



Research Article

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Perceptions of Life Success and Moral Qualities of a Modern Person of Generation Z: A Study of Economics and Humanities Students

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Abstract

The study aims to establish the ideas of Kazakh Generation Z students about a modern person's life success and determine their relationship with moral qualities. The authors utilize the methods of document analysis, survey, and data analysis. The study is conducted on 160 students in two different specialties, economics and the humanities. The results demonstrate that economics students are more likely to note qualities associated with socioeconomic status and the attitude to activity and work, while humanities students are more focused on the qualities of moral consciousness and the attitude to other people. The study also shows that some young Kazakh people deem immoral qualities important in achieving life success. Kazakh student youth believes that negative qualities prompt people to commit immoral actions and deeds, while more positive qualities, on the contrary, shield the individual from immoral actions. The authors conclude that the young Gen Z in Kazakhstan continues to adhere to traditional cultural values and considers them important in achieving success. However, traditional values are not static and may change depending on the professional and regional socialization environment of Gen Z youth.

Keywords: life success, generation Z, Kazakh students, morality, conscience

1. Introduction

Modern researchers argue (Vinichenko et al., 2022) that representatives of Generation Z born between 1995 and 2020, regardless of their place of residence, are characterized by common traits and value orientations. Young people born in the age of virtual reality (Alieksiienko, Kryshtanovych, 2022) are marked by a marked transformation of values, lifestyle, and skills (Berfin Ince et al., 2023). Research suggests (Szymkowiak et al., 2021) that this primarily owes to their socialization occurring in the environment of information technology, which, in turn, shapes the worldview and behavior of young people. Digitalization is one of the most influential factors characterizing the process of information perception. Studies also show (Vinichenko et al., 2021) that Gen Z is not idealistic but has a pragmatic approach to life which is reflected, among other things, in their attitude to personal welfare and career growth opportunities (Syzdykova et al., 2022), as well as the striving to save emotional and intellectual resources and avoid responsibility (Noskova et al., 2022). Research reveals a trend of change in the self-identification of Gen Z individuals, namely a rising sense of cosmopolitanism of the younger generation, which is distinguished by the reduced significance of the factor of identification with a particular country, place of birth, or nationality (Tikhomirova, Tikhomirov, 2022).

Despite their common traits, representatives of Gen Z differ in living standards, values, culture, and models of behavior (Vallé et al., 2018). Furthermore, these differences are observed both between and within countries. For instance, in Kazakhstan, the trend of increased cosmopolitanism was discovered back in the late 1990s among Generation Y student youth (Kaliyev et al., 2023), but it became much stronger as Gen Z youth grew up. However, it is important that this trend is not universal for all regions of the country, as discrepancies are observed between bigger and smaller cities of Kazakhstan (Togaibayeva et al., 2020). We believe that differences in values and attitudes among people depend on various factors, such as the economic culture of the region of socialization, which covers the values, beliefs, and attitudes of people towards economic activity, as well as the education received and professional orientations. The perception of success among Gen Z youth in Kazakhstan is largely contingent on the economic culture and career opportunities in the specific region. Depending on the direction of the region's development, young people develop different ideas of success.

For example, large regions, such as the Almaty and Akmola regions (Number of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 2022) have well-developed entrepreneurial culture; in these regions, young people are more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a way to success and prioritize training in economic specialties. Conversely, if there is a downturn in the economy and limited job prospects, as in the Mangistau region (Rating of quality of life in the cities of Kazakhstan in 2021, 2022), success may seem difficult to achieve for young people.

Aside from economic and professional factors, a great role in the formation of young people's convictions is played by moral values. This impact is reflected in their expectations of moral qualities from the modern person, such as conscientiousness, openness, and altruism. The region's economic culture can both support and hinder these values (Kalashnikov et al., 2023). For example, the Turkestan and Kazylorda regions have the highest number of corruption offenders (Corruption in akimats: executive bodies of which regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan employ the most bribe-takers and corrupt offenders, 2022), and young people there may become disillusioned with traditional notions of success and instead seek alternative ways that correspond to their moral values.

In this light, the research question in the present study is formulated as follows: differences in the economic culture of Gen Z youth living in different regions can affect their perceptions and attitudes toward life success and the moral qualities of modern people. These differences in values can result in varied interpretations of what it means to be a successful person and shape young people's behavior to achieve success.

