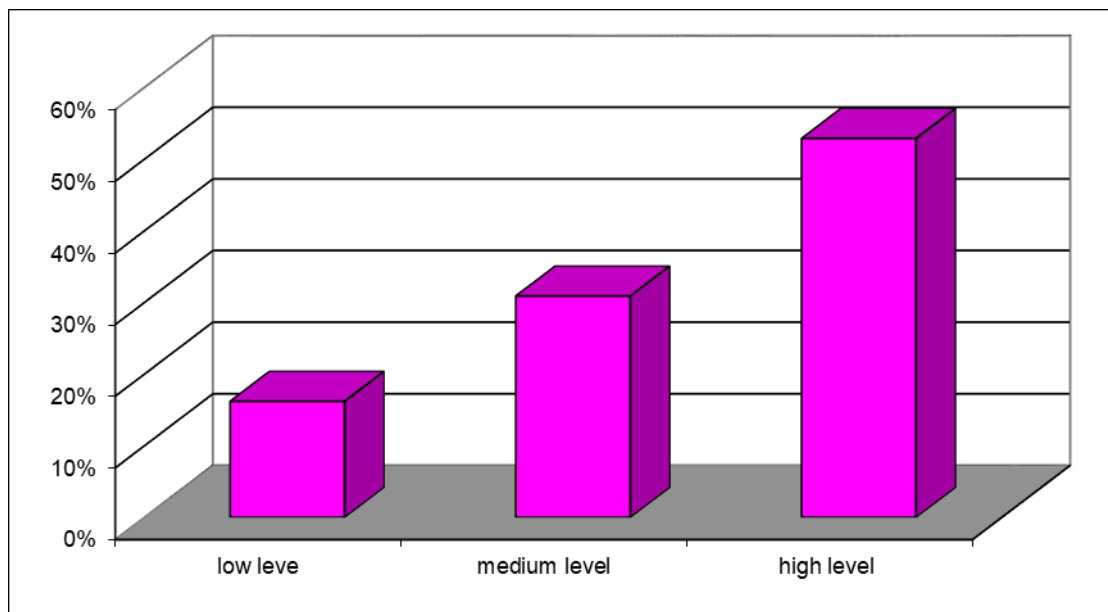


Fig. 1. The development level of the cognitive component of the ecological focus in the experimental group based on the results of the second test

Table 3. The development level of the affective component of the ecological focus in the experimental group based on the results of the second test

Level of development	Shares (%)
high	91.2
medium	8.8
low	0.0
In total	100

The second test on the behavioral component in the experimental group recorded changes in the structure of the component. The share of respondents with a high development level of the behavioral component of the ecological focus increased by 10% – from 45.6% to 55.8%. Although it should be noted, that the increase was due to the share of respondents with a medium level, because the proportion of students with low behavioral component has not changed (22.1% according to the results of both tests).

When comparing with the results of the test in the control group, it is important to note that in the experimental group there is a positive trend to increase the proportion of students with a high level of this component of the ecological focus. While in the control group there is no such dynamics and the results are similar to the results of the first test - a little more than 40% of respondents demonstrate a high level of behavioral component, a third of respondents (35.3%) – the medium level and 23.5% - the low level of development of this component.

As for the affective component according to the data of the second test in the experimental group, no significant changes were recorded in its structure. But taking into account that initially the results were very high (more than 80% with a high level), it was difficult to expect a significant improvement in performance, in principle, and this component did not require changes from the researcher (see **Table 3**).

It can be noted that the share of respondents with a high level of development of the affective component in the control group is also very high – 79.4%.

Analyzing the results obtained, one can see that the aesthetic focus remained dominant among the majority of students, while almost in the same proportion as before the training (38.9%); Significantly increased the share of ethical attitude - from 19.5% to 30.8%. Also increased the proportion of cognitive type of ecological focus – from 14.9 to 17.7%. It should also be noted that the increase in the values of ethical and cognitive type was mainly due to the reduction of pragmatic ecological focus. After the experiment with students, the share of pragmatic attitude decreased from 23.8% to 12.6%.

DISCUSSIONS

In this study, we will proceed from the fact that the *ecological focus* is the readiness, predisposition of the individual to perceive future events and actions in the natural environment in a certain direction.

We take as a basis the three-component structure of the ecological focus, according to which, the ecological

focus includes cognitive, affective and behavioral components.

The cognitive component is the awareness of the object of ecological focus, it is a certain set of opinions, beliefs and arguments that are allowed in the evaluation (or selection) of the natural object or the whole surrounding world.

An affective component is the emotional evaluation of a natural object, the degree to which a person loves or hates, approves or disapproves of a certain natural object. These are emotions, feelings, experiences associated with a natural object.

The conative (behavioral) component is an open consistent behavior in relation to a natural object: plans, aspirations, intentions.

