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# COGNITIVE COMPONENT OF LEGAL AWARENESS IN LEARNERS

Irina Pogozhina (a)*, Marina Sergeeva (b), Diana Pshenichnyuk (c)
*Corresponding author

(a) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Department of Psychology, Mokhovaya st., 11/9, Moscow, 125009, Russia; pogozhina@mail.ru
(b) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Department of Psychology, Mokhovaya st., 11/9, Moscow, 125009, Russia; kayture@mail.ru
(c) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Department of Psychology, Mokhovaya st., 11/9, Moscow, 125009, Russia; yandex.psdiana@ru

### *Abstract*

Legal concepts are one of the components of legal awareness and formed in the course of legal socialization as well as other elements of legal awareness. To date, psychological research devoted to the problems of legal socialization and legal awareness mainly focuses on the study of attitudes to laws or crimes, or individual components of legal awareness. Legal awareness is systemic, so it is important to know not only the specifics of each component individually, but also how its individual components are correlated, which of them is the main one in structure.

The present study examines the relationship between the cognitive component of the learner's legal awareness and his ability to use this cognitive component in the analysis of economic offences (in the case study). Two main hypotheses gave been verified. There are significant relationships: between the developmental level of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of learners' ability to identify significant signs of unlawful situations; & between the developmental of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of learners' ability to apply the rule of logical inference when recognizing economic offences.

The verification of the both hypotheses reveals statistically significant positive results. These findings enable us to assume that the more developed legal concepts are, the more correctly learners apply the knowledge of the relevant laws to recognize situations with unlawful behaviour.

The obtained results can be taken into account in developing training programs to increase the legal awareness of people.

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**Keywords:** Legal concepts, legal socialization, economic offences, ability to recognize unlawful behaviour, logical operation summarizing the concept**.**

## 1. Introduction

In the modern world, the development of legal awareness is an indispensable component of the successful socialization for any individual. According to the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the sphere of the development of citizen's legal literacy and legal awareness, this task should be solved through family upbringing, appropriate educational programs, and also with the help of competent media influence (The Fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the sphere of the development of legal awareness and legal awareness of citizens, 2017).

Legal concepts are closely linked with legal awareness, because they are its cognitive component. In this paper, legal concepts are knowledge of laws and rights. In addition to the cognitive component, the structure of legal awareness includes evaluative element (attitude and assessment of law by cognitive level), energy element (feelings and emotions about legal reality) and behavioural elements ("what"-elements - what behaviour to implement and how to implement it and «how»-elements - motives) (Romanov, 1998).

The Russian psychological research in the field of legal awareness and legal socialization available today are devoted either to individual components of legal awareness, or legal attitudes. Foreign works on these issues focus mainly on legal attitudes and their correlation with behaviour. The majority of the models of legal socialization are also oriented only to one aspect of legal awareness, namely, the evaluative aspect (what changes in relation to the law in the development process). Moral and legal development (knowledge of laws), and their connection with attitudes are still beyond the scope of interests. In addition, it remains unknown, what other types of socializations influence the legal awareness's formation (besides moral and political socializations) (Gulevich, 2006).

The present study proceeds from the principle that legal awareness is systematic. Consequently, to form learners' legal awareness or legal competence, it is necessary to know not only their components, but also what component is the backbone in their structure. In other words, it means revealing what psychological factors (cognitive, motivational or emotional) as components of legal competence have more influence on learners' ability to recognize unlawful situations. If this is cognitive component, then the emphasis in legal education should be made on learning (as providing learners with all the necessary and essential information about laws and rights). If motivational or emotional component is leading, then upbringing plays an important role (as the development of such personal qualities as moral consciousness, emotional intelligence etc.).

## 2. Problem Statement

This article presents one of the parts of the study devoted to the specifics of correlation between the peculiarities of learners' concepts about economic offences (by the example of corruption) and learners' psychological characteristics. We hypothesize that there are significant links between the features of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of specific cognitive skills (to identify the essential features of the concept, to apply the rule of logical conclusion on examples of the economic offences of a specific type).

