# Developing parental psychological competencies by means of online training

## Desarrollo de competencias psicológicas parentales mediante medios de formación en línea

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**Resumen**
El propósito de este artículo es fundamentar los métodos exitosos para desarrollar competencias psicológicas en los padres en el contexto de una pandemia global basada en tecnologías en línea. El método de investigación líder consistió en la integración de los recursos de capacitación en línea, que ha proporcionado una visión integral del diagnóstico en las características personales de los padres de los estudiantes, lo que les impide resolver con éxito los problemas dentro de la familia, complementado con el fomento de las competencias psicológicas de los padres. Este artículo presenta el análisis de materiales recolectados en el curso de diagnósticos en línea de problemas relacionados con la implementación de las competencias psicológicas de los padres. En conclusión, presentó un panorama general del programa de desarrollo "Caleidoscopio familiar", brindó evidencia de su alto impacto en la adopción del estilo parental productivo. Los hallazgos del artículo pueden ser útiles para los psicólogos educativos que ya ejercen y que se esfuerzan por mejorar las interacciones dentro de las familias de los estudiantes para crear un entorno favorable para la socialización exitosa de los niños.

**Palabras clave:** Competencias psicológicas, competencias parentales, programa de desarrollo, formación online, tecnología online en psicología.

**Abstract**
The purpose of this paper is to substantiate the successful methods for developing psychological competencies in parents against the backdrop of a global pandemic based on online technologies. The leading research method consisted in integration of the online training resources, which has provided a comprehensive view of diagnostics into the personal characteristics of students' parents preventing them from successful resolution of problems within the family complemented with the fostering of psychological parental competencies. This paper presents the analysis of materials collected in the course of online diagnostics of problems related to implementation of

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psychological parental competencies. In conclusion, it presented an overview of the development program "Family Kaleidoscope", provided evidence of its high impact on the adoption of the productive parenting style. The paper findings may be useful for the already practicing and future educational psychologists striving to improve interactions within the students' families for creating a favorable environment for successful socialization of children.

**Keywords:** Psychological competencies, parental competencies, development program, online training, online technology in psychology.

## Introduction

Today, demographic problems in the urbanized countries leading to the falling birth rates and strong propaganda of values upheld by the communities of people with nonstandard sexual identities aimed at devaluing a traditional family and its role in upbringing the younger generation, aggravated the antagonism, the solution to which lies in the introduction of changes in the state-led family policy in Russia. The real legislative, financial and executive steps have been taken to strengthen support from the state for families with children and offer them good incentives, to prevent infant and maternal mortality, and create conditions for ensuring high level of pre-school educational services delivered to the working parents.

In 2019, the implementation of the Russian Federation National Project "Education" (National Project "Education", 2018) has begun, it places high emphasis on the measures intended to support families with children. Within the frames of this project, parents of preschoolers and students of general education programs receive support of various kinds. However, alongside the positive trends, the parents of students experience certain psychological difficulties. They are caused by different factors, which include the low competence in the field of child-parent relationships, poor understanding of own specific features and specific features of own child (individual, age-related, psychological), upbringing in the family with reliance on intuition, along with other difficulties.

The global pandemic with intermittent periods of self-isolation and distance learning called for parents to spend more time with their children. However, amidst the chronicle deficit of time, these parents are often not receiving sufficient psychological help. Of particular concern is the lack of diagnostic, enlightening and consulting psychological help for parents of students through the use of available online resources. This has a considerable suppressing effect on the positive outcomes of the support provided to families with children on their path to adulthood, adding more urgency to the research into this problem caused by the low level of psychological competences of present-day parents of students, and the prospective solutions based on the online technologies.

*Literature Review*

The analysis of literary sources helped to distinguish several thematic blocks with productive ideas for effective research and development of psychological parental competencies by means of online training. The special studies were dedicated to the results of online diagnostics covering a range of components of parental competencies: level of satisfaction with the quality of life and own parental competencies, anxiety in the family, parents' attitude to a child (Vardanyan and Kechina, 2020). Researchers look into the essence of parental competence (Bykova et al., 2020), specifics of its evolvement (Khalikova, 2020) and development through the use of coaching technologies based on personality-activity and system-structural approaches to analysis of upbringing processes in the family (Pankratova and Ibakhadzhieva, 2019), characteristic features of parental competences (Lesina, 2018).