In this connection, the purpose of this study is to identify the ideas of Kazakh Gen Z students about the life success of a modern person and to determine their relationship with moral qualities.

2. Literature Review

As research indicates (Yembergenov et al., 2022), the concept of economic culture encompasses the image of a successful person as a factor that determines the content and development of an individual's economic culture (Kapustina, 2021). The economic culture of a person is understood as their psychological and economic qualities, which are determined by the system of economic values of society and reflect the economic type of a person of this society (Liu et al., 2023). The image of a successful person becomes a carrier of personal economic culture and determines its content.

Analysis of scientific literature demonstrates that the morality of the modern person as an economic person is explored by scientists from various fields and belongs to the topical problems of modern sociology (Bocharova, 2021), psychology (Borisova, 2018), philosophy (Kapustina, 2021), and pedagogy (Dyuseminova et al., 2018). In particular, there are studies on the socio-psychological regularities of the formation of economic culture among young people in the educational space (Yespolova et al., 2019) and the role of the moral factor in the economic socialization of Gen Z individuals (Priporas et al., 2017). There are also semantic studies on the features of the relationship between economy and morality in the system of economic-psychological factors, such as the awareness of Gen Z representatives in the socioeconomic sphere (Francis, 2022) and their value-emotional attitudes to the socioeconomic space (environment and people) (Degtev et al., 2022) and active forms of personal economic activity, as well as analysis of the types of Gen Z monetary culture depending on attitudes toward money (Windasari et al., 2022).

In the last decade, the understanding of the relationship between socioeconomic relations and morality has changed (Yamane, Kaneko, 2021). Currently, morality is recognized as one of the most important factors of socioeconomic activity (Shorey et al., 2021). Public opinion attaches increasing importance to the moral qualities of socioeconomic actors associated with the protection of the welfare, safety, and health of large groups of people (Hoffower, 2021).

In the studies addressing the relationship between the moral and modern perceptions of personal life success, it has been established that in modern market conditions, the violation of moral norms becomes economically inexpedient (Hossain et al., 2023); there is dissonance between the moral and socioeconomic (Nikolić et al., 2022) in the actual self of the individual.

Proceeding from the research question, we believe that differences in the economic culture of Kazakh Gen Z youth may influence their ideas and attitudes toward life success and the moral qualities of a modern person.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research design and methods

To realize the purpose of the study, we chose a mixed-methods type of study. The mixed type of research involved the use of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The study was conducted in 2022 based on the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Turan-Astana University, Esil University, S. Seifullin Kazakh Agro-Technical University, and Astana International University.

The study employed the following research methods:

- the method of analysis of documents on the interpretation of the concepts of life success and morality and the stability and moral development of the individual;
- the method of student survey using the method of associations on the topic "Moral Qualities of a Successful Person" to study the ideas about a successful person and the role of the moral foundation of actions and deeds in the economic and social spheres of life;
- the method of data analysis;

3.2 Research participants

The study included 160 people, of which 80 were economics students and 80 – humanities (philosophy and history) students. The research sample consisted of young men (35%) and women (65%) aged 18-25, which generally reflects trends in gender distribution in the universities. The age distribution was as follows: 18 years old – 10%; 19-20 years old – 60%, 21-24 years old – 15%; 25 years old – 15%.

3.3 Research stages

The first stage of the research consisted of document analysis. The research materials included monographs and articles concerning the issues of interpretation of the concepts of life success and morality published in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science over the past 5-7 years.

The second stage of the study involved a student survey using the method of associations (associative experiment) on the topic "Moral Qualities of a Successful Person".

The association method was also used to explore the students' recognition of the role of morality as a factor in moral and immoral actions and deeds of a person in various areas of life.

The goal of this method was to identify the students' ideas about a successful person and determine the role of the moral foundation of behavior in different spheres of life. For this purpose, we developed two association study forms.

The first form requested answers to the following two questions:

1. What are the moral qualities of a successful person?
2. What qualities allow a person to achieve success in life while disregarding any moral values and norms?

Thus, the respondents were asked to identify the personal qualities of a successful person, as well as the qualities that allow a person to commit immoral actions and deeds to achieve success in life.