## 3. Research Questions

There are two questions under study:

1. Is there any significant correlation between the developmental level of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of learners' ability to identify the essential features of unlawful behaviour?

2. Is there any significant correlation between the developmental level of learners' concepts about economic offences and learners' ability to apply the rule of logical conclusion when recognizing economic offences?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the specifics of relationships between developmental level of learners' concepts about the economic offences and learners' ability to recognize economic offences (in the case study).

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Sample group

The sample consisted of 119 respondents. All of them were students of universities of Moscow.

### 5.2. Methods

To diagnose the developmental level of concepts about economic offences (by the example of corruption), we used the questionnaire, which included three tasks: 1) to define corruption (What is corruption?); 2) to give an example of corruption; 3) to explain the example (Why is it corruption?).

To diagnose the developmental level of the ability to recognize economic offences we used the case method (the cases were developed by M.Sergeeva) – the analysis and solution of three types of problem situations with potential opportunities for corruption behaviour: 1) everyday situations; 2) literary extracts; 3) episodes from feature films. The respondents had to read the cases and answer the question: Is the characters' behaviour corrupt? Why is the characters' behaviour corrupt?

To complete both of the tasks successfully, the respondents had to have the formed structure of a special logical operation called "summarizing the concept". The structure of this operation included three components: 1) identifying the essential features of the research concept (as the class of objects) and research object or situation; 2) defining the type of the concept's structure (conjunctive/disjunctive); 3) applying the rule of logical conclusion (Talyzina, 1984). The orientating basis of the concept of corruption used to assess the developmental level of learners' ability to recognize corruption in special cases included three components: 1) an official; 2) abuse of authority; 3) receipt of personal benefit by an official (Pogozhina & Pshenichnyuk, 2014).

### 5.3. Procedure

The respondents consistently performed the tasks of the diagnostic techniques described above. We determined their developmental level of concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of the ability to recognize economic offences. Further, we identified the nature of the relationship between the indicators of the learners' developmental level of concepts about economic offences and the developmental

level of the ability to recognize economic offences. We used the statistical procedure of correlation analysis ($\rho$ Spearman and $\tau b$ Kendall data in SPSS 22.0) for it.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Results of the diagnosis of the learners' knowledge (concepts) about economic offences (by the example of corruption).

Only 29 (24%) of the 119 research participants identify all the three essential features of the concept of "corruption" in answering each question.

### 6.2. Results of the diagnosis of the learners' ability to recognize economic offences (by the example of corruption).

1) The ability to identify essential features of the concept of "corruption" in the case study:

• literary fragment - the majority of research participants (53%) identify 2 features of the concept in the proposed literary fragments when justifying the answer, whether the character's behaviour is corrupt;

• episodes of the films - the majority of learners (65%) identify 2 features of the concept in episodes of the movies in support of the answer to the question whether the character's behaviour is corrupt.

2) The ability to apply the rule of logical conclusion when analyzing problem situations with potential opportunities for corruption behaviour (average learners' total scores for each type of cases):

• everyday situations = 4.7 points (at max = 10); that is, on average, participants correctly recognize 4 or 5 situations out of 10 (24% of subjects);

• literary fragment = 3 points (at max = 5); that is, the majority of subjects (27%) correctly recognized 3 situations out of 5;

• episodes of the films = 6 (at max = 10); that is, most of the subjects (24%) correctly recognize about 6 situations out of 10.

### 6.3. Results of correlation analysis.

To test the main hypothesis of the study, the total respondents' scores are compared for the both diagnostic procedures (Tables 01-02).