Still, for carving out a more precise definition of the essence of psychological parental competencies it is essential to embrace some of the broader ideas focusing on different aspects of correlation between competencies and competence (Zimnyaya, 2013), their development models (Zhuravleva et al., 2018), harnessing the developing potential of professionally oriented training courses (Shukshina, 2018), description of psychological competencies and monitoring of their level (Vardanyan et al., 2018). In our understanding, the psychological parental competencies are the properties of personality acquired during the lifetime, which allow building positive cooperation and communication with own children on their path to adulthood.

The key idea running through many publications is recognition of a huge role played by the family environment in development of a child (Lushpaeva, 2019). It has been proposed to use diverse solutions targeting the problem of a child upbringing in the family: utilize the potential of educational institutions in bolstering the involvement of parents in the upbringing of their children (Schemerova and Kirkina, 2018), encourage parents and children to engage in joint extracurricular activities (An and Western, 2019), foster the readiness of children for successful adaptation with due regard for their social context and conditions of living (Barcaeva and Ryabova, 2019), bridge the gap between a strong intent to support the healthy behavior of children and the real provision of such support (Rhodes et al., 2019), address mental health disorders while taking in consideration their experience of being discriminated in the family by their parents (Tran, 2014).

The studies revealed characteristic features of psychological security of intrafamily relationships (Dolgova et al., 2020), a correlation between child-parent relationships in Russia and the family type (Yashkova et al, 2019), indicators of child-parent relationships with account of the specifics and structural features of the urban living environment of a family (Rean and Konovalov, 2020), ways to enhance the attentional control and executive functioning to improve parent-child interactions (Spruijt et al., 2020), the affect of parental gender on child mental health (Loevaas et al., 2018). Scholars looked into correlation between academic achievements of children and

different factors of effect within the family: parental autonomy combined with psychosocial activity of child (Vasquez et al., 2016), behaviors of parents (Matthes and Stoeger, 2018), parental involvement in the upbringing of children (Rogers et al., 2009), impact of the supervisory parenting style on the low academic performance and low engagement of adolescents in the learning process (Wuyts et al., 2017). The works referred to above contain valuable ideas for paving a way forward for the development of psychological parental competencies.

Nowadays parents are active users of social media, so it is important to embrace the possibilities offered by the existing and newly created Internet resources for diagnosing personal properties related to parenthood that may pose a barrier to the successful solution of problems within the family, for finding a way for constructive overcoming of any obstacles that may emerge and subsequently for preventing the lack of competencies crucial for successful implementation of this important mission. Thus, it leads to transformations in pedagogical theory and methodology at the global level (Chigisheva, 2015).

Of great interest is information of a rather generalized nature about the use of mass open online courses (Glukhova and Ephremova, 2019), high importance of prevention of Internet addictions (Kechina et al., 2018) and teaching teenagers to exercise prudence in interpersonal communications in virtual space (Buyanova et al., 2018). It is emphasized that Internet users, quite many of whom are parents, spend significant amounts of time on social media, where they communicate online using "avatars" and "nicknames", in an attempt to find and analyze information about parenting (Pogorelov, 2020). Thus, the relevance and urgency of ensuring the development of psychological parenting competencies by means of online training are recognized. However, this problem is dealt with only fragmentarily within other topics, so its exploration as an independent subject of research is justifiable.

## Methodology

The present research is both of quantitative and qualitative character as it simultaneously relied on two groups of methods: theoretical - analysis and systematization of materials sourced from the scientific literature; and empirical - a questionnaire "Parenting Styles" and a test for revealing the parental attitude to a child (Arbatskaya and Dichina, 2017). Such methodological approach provided a fuller understanding of the studied phenomena and revealed development dynamics of parental psychological competencies by means of online training.

The research run a trial test of the program for developing parental competencies by means of online training and assess its effectiveness. The research objectives were as follows: reveal the major psychological difficulties encountered by the parents of students as caused by parenting style and parental attitude to children; also, substantiate and run a trial test of the program for

developing parental competencies which purpose is to help to overcome the revealed difficulties by means of online training; and prove its effectiveness.

The research was held in June-July 2020 on the electronic learning platform of the Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev (http://vr.mordgpi.ru/) and covered parents of junior schoolchildren and adolescents for whom during the summer break an online camp (https://www.mordgpi.ru/news/3473/77113/) was organized in a distance format.

