

## PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENTS OF SELF- REALIZATIONS OF STUDENTS IN INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

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### *Abstract*

*The psychological aspects of volunteering as a means of self-realization of the students in international volunteer programs have been analyzed in this article. The authors have proposed a definition on the self-realization of students in international volunteer programs. A theoretical-conceptual model of self-realization of the students in international volunteer programs has been used to define the content and structure of the empirical research that has been created. Such personal spheres of the student's self-realization and the main components as cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral have been pointed out in the model.*

Keywords: psychological structure, psychological components, self-realization, international volunteer program, volunteering

### **Introduction**

The theoretical data proves the existence of the specific peculiarities of the students' self-realization. The expansion of a scope of social interaction, the development of a sense of psychological and social competency, the dynamics of a process of identification, the adaptation and reflexive awareness of the students to the conditions of the surrounding socio-cultural environment are

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done through their self-realization in different activities: a realization of their own potential abilities and approbation of their own “I”.

The concept ‘self-realization’ is viewed in various ways. It is viewed as a process of maturation of the personality to accept own evanescence and allow space for the true Self to reveal itself (Wikipedia); fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality (Webster's); it is the impulse to convert oneself into what one is capable of being (A. Maslow).

In determining the sources of the students’ self-realization, the methodological position, according to which the issue of the students’ self-realization has to be considered on the basis of unification of the three pillars of human existence: activity, consciousness and community have been relied upon. Activity is presented with the students’ participation in the international volunteer programs. The socio-psychological environment, host community, host family, volunteer work placements, and group act as the community.

In line with an objective of the paper, it was decided to develop a theoretical-conceptual model of the student’s self-realization in international volunteer programs; structural components of student’s self-realization in international volunteer programs and peculiarities of their dynamics have been specified; theoretical foundations of psychological-pedagogical conditions for ensuring student’s self-realization in international volunteer programs have been highlighted.

### **Methodology of Research**

Theoretical analysis of the literature and the results of surveys have allowed us to develop a theoretical-conceptual model of the student’s self-realization in the international volunteer programs which includes the relevant organizational and psychological components of the programs, and the functional and structural components of self-realization of the students (cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral) (*Figure 1*).

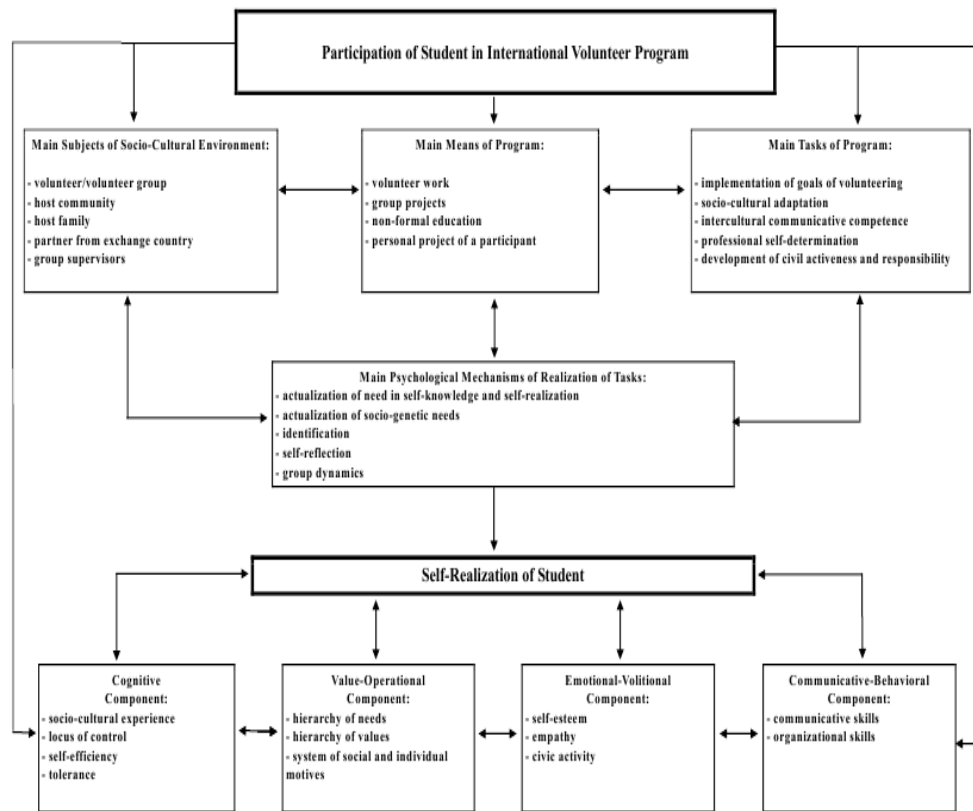


Figure 1. Theoretical-Conceptual Model of Self-Realization of Students in International Volunteer Programs

