



THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON THE MOTIVATIONAL SPHERE OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

Relevance. In the context of war, digital transformation and European integration, Ukrainian higher education requires increased attention to the motivational sphere of higher education students as a key factor of educational quality and continuity.

The purpose of the article is to theoretically synthesise contemporary approaches to understanding the motivational sphere of higher education students and to substantiate the proposed model of its structure.

Methodology. The study employs theoretical methods, including analysis, comparison, systematisation and generalisation of scholarly sources; structural-functional analysis of models of the motivational sphere; interpretation of recent empirical findings on the motivation of higher education students; and theoretical modelling based on leading motivational theories.

Results. The article generalises approaches to understanding motive and motivation, outlines the key dimensions of motivation and analyses their role in shaping motivational profiles of higher education students. On this basis, it substantiates a model of the motivational sphere of higher education students as a multilevel system described by four blocks: types of motivation (learning, professional, socially oriented, meaning-related), motivational mechanisms, quality of regulation (a continuum from external to internal regulation) and behavioural manifestations.

Conclusions. The motivational sphere of higher education students is conceptualised as a complex system of multidirectional determinants that integrate internal and external motivational drivers and structure the educational and professional trajectory. The proposed model may serve as an analytical framework for further empirical research and for the development of institutional strategies to support student motivation.

Keywords: motivational sphere, higher education students, types of motivation, components of the motivational sphere, theoretical models of motivation.

Relevance

Ukrainian higher education is undergoing a phase of profound transformation driven by the combined influence of three groups of factors: the war context with its associated risks, losses and mass migration; integration into the European Higher Education Area; and rapid digital transformation, including the emergence of artificial intelligence, micro-credentials and new market expectations. Under these conditions, supporting the



motivational sphere of higher education students becomes a strategic prerequisite for the quality of the educational process, the retention of the student body and the training of competitive professionals.

The motivational sphere is understood as an integrated system of motives, needs, values, meanings, goals, expectations and regulatory mechanisms that determine the direction, intensity and stability of an individual's activity in educational, professional and social domains. The quality of the motivational sphere is determined not only by the level of motivational drive, but also by the degree of internalisation of professional and ethical values, the experience of autonomy and competence, and the maturity of meaning-making and self-regulation.

In Ukrainian psychology, the problem of the individual's motivational sphere is elaborated in various thematic areas. Researchers examine the intrinsic motivation of young people's learning activity (Klymchuk & Horbunova, 2014), the relationship between learning motivation and self-efficacy (Kovalchuk & Semionov, 2024), the specifics of professional motivation of the individual (Piankivska, 2021), and the possibilities of a marketing approach to shaping students' learning motivation (Astakhova, 2023).

A number of scholarly monographs are devoted to the problem of forming the motivational sphere of higher education students. They provide a comprehensive examination of the development of students' learning motivation in the context of activating learning (Zaitseva, 2000), as well as the essence, structure and diagnostics of learning motivation of students in the conditions of the information society (Prorok, 2020).

Against the background of the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war, the study of the motivational sphere of higher education students in a transformed educational and emotional context is becoming increasingly urgent. Research by Kviatkovska et al. (2022) shows the growing role of creative design of distance courses and positive emotional experiences in maintaining learning motivation.

The works of the aforementioned scholars demonstrate that the motivational sphere of higher education students is formed through the interaction between meaning- and value-related structures, self-efficacy and self-regulation on the one hand, and the characteristics of the educational environment on the other, which creates the need for its comprehensive theoretical modelling.

A well-developed motivational sphere promotes goal setting, perseverance, flexible planning, emotional resilience and responsible decision-making. Intrinsic motivation, internalised professional values, and a sense of competence and autonomy are associated with higher academic achievement, academic integrity and student well-being, whereas a deficit of motivation is linked to fragmented effort, alienation and the risk of academic burnout.

Taken together, these lines of research show that the motivational sphere develops at the intersection of success expectancies and task value, the support of basic

psychological needs, effective self-regulation strategies, and an emotionally safe and inclusive educational environment in institutions of higher education.