## Results

The parents, whose children attended the summer-break online camp, were offered a possibility to undergo an examination assessing the level of their parental competences in the form of online diagnostics accessible through the electronic link with the help of BigBlueButton technology. Based on the results of online diagnostics, 18 parents were selected with serious problems in implementation of psychological parental competences. Drawing from the results of analysis of the problems revealed by the online diagnostics targeting psychological competences of a group of selected parents, an online program for competencies development "Family Kaleidoscope" was created and made available for parents by means of online training.

The online program consisted of 14 group sessions with the elements of a seminar, a discussion, a workshop and leisure activities. In addition, the targeted work was conducted with some parents and families with the use of modern online technologies (individual consulting for parents, group psycho-corrective or psycho-developing training work with families).

### *Development potential of the online training program for parents*

Topics for discussion at the group sessions of the program were wide-ranging: "I Choose Safe Childhood for My Child", "I am Looking in the Mirror of Happy Parenthood", "A Successful Parent", "Modern Childhood in Virtual Reality", "My Emotions", "Our Family Pictured in a Drawing", etc. Let us assess the developmental potential of some sessions by way of example.

An online seminar for parents "Parents and Children in the Lens of Reality" was structured as an analysis of video-cases depicting situations into which the parents were supposed to immerse themselves and then develop a constructive strategy for finding a solution in the context of building interaction with their own child. The range of covered questions included: parent's contribution to their child's success in school, role of parents in the development of their child's personality, abuse in the family, optimal parenting styles, teenage subcultures popular among children, addictive behavior, co-dependent relationships in the family, teenage crisis, Internet addiction, bullying among peers.

An entertaining intellectual show for parents and children "We are Strong Together!" was held on the eve of the All-Russian Day of Family, Love and Fidelity. Participants learned the origins of the holiday, and accentuated a role of love and respect for their families and their relatives. A discussion was held on modern approaches to raising children in the family; the relationships between parents and children; importance of setting the boundaries of personal space of both children and parents. Many parents noted that participation in such events taught them how to interact with their children in a constructive way, contributed to building a creative environment in the family and developing a life-affirming attitude.

The psychological online lounge "Parents FOR a Safe Childhood" was devoted to an analysis of training case studies and included elements of eco-art therapy. Especially vigorous were discussions on such topics as social media and modern children, causes of conflicts between parents and adolescents, constructive resolution of child-parent conflicts, upbringing through love, etc.

### *Effectiveness of the online training program for parents*

In order to assess the effectiveness of the online training program, a repeated diagnostics of psychological parenting competencies was carried out. Let us examine changes that occurred. For revealing the prevailing parenting style in the relationships of parents with the children, a questionnaire "Parenting Styles" was used. The assessment of changes is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Changes in parenting styles*

| Parenting Styles | Ascertaining stage | | Control stage | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Abs.** | **%** | **Abs.** | **%** |
| Authoritarian | 6 | 33.3 | 4 | 22.2 |
| Indifferent | 4 | 22.2 | 2 | 11.1 |
| Authoritative | 3 | 16.7 | 9 | 50 |
| Liberal | 5 | 27.8 | 3 | 16.7 |

Source: compiled by authors.

Analysis of the results of ascertaining stage shows that the overwhelming majority of selected parents (83.3%) have unproductive parenting style preventing them from successful solution of the psychological parenting issues they face. Comparison of the results of ascertaining and control diagnostics of parenting styles revealed that after completion of the online training program the number of parents using least productive styles (authoritarian, indifferent and liberal) reduced by 11.1%. At the same time, the number of parents using a highly productive authoritative style increased by 33.3%. These parents acquired an ability to listen carefully to their children,

make decisions together with them and explain the reasons for the decisions made. For revealing the prevailing attitude of parents to a child, a test titled the same was used. The assessment of changes is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Changes in parental attitude to a child*

| Parental Attitude to a Child | Ascertaining stage | | Control stage | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Abs.** | **%** | **Abs.** | **%** |
| Optimal emotional contact | 5 | 27.8 | 11 | 61.1 |
| High emotional distance | 6 | 33.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| Excessive concentration on a child | 7 | 38.9 | 4 | 22.2 |

Source: compiled by authors.