We are examining the success of the student's self-realization in international volunteer programs through such components as cognitive (socio-cultural experience, locus of control, self-efficiency, tolerance), value-operational (development of hierarchy of needs, hierarchy of values, system of social and individual motives), emotional-volitional (self-esteem, empathy, civic activity) and communicative-behavioral (communicative skills, organizational skills).

In constructing the model we have used the methodological positions that the most important personal components of the student's self-realization, formed during their participation in the international volunteer programs,

should be examined comprehensively in frames of the specified system through such psychological principles as: the principle of determinism; unity of personality, consciousness and activity; development; systematic-structural etc. The presented components of the model have been selected by us on the basis of the empirical research on the international volunteer programs implemented by the National University of Ostroh Academy as well as empirical surveys completed by former participants of the programs.

The main components of the international volunteer programs which ensure the students; self-realization are the following: the subjects of the socio-cultural environment, the tasks of the program, the means of the realization of the tasks and the psychological mechanisms of the realization of the tasks.

The main objectives of the psychological development of the youthful age are: the establishment of one's own identity in terms of one's personality, and development as a future professional and citizen; as well as socio-professional adaptation; the understanding of civil rights and obligations; and social responsibility. It is impossible to research such personal, interpersonal and social competences such as social orientation, intercultural tolerance and self-knowledge without the execution of these objectives.

The international volunteer programs encourage participants to ask questions, discuss and reach consensus on different sociogenic issues of human development. The main objectives of the researched international volunteer programs between Ukraine and Canada are to: 1) encourage volunteers to explore the social structure of the partnering countries and to form an orientation on understanding and the activation of their own civic position and responsibility; 2) promote the active acquisition of ideas, knowledge and interests, and widening the outlook of volunteers; 3) encourage an understanding of the socio-cultural problems of communities in partnering countries, and the adaptation to the roles which youth can play in the creation of sustainable and balanced society; 4) form an understanding and respect for the peculiarities of other cultures and traditions of the host communities in the acquisition of intercultural and communicative competence and tolerance; 5) develop the students' self-learning and understanding of their own dignity as is integral to the components of the person's life and contribute to their comprehensive functioning in such an environment; 6) facilitate professional self-determination of the participants' development through the volunteers' activities such as qualities and skills like critical thinking, efficient use of time,

conflict resolution, stress management, organizational skills, and leadership (Canada World Youth, Rural Development Foundation & The National University of Ostroh Academy Alberta-Ukraine/Poland NETCORPS Exchange Program 2001-2002 Educational Plan, 2001).

Students-participants of international volunteer programs get into a new socio-cultural environment. The volunteer group, host community, host family, and counterpart from the exchange countries as well as project supervisors are the main subjects of the socio-cultural environment. Learning the foundations of group work through volunteer work and living with a counterpart in a host family in a host community practically implements the concept of volunteerism.

All the volunteers must satisfy certain requirements, such as being aged 17-27 years old; having demonstrated active participation in the public life of one's own country; and to represent different economic, social, cultural, religious and language groups of the population. The program's group work helps students to develop organizational, communicative and leadership skills. The volunteers have an opportunity to learn from each other while fulfilling the group projects. Participation in such projects encourages volunteers to achieve more knowledge, and to open and realize their own potential.

The host community provides the volunteers with their work placements and stimulates the process of their adaptation to the new socio-cultural conditions and their active involvement in community life. For the student volunteers, the host family is an integral part of the environment and is the most conducive in the process of learning the socio-cultural features of the community.

The counterparts from the exchange country represent different layers of the respective countries' societies. The establishment of relationships between the counterparts and their joint work on different projects during the program is a significant factor of socio-cultural adaptation of the volunteers in the exchange country, as are the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence and the development of tolerance and empathy.