The purpose of the article is to theoretically synthesise contemporary approaches to understanding the motivational sphere of higher education students and to substantiate the proposed model of its structure.

Methodology

To achieve this aim, a set of theoretical research methods was employed: analysis, comparison, systematisation and generalisation of scholarly sources on the problem of motivation; structural and functional analysis of models of the motivational sphere; interpretation of the findings of contemporary empirical studies on the motivation of higher education students; and theoretical modelling of the motivational sphere based on key motivational theories, which ensures the alignment of Ukrainian and international approaches and the formation of a coherent conceptual field of the study.

The source base consists of peer-reviewed scholarly publications in Ukrainian and international psychological journals, monographs devoted to motivation-related problems, and the results of contemporary empirical studies of the motivational sphere of higher education students. Priority was given to sources published over the last decade (2015–2025), which ensures the relevance of the theoretical generalisations. The search for sources was conducted through international scientometric databases such as Google Scholar and academic communication platforms such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

Results

The problematics of human motives and motivation occupies a central place in the work of contemporary scholars, whose body of research is both multidimensional and heterogeneous: approaches vary depending on theoretical frameworks, empirical data and historical context. The fact that the same researchers periodically revise their own positions on the nature of motives and motivational mechanisms attests to the dynamic and conceptually complex character of this scientific problem area.

In the scientific literature, the concept of motive is interpreted in multiple ways: as an internal state, a need, a goal, a stimulus, an intention, as well as a relatively stable characteristic of the individual, etc. In general, it refers to an internal determinant that gives activity meaning, direction and energy. Accordingly, in the works of Ukrainian psychologists, motivation is considered as a set of factors that sustain and direct behaviour; a system of interrelated motives; an intention that activates an individual's activity and determines its orientation; and a process of mental regulation of activity.

Thus, in V. Shapar's (2007) explanatory psychological dictionary, a motive is defined as a conscious reason underlying an individual's choice of actions and deeds, whereas



motivation consists of drives and conscious or unconscious psychological factors that elicit the organism's activity and determine its direction and goals.

Emphasising the dynamic character of motivation, V. Klochko and A. Kolomiets (2012) view a motive as a complex of stimulators integrated with an individual's needs that prompts the individual to act, and motivation – as a set, a system of interrelated and hierarchically organised motives of the individual's activity.

Motives are viewed by H. Vasianovych (2012) as an internal driving force that prompts a person to engage in activity. The researcher argues that motives of human activity and behaviour are genetically linked to an individual's organic and sociocultural needs.

Within the structure of a motive, two components can be distinguished: a static one (as a stable characteristic) and a dynamic one, which reflects its functional role in activity. In its dynamic dimension, a motive performs a number of interrelated functions (V. Klochko & A. Kolomiets, 2012), in particular: an arousal function (a potential force that activates action) and a directional function (determining the vector of this force); a stimulating function (maintaining arousal during the implementation of an intention); a guiding function (setting the mode of action and expected outcome); an organisational function (preliminary "rehearsal" of the action in consciousness) and a structuring function (analysis of the situation and verbalisation of steps); a controlling function (mediated by emotional feedback); a meaning-making function (imparting personal meaning to events and actions); and a representational function (preliminary mental modelling of goals and means, which shapes the structure and content of the motivational sphere).

Since the concept of "motive" is interpreted differently across theoretical approaches, the principles of its classification depend on the chosen conceptual framework. There is currently no unified, generally accepted typology of motives; instead, a number of alternative classifications are presented, reflecting different research approaches and methodological foundations.

Motives are differentiated by their level of awareness: alongside clearly conscious motives (duty to the community, responsibility, discipline), unconscious ones – habits, biases, stereotypical evaluations of events and people – also play a significant role. According to H. Vasianovych (2012), the motivation of activity may be both proximal (oriented towards the realisation of desired outcomes in the near future) and distal, associated with the attainment of long-term goals.