Analysis of the results obtained at the ascertaining stage revealed that the overwhelming majority of selected parents of students (72.2%) experienced difficulties in establishing, maintaining and developing an emotional contact with their children, which mainly manifested in two opposite low productive extremes: hypoprotection or hyperprotection. Comparison of the results of ascertaining and control diagnostics shows that after delivery of a complex of online lessons to the researched sample, the number of parents demonstrating high emotional distance in relationships with their children in the form of hypoprotection reduced by 16.7%, and the number of parents excessively concentrated on a child in the form of hyperprotection also reduced. At the same time, the number of parents having optimal emotional contact with a child increased more than twice (by 33.3%). Such parents successfully developed the emotional self-regulation in the activity, behavior and communication with a child.

**Discussion**

Professional development of psychological competencies is primarily important for future psychologists, since the process of solving professional problems by them can take place only when it is equipped with psychological competencies (diagnostic, preventive, consulting, corrective, developmental) (Vardanyan et al., 2018). However, there are many categories of people in whose life psychological competencies are also in demand. These include the parents of schoolchildren, the experience of relationships with whom has a decisive impact on the mental development of children. It goes in line with the ideas expressed by Cheng, et al. (2021) who investigated the mental health of children and working parents in the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Analysis of the problem of implementation of psychological parental competencies in a selected experimental group of parents showed that at the ascertaining stage of research most of them demonstrated low productive parenting styles (83.3%) combined with low productive forms

of relationships (hypoprotection - 33.3%), hyperprotection - 38.9%). That was a major barrier to the effective building of healthy intrafamily relationships and weakened the capacity of such parents to ensure successful socialization of their children. Also, Goltsova and Yakovleva (2018) claimed that hypoprotection reduces the effectiveness of the development and socialization of children.

The proposed program for developing psychological parental competencies by means of online training tailored to psychological difficulties encountered by parents was meant to give them a deep awareness of the encountered problems and help them find productive ways for their resolution. The program uses individual, couple and group online technologies of psychological-pedagogical support of modern parents adequate to the tasks at hand. This is consistent with the position of some Russian researchers. In particular Bykova, Istomina and Samylova (2020) pointed out the importance of psychological-pedagogical support for the formation of parental competence which they propose to develop through the following psychological mechanisms: awareness, understanding, reflection, learning, maintaining motivation and interest in the parenting process.

Empirical data obtained at the control stage of our research prove the effectiveness of the development program: 33.3% of program participants learned the ways for applying a more productive authoritative parenting style and their overall number increased to 50%; 33.3% of program participants learned the optimal ways of self-regulation during emotional contact with their children and their overall number increased to 61.1%.

The research has proven that integration of diagnostic and development tools of online training facilitates the solution of the stated problem. Similar results were obtained by foreign researchers Hopwood, Mäkitalo (2019) and Lépinel (2020) who studied the practice of teaching and facilitation for parents.

Therefore, integration of online training tools helps to build a program for developing psychological parental competences tailored to specific needs based on the prior diagnostics of encountered difficulties which facilitates learning of productive ways of action and specific actions for more effective handling by parents of psychological problems in relationships with their children and creation of favorable environment for their successful socialization.

## Conclusion

Psychological parental competences are the properties of personality acquired during the lifetime, which allow building positive cooperation and communication with own children on their path to adulthood, while ensuring a favorable environment within the family for child's development and helping to address the problems occurring in the public social space beyond the family. However, a significant number of modern parents of students experience significant

difficulties in interaction with their children on their path to adulthood and for accomplishment of this sensitive mission they need purposeful training intended to teach them certain actions crucial for proper implementation of psychological parenting competences.

Proceedings of the research validated that amidst the global pandemic parents of students prefer compact online training programs that address their psychological problems and help to find adequate solutions. The program for developing psychological parental competencies by means of online training based on the prior online diagnostics, contributed to the deeper awareness by parents of the causes of many negative occurrences in the family environment (conflicts, psychotraumatic state of family members during the divorce, high anxiety of parents as concerns upbringing of children, etc.). As part of the program, original online technologies of psychological and pedagogical support for present-day parents were tested (psychological online lobbies, online training sessions, online eco-art-therapy sessions, online consultations with family members, online group counseling of couples). Through participation in the development program parents learned effective parenting styles and the actions for emotional self-regulation. The gained experience of success in psychological parenting tasks contributed to overcoming the previous low-productive parenting styles and higher weight of trusting emotional contact with own child.

The prospective line of research is seen in designing and implementing an online program for developing psychological parenting competencies, including a compact universal basic module (building awareness and helping to handle typical psychological parenting problems), supplemented by differentiated modules (aimed at building awareness of special problems and showing effective ways to address them).

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