A very important role in ensuring the effectiveness of the programs is played by the supervisors from the exchange countries who basically define the foundations and basic psychological mechanisms of the program, the tactical and strategic objectives of the group, and the process of implementation of the tasks of the cooperating organizations. Every group is lead by two project

supervisors who have receive special methodological training for ensuring the fulfillment of the required tasks such as ensuring the fulfillment of ethical norms, and ensuring racial, gender and religious equity in the group. The following qualities constitute an ideal and effective project supervisor of the international volunteer program: successful in administrative, strategic, consultative, communicative, disciplinary, educational; and the general management components of the group. Furthermore, project supervisors are successful at planning activities; as well as competent in promoting motivation and keeping control of the program.

On the basis of theoretical analysis we can define the following components of the psychological activities of the project supervisor of a volunteer group:

- Cognitive interaction with volunteers in order to comprehensively reflect on the problematic situations arising in the group;
- Creative interaction with volunteers, foreseeing creative solutions for the program tasks and the development of creativity in the volunteers;
- Constructive component of making group decisions aimed at developing the volunteers' responsibility;
- Communicative interaction with volunteers helping to develop their communicative and organizational skills;
- Organizational interaction at which the supervisors are forming in volunteers an appropriate image of volunteering and activating their motivational sphere (Canada World Youth & the National University of Ostroh Academy Ontario-Ukraine CORE/HEALTH/ECO Exchange Program 2012-2013 Educational Plan, 2012).

The objective implementation of the essential potential of the volunteers, including selection of their future professional activities, depends on the availability of the above mentioned subjects of socio-cultural environment and their interaction during the international volunteer program.

Volunteer work placements are considered to be the key tool of the programs; helping the volunteers establish contacts with the representatives of the socio-cultural environment, master new professional skills, develop a sense of responsibility, discipline, exactingness to themselves and their behavior and activity, a sense of empathy and tolerance.

Another important tool of the volunteer programs which intensifies the development of the volunteer's self-learning is group volunteer work. It helps

participants develop their organizational, communicative and leadership skills, teaches the foundations of stress management and conflict resolution in the group and strengthens relations in between volunteers and the representatives of the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

Non-formal education without any age, professional or intellectual restrictions is a mandatory structural component of the international volunteer programs. Realization of non-formal education does not foresee any formal evaluation of the participant's achievements. It requires the application of innovative approaches, the approbation of innovative methodologies and learning technologies, and a creative approach to the process itself. It is known that the effect of non-formal education is much higher when a person's knowledge comes as a result of one's own motivational and intellectual efforts. Such education enhances as an extension of the volunteer's outlook, the development of their intellectual and cognitive sphere, the formation of a value system, and the professional self-determination.

The educational projects consist of the periodical educational activity days when several members of the group prepare a presentation, invite guest speakers from the host community's volunteer work placements in order to discuss the topical issues of the community which correspond with the main objectives of partnering organizations. Typically such educational days take place weekly, and all the different aforementioned approaches of non-formal education are used.

Personal social projects of every participant foresee the realization of the volunteers' own project during the program. The project must meet the program objectives and be useful for the surrounding socio-cultural environment as well as carry out the tasks set before the program and comply with the objectives of the partnering organizations.

The principles of non-formal education in the international volunteer programs consist in learning the foundations of democracy, civil society, and the requirements of the labor market. Furthermore, non-formal education in international volunteer programs enhances the volunteers' self-esteem, increases their sense of solidarity, and is an optimal combination of freedom and responsibility. In turn, this leads to a fuller objective of internal satisfaction of the students from participation in the program and the maximally complete realization of their potential in the program: that is self-realization.

The issue of self-realization gains particular importance in the reality of

modern Ukrainian society when a stable system of rules, norms and values of social and political life is missing, and there is no confidence in a future professional path of a young person. If previously it was enough for the students to only select and adapt to the models of behavior existing in the society, now it is required to use the mechanisms of self-determination, apply much more efforts and foresee the obstacles in the way of consistent self-realization. The issue of balance between responsibility and the mechanisms of professional self-determination, self-development, and self-realization of a personality has become increasingly important (Ciesolkowicz, 2002).

## **Discussion**

Various aspects of responsibility have been researched by a number of scientists such as I. Bekh (responsibility as an internal source of self-realization of a person); K. Abulkhanova-Slavska, M. Savchyn (responsibility as a sense formation of a person); B. Ananiev, S. Rubinstein (forms of display of responsibility); B. Bratus, O. Veselova (internal responsibility), K. Muzdybaev (responsibility as a result of integration of all the psychological functions of a person). We share the viewpoint of M. Savchyn that “responsibility is a sense formation of a personality, kind of general principle of self-regulation within the integrated motivational and sense sphere of motives, goals and means of life activity” (Bandurka, 1998).