There are 4 types of ecological focus:

- Aesthetic ecological focus is when an individual perceives nature as an object of beauty.
- Ethical ecological focus - nature is perceived by a person as an object of protection.
- Cognitive ecological focus - a person perceives nature as an object of study, an object of knowledge.
- Pragmatic ecological focus - nature is perceived by man as an object of benefit (Cherdymova 2010).

We understand under the releaser a specific stimulus associated with a natural object, which determines the direction and nature of the formation of a subjective attitude to it.

Summing up the results of this study, one can draw the following conclusions:

In General, students demonstrate a fairly high development level of all components of the ecological focus. But it should be noted that the cognitive component is less developed than the other components of the ecological focus (most of the respondents show the medium level of development of the component). Half of the surveyed students belong to the group with a high level of behavioral component. Well, the most developed emotional component, which is partly due to the peculiarities of the age period of students: a strong emotional experience, impulsiveness, increased emotionality.

With a significant advantage, the dominant type of student ecological focus is aesthetic. Individuals with such a dominant type perceive nature as an object of beauty and a source of aesthetic pleasure. The ethical type of ecological focus where the nature is considered as object of protection and preventing from harmful influence of human activity is developed much more poorly. The cognitive type of ecological focus also has a low proportion. Unfortunately, among the students there is a large proportion of pragmatic subjective attitude to nature, which is characterized by the perception of nature as an object of benefit to humans. This type is the second place which is most common among respondents.

Analysis of the results obtained *before* and *after* the experiment shows that the development level of the cognitive component has significantly increased (if earlier the majority of students showed a medium level, then after the training the majority of them shows a high development level of the component). The share of respondents with high level has increased; the number of students with low level of behavioral component has decreased.

If one compares the data of the technique *before and after* its using, one can see that the share of the ethical type of ecological focus has increased; the share of the cognitive type has slightly increased. The aesthetic focus remained almost unchanged, and the pragmatic ecological focus moved from the second to the fourth place in the share of representation among students, i.e. significantly decreased.

Analyzing the influence of releasers on the formation of ecological focus, one can conclude that the use of releasers has a positive impact on the development of behavioral and cognitive (especially cognitive) component of student ecological focus. In addition, ecological releasers have a positive impact on the development of an ethical type of ecological focus and reduce the share of the pragmatic attitude towards nature. Thus, releasers can serve as an effective means for developing student ecological focus and engaging way of environmental education.

CONCLUSION

The need for the formation of positive ecological focus is recognized today at the highest state levels, as the focus on careful and responsible attitude to natural objects is the key to the harmonious interaction of mankind with nature, the key to ecologically friendly living environment.

We have analyzed the concept of the releaser as one of the ways to influence the ecological focus, highlighted the types and options of releasers used by social psychologists. Under the releaser in social psychology is understood – “a specific incentive associated with a natural object, and determining the direction and nature of a subjective attitude formation to this object.” It was found that releasers are visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory-gustatory and vital. The most effective releasers are under the influence on three channels: perceptual in the process of building a perceptual image, cognitive — based on processing of the received information and practical — in the course of practical interaction.

In addition, we have identified and described the main social and socio-psychological characteristics inherent in student age - high educational level, high cognitive motivation, the highest social activity and a fairly harmonious combination of intellectual and social maturity. The importance and relevance of ecological focus formation in this social group was determined. The time of students coincides with the age of the final formation of the system of values, priorities and life meanings. Also, students are one of the most active, purposeful groups of society; they can be expected to take practical actions to change the environmental situation (Ananiev 1974, Ishchenko 1970).

Analyzing the results of the study, we saw that the students were dominated by the aesthetic type of ecological focus. Individuals with such a dominant type perceived nature as an object of beauty and a source of aesthetic pleasure. The ethical type of ecological focus, where nature was regarded as an object of protection

and prevention from the harmful effects of human activity, was much less developed. The cognitive type of ecological focus also had a low proportion. Unfortunately, among the students there was a large proportion of pragmatic subjective attitude to nature, which was characterized by the perception of nature as an object of benefit to humans. This type was the second most common among respondents.

The results obtained *before* and *after* using releasers showed that the development level of the cognitive component had significantly increased (if earlier the majority demonstrated an average level, then after the training the majority showed a high development level of the component). The proportion of respondents with a high level increased and the number of students with a low level of behavioral component decreased.

Analyzing the influence of releasers on the formation of ecological focus, we can conclude that the use of releasers has a positive impact on the development of behavioral and cognitive (especially cognitive) component of ecological focus of students. In addition, ecological releasers have a positive impact on the development of an ethical type of ecological focus and reduce the share of the pragmatic attitude towards nature.

For more significant results, it is necessary to systematically conduct such lessons with students, preferably two or three times a month. It doesn't take much time, and the effect is obvious. Thus, releasers can serve as an effective means of developing student ecological focus and engaging way of environmental education.

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