Other authors (V. Klochko & A. Kolomiets, 2012) distinguish a number of complementary dimensions of motivation: by source – intrinsic (interest in the content and process) and extrinsic (orientation towards rewards, sanctions, social approval); by origin – direct, arising from the activity itself, and mediated, determined by the broader social context and demands; by temporal perspective – proximal (short-term intentions) and distal (long-term goals); by level of awareness – conscious drives and unconscious

impulses, habits, attitudes; by functional orientation – process-oriented (focus on exploration and mastery of ways of acting) and result-oriented (emphasis on achieving a specific outcome). In practice, these dimensions are combined to form individual motivational profiles of higher education students and differentially influence their engagement, persistence and academic outcomes.

In the field of educational psychology, particular interest is directed towards learning motives, which specify general motivational tendencies in the context of educational activity. They mediate higher education students' attitudes towards the content of learning, the organisation of the educational process and their own educational trajectories.

Researcher N. Moiseiuk (2007) distinguishes three blocks of learning motives: (1) directly stimulating motives, which arise from the individual's emotional reaction, where positive or negative experiences directly "push" them to act; (2) prospectively stimulating motives, which are based on an awareness of the importance of knowledge, as well as the worldview, social and practical–applied significance of a subject and its connection with future independent life; (3) intellectually stimulating motives, which are grounded in an interest in cognition as such, curiosity, satisfaction from solving learning and cognitive tasks, and the desire to broaden one's cultural horizon and acquire skills and competences.

In his study of the motivational sphere of future psychologists, F. Podshyvailov (2015) offers his own definition of the motivational sphere, which he considers as "the core (centre) of the space of personality in which the coordinate axes (properties) that characterise it intersect" (Podshyvailov, 2015, p. 23). The scholar identifies four components of the individual's motivational sphere: orientational, mobilising, actualising and realising, which successively flow into one another and form a four-phase cycle.

The orientational component of the motivational sphere ensures the individual's general and differential orientation in the environment, comparing external conditions with internal properties and assessing their safety for maintaining equilibrium and integrity. It relies on innate preconditions and reference points and is manifested in typological properties of the nervous system, characteristics of sensory analyzers and the cerebral cortex, drives, inclinations, general orientation and emotional orientation.

The mobilising component of the motivational sphere reflects the function of recruiting the individual's forces and resources for interaction with the environment. In terms of content, it is a system of acquired and consolidated preconditions manifested in character traits and an individual style of activity, performing an instrumental role in ensuring activity. Its indicators include dynamic stereotypes, attitudes, psychological defences, accentuations, adaptability, personal anxiety, organisation, perfectionism and individual style of activity.

The actualising component of the motivational sphere performs the function of translating existing potential into real activity and of preliminarily determining the



necessary volume of resources for its implementation. It represents a system of mechanisms of awareness and self-motivation that orient the individual towards the development and effective use of their own resources. In the educational context, it correlates with learning motivation and corresponds to the “zone of proximal development”, where the capacity to optimally expend and restore resources is formed. Its indicators include interests, professional orientation, learning motivation and motives for studying.

The realising component of the motivational sphere ensures the embodiment of the individual’s potential in interaction with the environment. In terms of content, it is a system of values, meanings and worldview positions that determine the stability of behaviour, actions and activity. Its indicators are locus of control, achievement motivation, value orientations, meanings, worldview, sense of life and the “picture of the world”. Integratively, the realising component supports the integrity of the open system “personality” as it is manifested in relation to the surrounding world and to itself.

In each act of interaction with the environment, the process starts from the orientational component, moves into the mobilising component, then into the actualising component and is completed by the realising component (Podshyvailov, 2016).

Thus, the approaches outlined above not only identify individual motivational factors, but also describe them as interrelated elements of a single system – the motivational sphere of higher education students.

In international scholarly discourse, the motivational sphere of higher education students is conceptualised through a number of influential theoretical models that specify its internal structure and mechanisms of functioning. These models describe how cognitive expectations and the subjective value of a task (expectancy–value theory), the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (self-determination theory), motivational beliefs and self-regulatory strategies (the social-cognitive approach to self-regulated learning), achievement emotions (control–value theory), the development of interest and the state of “flow” influence the choice of learning activities, effort, persistence and outcomes.