It is known that responsibility plays an important role in determining the psychological space for self-realizations of a personality. It creates potential guidelines for successful self-realization and determines an adequate optimal ratio for external requirements for a person and their own potential abilities. Responsibility in such cases controls a process of a person’s protection and stability in relation to external destructive displays and internal instability. The subjective measure of responsibility is the locus of control which allows the individual to control their own life and behavior, including life activities in the socio-cultural environment (Savchyn, 1997).

Various studies indicate that externals do not take responsibility for the actions taking place during their lifetime, but impose it on others. On the other hand, internals always impose such responsibility for their lives on themselves and feel the connection between the events in their own lives. The locus of control helps individuals overcome life obstacles which provide an



opportunity for self-realization. Internality-externality is connected with various psychological phenomena and processes. It is much easier for internal to overcome the obstacles of their life path, as demonstrated by seeking activeness, the rejection of which gradually leads to the degradation of the individual. Therefore, responsibility in psychological terms combines various mechanisms of self-realization of a personality and creates area for its deployment (Vulpe, 2000).

The researches on civic engagement in Ukraine as a particular phenomenon have just begun. Civic engagement rarely serves as a subject of an independent psychological research. It is mainly being researched in frames of a socio-cultural approach and is associated with the psychological peculiarities of the socialization of personality. Among the important factors of civic engagement we shall highlight the presence of civic activity skills, the development of empathy of a person, communicative and organizational skills, the general culture of a population, the development of civic consciousness of the students, and the efficiency of the activities of civic institutes (A. Huseva, O. Pikalova, N. Saveliuk, N. Khazratova, S. Cholii, O. Shamykh) (Rudkevych, 1997).

We share the viewpoint of V. Abelar that altruism which a person acquires as a result of socialization and focused education is an essential component of civic engagement and is usually considered as a psychological foundation of volunteering. We believe that civic engagement determines the level of civic culture of the society and is a kind of socially beneficial activity. The volunteers learn such important aspects in the exchange countries.

Achieving the goals and objectives of the international volunteer programs is ensured by a number of organizational factors and the consideration of such important psychological mechanisms as the actualization of need in self-knowledge and self-realization, identification, self-reflection, and group dynamics. Actualization of the students' needs in self-knowledge and self-realization is motivated by various forms and tools in the context of realizing other sociogenic needs. These are primarily the needs of cooperation, responsibility, cohesion, competence, recognition, respect, and in bringing about benefits for a community, and influencing the process of decision-making and social affairs etc.

We primarily consider self-knowledge as a person's cognition of their inner abilities on the foundation of which life plans foreseeing changes in

current social status for the desired are built. This issue has been researched by A. Bandura (mechanisms of self-knowledge), N. Hutkina, A. Zakharova, I. Kon, A. Lipkina, V. Stolin, N. Penkovska (self-knowledge as element of self-reflection), I. Chesnokova (levels of self-knowledge) (Penkovska, 2003).

Self-knowledge involves the objectification of the essence of the personality with new content and is closely structurally connected with self-realization. It is a structural unit of the process of self-realization and one of the most important determinants in the selection of the goals of an individual's activities.

Sociogenic needs of a personality appear in the social structure of a personality under the influence of social situation. Another person or a group with whom the subject seeks to establish certain relationships is the essential condition for the satisfaction of the subject's needs. They arise in the process of certain social interactions. There are different approaches to the definition of sociogenic needs and their classification. The approaches belonging to sociogenic needs include the needs aimed at benefits for other people (nobility, justice, protection of others, caring for others), the social relations aimed at one's own good and the good of others at the same time (exchange of ideas, conversation, cooperation, family happiness, friendship, love), and the social relations focused on the self (self-asserting, independence, freedom).

Speaking of sociogenic needs, we primarily mean the needs of satisfaction which make the sense of life and lead to self-realization of the students in terms of usefulness for a community - social civic engagement for the benefit of a community, the implementation of important socially-focused projects, an increase in one's own level of education and qualification, as well as creativity in science, technology and art etc. (Tsyba, 2005).