**Table 01.** Correlations between the variables "Knowledge about corruption" and "Ability to identify essential features of corruption" (N = 119)

| | | | Knowledge | Features |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| τb Kendall | Knowledge | Correlation coefficient | 1,000 | **,364**** |
| | | 2-sided significance level | . | ,000 |
| | Features | Correlation coefficient | **,364**** | 1,000 |
| | | 2-sided significance level | ,000 | . |
| ρ Spearman | Knowledge | Correlation coefficient | 1,000 | **,485**** |
| | | 2-sided significance level | . | ,000 |
| | Features | Correlation coefficient | **,485**** | 1,000 |
| | | 2-sided significance level | ,000 | . |

** Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-sided).

**Table 02.** Correlations between the subjects' indicators on the scales "Knowledge of corruption" and "Ability to apply the rule of logical conclusion" (N = 119)

| | | | Knowledge | Abilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| τb Kendall | Knowledge | Correlation coefficient | 1,000 | **,339**** |
| | | 2-sided significance level | . | ,000 |
| | Abilities | Correlation coefficient | **,339**** | 1,000 |
| | | 2-sided significance level | ,000 | . |
| ρ Spearman | Knowledge | Correlation coefficient | 1,000 | **,441**** |
| | | 2-sided significance level | . | ,000 |
| | Abilities | Correlation coefficient | **,441**** | 1,000 |
| | | 2-sided significance level | ,000 | . |

** Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-sided).

One can see in Tables 01-02, significant links are detected ($p \leq 0,01$): 1) between the developmental level of knowledge about corruption and the ability to identify essential features of corruption in the case study (Table 1: ρ Spearman = 0.485, τb Kendell= 0.364); 2) between the developmental level of knowledge about corruption and the ability to apply the rule of logical conclusion in the case study (Table 2: ρ Spearman = 0.441, τb Kendell = 0.339).

### 6.4. The discussion of the results.

As mentioned above, the main features of the concept of "corruption" were an official, abuse of authority by an official and personal benefits for an official. Our study showed that only 29 learners (24% of the respondents) out of 119 research participants identified all the three attributes in the definition of the concept of «corruption», both in the example and in the justification of this example. According to the Talyzina's statement about importance of basic logical operation "summarizing the concept» for formation of any concept, one could suppose that only 29 students out of 119 had the highest level of this basic operation. The remaining research participants had difficulties in performing the tasks, because they did not have this logical operation as formed. So, even if they could reproduce the definition of the concept of

"corruption", they had mistakes in other tasks (as well as schoolchildren from Talyzina's study who unmistakably reproduced the definition of the concept of "circumference", found it hard to answer the question is whether the ellipse is a circumference) (Talyzina,1984).

Correlation analysis found the statistical significance ($p \leq 0.01$) of the relationship between the content of learners' concepts about economic offences (by the example of corruption) and learners' ability to recognize unlawful situations.  Consequently, one could assume that the higher the developmental level of knowledge about economic offences among students was, the better they recognized them (they could identify all the necessary features and make the correct logical conclusion). These results were consistent with the results of studies demonstrating that any knowledge and skills were qualitatively better for those subjects who had basic logical structures, in particular, the ability to summarize the concept (Talyzina,1984). Since the procedure for diagnosing both indicators based on the logical operation to summarize the concept, one might suppose that both of the concepts about economic offences and the ability to recognize them were developed better, if in those students who had a basic logical operation to summarize the concept as completely formed.

## 7.  Conclusion

As hypothesized, there is a significant relationship between the developmental level of concepts about economic offences and ability to recognize them. Significant correlations were found between the following:

1) the developmental level of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of learners' ability to identify essential features of unlawful situations;

2) the developmental level of learners' concepts about economic offences and the developmental level of learners' ability to apply the rule of logical conclusion when recognizing economic offences.

The obtained data allow assuming that the more complete and generalized learners' knowledge of economic offences are, the better they can identify all the significant attributions of such offences, and also make the right conclusion in the analysis of cases describing unlawful situations.

The developed technique for diagnosing the ability to recognize economic offences can be used to form legal awareness in children at primary school age, because some of the episodes of literature and movies correspond to this age. In addition, these methods can be used to study the influence of culture on the formation of legal awareness.

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