The combination of these approaches makes it possible to view the motivational sphere as a multilevel system in which cognitive, emotional, value-related and self-regulatory components interact, determining the quality and stability of learning activity.

In their review article, Eccles and Wigfield (2002), drawing on expectancy–value theory, demonstrate that learning behaviour is determined by the interaction between success expectancies and the subjective value of a task, which includes four components: interest and intrinsic value (Is it interesting for me to do this?); importance/identity value (How important is this for my identity?); utility value (What practical benefit does this bring?); and “cost”, which includes effort, anxiety and foregone alternatives (How much will this “cost” me in terms of resources?).

These indicators are shaped by beliefs about one's own abilities and self-concept in the relevant domain, prior achievement and socialisation experiences (family, teachers, peers), and they change over the course of development. According to this theory, people's behaviour is driven by the combination of success expectancies (What are the chances that I will succeed?) and the subjective value of the task (Why do I need this?).

In sum, higher success expectancies and a high subjective task value are associated with more well-grounded choices of courses and specific subjects, greater persistence and better learning outcomes, whereas high "costs" reduce engagement even when interest or utility is present.

Within self-determination theory, motivation is explained through the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (a sense of volition and choice), competence (experience of effectiveness, an optimal level of challenge and constructive feedback) and relatedness (warm, supportive relationships). When these needs are supported in the educational environment, external demands become internalised along a continuum of regulation (from external and introjected to identified and integrated), which strengthens intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement.

In contrast, controlling practices (excessive pressure, punishment and threats, formalistic feedback) frustrate these needs, leading to superficial engagement, amotivation and exhaustion. Synthesised findings from educational research within the self-determination theory framework consistently demonstrate that autonomy support from instructors, reinforcement of perceived competence, and high-quality relationships with peers and mentors are associated with greater persistence, better academic outcomes and enhanced student well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The integration of motivational and self-regulatory components is regarded as the mechanism through which a higher education student's beliefs are translated into actual learning behaviours and outcomes. The classic study by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) showed that adaptive motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy and intrinsic subjective task value, are associated with the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (rehearsal, elaboration, organisation, critical thinking, planning, monitoring, regulation) and with effort management; taken together, these variables substantially predict current achievement.

In other words, higher education students who believe in their own capability and perceive meaning and value in the task are more likely to plan their work, monitor their understanding, adjust their strategies and follow tasks through to completion, which in turn leads to improved outcomes. Subsequent research confirmed that self-efficacy is related to achievement both directly and indirectly – through more intensive and higher-quality use of strategies. At the same time, metacognitive self-regulation and effort regulation consistently emerge as the strongest predictors of academic success (Pintrich et al., 1993; Zimmerman, 2002).



From a broader social-cognitive perspective, this is consistent with the view of goal setting, planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluation as a self-regulatory cycle in which motivational beliefs determine the choice of strategies, and successes and failures, in turn, feed back to modify beliefs and subsequent actions.

An additional dimension of learning motivation is constituted by achievement emotions. According to control-value theory, emotions such as enjoyment, pride and interest, as well as anxiety or boredom, arise from subjective appraisals of control (the extent to which a student feels capable of coping with a task) and value (how important or significant the task is).

These emotions have direct effects on learning behaviour: positive activating states generally enhance attention, persistence and flexible thinking, whereas negative deactivating emotions reduce engagement and foster superficial processing of material. At the same time, some negative activating emotions (such as moderate anxiety) may have a nonlinear relationship with outcomes: up to a certain level they help mobilise effort, but when excessive they instead impair performance (Pekrun, 2006). Recurrent emotional experiences build stable patterns of engagement and thus influence long-term learning outcomes. Reciprocal causality has also been confirmed: emotions affect achievement, and achievement, in turn, changes emotions (Pekrun et al., 2017).