We agree with the viewpoint of H. Ball that the actualization of sociogenic needs is the result of the interaction of a personality with the socio-cultural environment and is a foundation for the social self-determination and successful self-realization of the personality. The volunteers in the international programs learn the foundations of self-organization and management of the activities, the responsibility for one's own and collective deeds, and about social engagement in resolving the critical needs of a community etc. (Ball, 2003).

Identification and adaptation are other psychological mechanisms of self-realization. Many known representatives of the psychological science have

been researching this topic such as A. Hryshanov, L. Vygotsky, V. Yachmeniova and others.

Identification is a mechanism of unconscious activeness of a personality and a process of the personality's identification with the objects on a basis of learning the characteristics, standards, norms, social attitudes and roles. This mechanism is situational and depends on the individual characteristics of the personality. Such psychological forms allow the volunteers to master different and new kinds of activities, and to learn about the norms of behavior and social values of the socio-cultural environment of the community where the volunteer program takes place. Along with adaptation, it involves a system of measures aimed at the formation of the person's ability to adjust to existing social requirements and criteria by conferring the norms and values of this society (Yachmeniova & Osmanova, 2010).

The aforementioned term is multivalued: it involves a diversity of the levels of this phenomenon and requires a systematic review. The reduction of personal anxiety levels, the domination of positive emotions, the presence of a desire to change one's life situation for the better, adequate self-esteem, self-confidence, ability to solve one's own problems are all indicators of personal identification of the students. This reflects all types of identification and therefore the analysis of such phenomenon is extremely important for our research.

Since the identification involves learning and adapting to the existing society, we believe that this term is contrary to self-realization of a personality which involves the realization of a person in a society. However, self-realization of a student in international volunteer program is impossible without the person's adjustment to the conditions of the surrounding socio-cultural environment. Therefore, studying a mechanism of identification is necessary, and it is impossible to explore a phenomenon of self-realization of the students without knowing the mechanism.

From a standpoint of social psychology, the psychological principles of ensuring the self-realization of a personality in international volunteer programs are inextricably connected with the phenomenon of self-reflection. Self-reflection involves the subject's awareness of how they are perceived by other people and groups. In self-reflection, the subject's reflection on their own psychological condition becomes an object of observation (Podoliak, 2006).

Through self-reflection the volunteers form an image of their own "I",

they substantially broaden and enrich their individual experience of activities and communication in the program. Self-reflection changes the students' attitudes on the surrounding world and develops their thinking. Self-reflection is a critical and creative reinterpretation of the world and the original conceptions of themselves as carriers of the defined stereotypes which results in the development of the personality's self-consciousness as the highest form of psychological development. The increase of the activeness of the students in the realization of their own holistic image is the realization of the essential potential of the student's personality within the present socio-cultural conditions or the ability to self-realization.

Group dynamics are also a very important psychological mechanism of the student's self-realization in international volunteer programs. Group dynamics are a set of processes in the group such as group cohesion, cooperation of formal and non-formal leaders, the division of power, the decision-making process, and the creative activity of the group etc. (Liakh, Bezpalko, Zaveriko, Zvereva, & Zymovets, 2001; Hornostai, 2007; Hosnostai, 2008; Hornostai, 2009; Hryshanov & Tsurkan, 1990).

Group work and group dynamics are in fact conflicting for the participants as on one hand an individual requires others for the realization of their own general or specific objectives, but on the other hand the individual tries to preserve their own freedom and independence. Quite often, the optimality of the subjective internal satisfaction of the volunteers from participation in an international program depends on the successful overcoming of conflict situations in a group. Another dependent factor is the students' participation in joint volunteer activities where the significance of everybody's input is evident and the success of a group depends on individual successes.

In addition to the achievement of the main objectives of volunteering in international programs, a range of other tasks are being achieved which are determined by the multicultural character of these programs. This is a primarily socio-cultural adaptation as an inherent objective during a volunteer's stay in the exchange country. We consider socio-cultural adaptation to be a very important process which all the foreign participants of the international volunteer program are faced with given the unique peculiarities of the socio-cultural environment.

We share the standpoint of T. Stefanenko by understanding this process as entering a new society and a new culture through the gradual assimilation of

its norms, values, examples of behavior. As a result, the individual fully participates in social and cultural life of the new group and the new environment (Stefanenko, 2009).

However we shall note the peculiarities of this process in the international programs. Based on the concept of “culture shock” of P. Adler we point out that the objective of socio-cultural adaptation of the participants of the volunteer programs is not assimilation with another socium and culture, but rather the preservation and development of respect for one’s own culture on the basis of the newly gained perception of the importance and value of the social, cultural and psychological differences and similarities between the host and home culture.