A distinct layer of this field of inquiry is constituted by interest and the state of flow. Interest unfolds as a developmental process: from situational interest (triggered by novelty, context or mode of presentation) to stable individual interest, which sustains autonomous cognitive activity over the long term (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

A closely related phenomenon is “flow” – a state of deep immersion in which task demands are balanced with the student’s skills, goals are clear and feedback is immediate. In this state, attention is focused, the perception of time is altered, and the activity itself is experienced as intrinsically rewarding. This directly nourishes intrinsic motivation and supports “deep” processing of material (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

These emotional-value processes are reflected in approaches to learning. A distinction is made between “deep” and “surface” approaches: the former is characterised by the search for meaning, integration and critical engagement with information, while the latter is marked by a focus on mechanical reproduction and minimisation of effort. Studies show that intrinsic motivation, interest and positive activating emotions correlate with deep approaches, whereas external regulators and boredom are associated with surface approaches (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001). Thus, interest, flow and achievement emotions not only accompany motivation, but also configure its quality, determining whether effort is transformed into meaningful learning with long-term outcomes.

The synthesis of the existing approaches points to the need for an integrative model of the motivation of higher education students that combines its different dimensions.

The approach to understanding the motivational sphere proposed below draws on the findings of a master’s study (Yaroshenko, 2025), which conceptualised the

motivational sphere of higher education students as an integrated multilevel system of internal and external incentives and behavioural regulators, within which cognitive, emotional, value-related and self-regulatory components interact. This system provides learning activity with meaning, direction and intensity, and determines the choice of educational trajectories, the level of engagement and the modes of self-regulation in the educational process.

According to this study (Yaroshenko, 2025), the motivational sphere of higher education students represents a latent construct that is not directly measurable and is operationalised through: (1) types of motivation – learning, professional, socially oriented and meaning-related; (2) mechanisms – success expectancies, subjective task value, satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, achievement emotions, interest and flow, and self-regulatory processes; (3) quality of regulation – a continuum from external, through introjected and identified, to integrated and intrinsic regulation; (4) behaviour – task choice, persistence, use of deep processing strategies and adherence to academic integrity.

For further specification, two interrelated components of the motivational sphere – learning and professional motivation – are considered below. Learning motivation directly regulates educational activity and current academic engagement, whereas professional motivation constitutes a system of internal and internalised incentives that determines the choice and sequencing of professional goals, regulates engagement in the acquisition of competences and contributes to the development of professional identity.

In addition to learning and professional motivation, the structure of the motivational sphere of higher education students also includes socially oriented and meaning-related motivation (Yaroshenko, 2025). Socially oriented motivation encompasses an orientation towards belonging and connectedness to a community, mutual support, as well as the desire to help others. A distinct social vector within it is the striving for prestige and recognition. Socially oriented motivation links individual learning efforts with the values of the group and the professional community.

Meaning-related motivation refers to the student's orientation towards life meaning and vocation; it involves the congruence of learning and the future profession with basic values and the self-concept, and ensures the long-term meaningful coherence of the educational and professional trajectory. At the same time, it is not reducible either to current learning activity or solely to career considerations or social involvement.

Table 1 presents the components of the motivational sphere of higher education students (learning, professional, socially oriented and meaning-related motivation) and their key indicators.



**Table 1, Components of the motivational sphere of higher education students
(Yaroshenko, 2025)**

No	Types of motivation	Indicators
1	Learning motivation: orientation towards educational activity and academic engagement.	Cognitive: cognitive interest, appraisal of task significance, success expectancies, clarity of goals, deep processing. Affective: positive achievement emotions, low test anxiety, academic self-esteem. Regulatory: self-regulation (planning, monitoring, reflection), implementation intentions, persistence in task completion. Ethical: academic integrity, adherence to rules of collaboration. Behavioural: regular attendance, timely completion of assignments, active participation, use of feedback.
2	Professional motivation: orientation towards the acquisition of competences and the development of professional identity.	Identificational: professional identity, career clarity, alignment of the profession with personal values. Agentic: professional self-efficacy, mastery orientation, readiness to take on challenging tasks. Value-normative: acceptance of professional ethics, responsibility, orientation towards quality. Instrumental: perceived professional utility of learning, proactivity in practical activities, portfolio development. Social: striving for professional recognition and respect within the professional community. Behavioural: participation in professional communities and events, attainment of micro-credentials, systematic updating of competences.
3	Socially oriented motivation: orientation towards social benefit and community belonging.	Prosocial: empathy, willingness to help without direct benefit, orientation towards social good, sense of justice, civic responsibility. Affiliative: sense of belonging and connectedness, trust in the community, striving for cooperation. Behavioural: volunteering, teamwork, mutual support, activity in educational and civic communities.
4	Meaning-related motivation: orientation towards life meaning and vocation.	Meaning-making: life purpose, sense of vocation, awareness of the reasons for studying and professional choice. Value congruence: alignment of the educational trajectory with basic values and the self-concept, internal coherence of decisions. Resilience and perseverance: willingness to overcome difficulties for the sake of meaningful goals, tolerance of uncertainty. Reflectivity: self-evaluation of progress and goal adjustment, narrative coherence (a consistent life story). Behavioural: long-term projects, consistent goal-directed choices, investment in development.