The result of this process depends on a number of objective and subjective factors. One of them is the level of overcoming cultural shock which is primarily caused by a previous socialization of a personality in one’s own socium (perception through the prism of accepted traditions, moral norms, religious beliefs, form of lifestyle etc.), and the stereotypes of behavior in one’s own culture, other-language environment and so on (Adler, 1975).

Most of the researches of the issue of socio-cultural adaptation point out the significant role of personal qualities such as tolerance, high self-esteem, and high level of communicative skills (M. Abramova, V. Volodko, I. Kryvtsova, D. Porokh, O. Rovenchak, O. Suryhin, N. Chesnokova and others).

The participants of the international volunteer programs also have a unique opportunity to acquire a certain level of intercultural communicative competence and professional self-determination. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is increasingly becoming a subject of research of the scientists who present its different definitions (N. Halskova, N. Hez, D. Derdoff, H. Yelizarova, Y. Zaporozhtseva, I. Kovalchuk, Y. Korotkova, S. Perova, W. Starosta, R. Wiseman, G. Chen, M. Yamazaki).

In the context of our topic we primarily consider ICC as an ability that allows a person to realize themselves in conditions of intercultural communication (N. Halskova). It includes an ability to cooperate with the people from other cultures on a basis of due regard of their values, norms and stereotypes of behavior, and choose communicatively appropriate ways of verbal and non-verbal behavior on micro- and macro level (I. Pluzhnyk). The authors also point out an importance of researching cognitive (knowledge about another culture), operational (intercultural communication) and emotional-

value (emotions, tolerance, empathy) components of intercultural communication (I. Kovalchuk) (Kovalchuk, 2010).

According to the three stages of a self-realization of a personality of V. Hupalovska (crystallization of personal essence of an individual, deployment of internal activity of an individual, objectification of essential powers of an individual) (Hupalovska, 2005) and the concept of competencies and coherent cycle of formation of personal self-realization of V. Zarytska (Zarytska, 2006), in our theoretical-conceptual model we have determined the following personal spheres of self-realization of students in international volunteer programs and their main components as cognitive (socio-cultural experience, locus of control, self-efficiency, tolerance), value-operational (development of hierarchy of needs, hierarchy of values, system of social and individual motives), emotional-volitional (self-esteem, empathy, civic engagement) and communicative-behavioral (communicative skills, organizational skills).

As a result of the theoretical analysis we define *the self-realization of students in international volunteer programs* as an active bilateral cooperation with the surrounding socio-cultural environment which results in the formation of the students' intercultural communicative competence, an increase in the students' civic engagement, the actualization of their professional self-determination, and the development of their potential abilities in cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral spheres.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of the research suggested the concept of self-realization of the student youth as their subjective desire for the fullest possible identification and development of their own potential abilities, the continuous and dynamic realization of their potential knowledge, abilities and talents in cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral spheres as a result of the student's cooperation with the surrounding socio-cultural environment. After a series of interviews with past participants of international volunteer programs had been conducted, it was concluded that it is particularly important to study the development of such psychological components of volunteers as socio-cultural experience, locus of control, self-efficiency, tolerance, hierarchy of needs and values, social and individual motives, self-esteem, empathy, civic engagement, communicative and organizational skills. It

has been proved that the main psychological spheres of the student's self-realization in the program are cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral.

Moreover, the authors' definition of *the self-realization of students in international volunteer programs* was proposed. According to this definition, the self-realization of students is an active bilateral cooperation with the surrounding socio-cultural environment which results in the formation of the students' intercultural communicative competence, an increase in the students' civic engagement, the actualization of their professional self-determination, and the development of their potential abilities in cognitive, value-operational, emotional-volitional and communicative-behavioral spheres.

A theoretical-conceptual model of self-realization of students in international volunteer programs was created. Such personal spheres of the student's self-realization and their main components ensuring self-realization as cognitive (socio-cultural experience, locus of control, self-efficiency, tolerance), value-operational (development of hierarchy of needs, hierarchy of values, system of social and individual motives), emotional-volitional (self-esteem, empathy, civic engagement) and communicative-behavioral (communicative skills, organizational skills) have been pointed out in the model.

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Received October 9, 2014  
Revision October 25, 2014  
Accepted November 26, 2014