Note: Each type of motivation can be realised at different levels of regulation – from external (through rewards/sanctions) to intrinsic (through interest and values). Indicators may overlap across types of motivation, since the motivational sphere is an integrated system.

In our view, such parameters as intrinsic and extrinsic, direct and mediated, proximal and distal, conscious and unconscious motivation should be considered as interrelated but relatively independent axes for describing the motivational sphere. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, in particular, should be interpreted as a continuum of quality of regulation that cuts across all content-related types of motivation: amotivation – external regulation – introjected regulation – identified regulation – integrated regulation – intrinsic motivation.

Each component of the motivational sphere can be realised at different levels along this continuum – from externally determined to internalised and intrinsically maintained forms. This gradation delineates a coherent field for analysing the motivational sphere of higher education students and serves as a methodological basis for further research on the psychological preconditions of its development.

Thus, in practice, the motivational sphere of higher education students can be described within a single analytical framework suitable both for theoretical modelling and for subsequent empirical study of motivational profiles.

Discussion

The model of the motivational sphere of higher education students proposed in this article makes it possible to reinterpret existing theoretical and empirical findings, aligning with leading motivational approaches while at the same time highlighting types of motivation specific to the university context, in particular learning, professional, socially oriented and meaning-related motivation. From this perspective, the development of the motivational sphere of higher education students appears not as a localised increase in learning motivation, but as the construction of a holistic ecosystem of conditions that enhance students' autonomy, competence and relatedness, increase the subjective value of learning and reduce its "costs".

Particular attention is currently required to contextual factors (war, economic instability, forced migration, combining study with work), which may shift the balance between internal and external drivers and foreground the issue of supporting the emotional dimension of learning activity. Under such conditions, the question remains open as to the extent to which motivational models developed predominantly for relatively stable educational systems can be directly applied to the realities of prolonged danger and resource depletion, where the boundary between autonomous choice and forced adaptation becomes significantly blurred.

Therefore, the proposed model outlines an analytical field rather than claiming to provide a definitive answer, and creates a basis for further empirical studies of the motivational profiles of higher education students and for the development of programmes to support student motivation in diverse social conditions.



Conclusions

The synthesis of theoretical approaches allows the motivational sphere of higher education students to be viewed as a complex system of multidirectional determinants that provide learning with a meaningful foundation, direction and intensity, and integrate internal and external drivers in each individual case.

International approaches specify the mechanisms of this system: the expectancy–value model explains choice and persistence through the combination of success expectancies and the subjective value of the task; self-determination theory – through the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness; and theories of self-regulated learning, achievement emotions, interest and flow – through the relationship between motivational beliefs, emotions and strategies, on the one hand, and depth of engagement and outcomes, on the other. These approaches describe these factors as interrelated elements of a single system – the motivational sphere of higher education students.

Based on the synthesis of theoretical approaches and the results of the previous study, a theoretical model of the motivational sphere of higher education students has been outlined. The proposed model conceptualises the motivational sphere as a connected system of internal and external incentives and behavioural regulators, within which cognitive, emotional, value-related and self-regulatory components interact. This system is operationalised through four interrelated blocks: types of motivation, mechanisms, quality of regulation and behavioural manifestations. In this configuration, the model of the motivational sphere serves as an analytical framework for describing educational and professional trajectories.

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