The second form contained two more questions:

1. What qualities prompt a person to commit immoral actions and deeds in the economic and social spheres of life?
2. What qualities should a person possess to refrain from immoral actions and deeds in the economic and social spheres of life?

Thus, the respondents were asked to identify personal qualities that prevent an individual from immoral actions and deeds or, on the contrary, push them to immoral behavior. All participants were informed about the study goals and the intent to publish the results in a summarized form.

The third stage of the study consisted of the analysis of the responses.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysis of the obtained student survey data was performed based on three types of data analysis: analysis of the responses to identify the most frequently mentioned qualities of a successful person and group them according to the criterion of morality;

- statistical processing of the answers obtained with the association method in SPSS software, allowing us to determine the qualities of a successful person;
- semantic analysis of the statements collected with the association method, which enabled the assessment of differences in the respondents and their ideas about the moral and immoral qualities of a successful person.

4. Results

The analysis of the responses obtained with the association method indicates the qualities of a

successful person as indicated by the students, which are notionally combined into the following groups (Table 1).

Table 1: Qualities of a successful person

Group of qualities	Total number	Economists	Humanitarians
Moral qualities of a successful person			
qualities of moral consciousness	22	14	21
qualities associated with the attitude to activity and work	17	15	11
qualities associated with the attitude to other people	12	5	11
qualities associated with socioeconomic status	12	12	6
personal qualities conducive to economic success	7	7	3
qualities associated with a person's image	3	0	3
Qualities allowing a person to achieve life success disregarding any moral values and norms			
qualities of moral consciousness	28	18	26
qualities associated with socioeconomic status	7	7	3

Comparative analysis of the responses of the students in the two directions of training (Table 1) demonstrates that economics students tend to identify qualities associated with socioeconomic status and the attitude to activity and work. Humanities students are more focused on the qualities of moral consciousness and those associated with the attitude to other people and a person's image.

Semantic analysis of the statements provided for the assessment of differences in respondents' ideas about the moral and immoral qualities of a successful person. The results showed that in answering the first question on the association study form, the respondents indicated the qualities that motivate a person to engage in and maintain immoral behavior. These qualities are conditionally divided into the following groups (Table 2).

Table 2: Qualities that drive a person to commit immoral actions and deeds

Group of qualities	Economists	Humanitarians	Qualities
Qualities of moral consciousness	66.6 %	88.8 %	Students identified nine qualities: greed, unscrupulousness, cynicism, lying, envy, audacity, hypocrisy, betrayal, amorality
Character qualities	60%	100%	Students identified five qualities: irresponsibility, aggression, stubbornness, timidity, overconfidence, lack of self-confidence
Qualities associated with the attitude to other people	57.1%	100%	Students identified seven qualities: disrespect, indifference, arrogance, egoism, intolerance, cruelty, ego
Qualities associated with socioeconomic status	100%	100%	Students identified one quality: imperiousness
Personal qualities conducive to economic success	100%	100%	Students identified two qualities: greed, mercantilism

In answers to the second question of the association study form, the respondents noted the qualities that stop a person from committing immoral actions and deeds. In Table 3, these qualities are conditionally combined into the following groups.

Table 3: Qualities that stop a person from immoral actions and deeds

Group of qualities	Economists	Humanitarians	Qualities
Qualities of moral consciousness	100%	75%	Students identified eight qualities: decency, noble goals of activity and behavior, conscientiousness, fairness, truthfulness, spirituality, dignity, integrity
Character qualities	100%	75%	Students identified four qualities: decisiveness, self-confidence, grit, willpower, self-respect, determination
Qualities associated with the attitude to other people	100%	69.2%	Students identified thirteen qualities: benevolence, humanism, openness, tolerance, sincerity, altruism, independence, empathy, caring nature, good upbringing, tactfulness, ability to compromise, respect for privacy.
Qualities associated with the attitude to activity and work	100%	100%	Students identified one quality: responsibility

Tables 2 and 3 present the comparative semantic analysis of the responses of the students of different professional orientations. The findings gave evidence that economics students are more inclined to highlight qualities that stop a person from immoral behavior. In turn, humanities students typically focus most closely on qualities that support immoral actions and deeds.

Disregarding moral principles and norms, according to contemporary Kazakh youth, also contributes to achieving some life success. The foundation for this becomes the pursuit of the goal at all costs, taking advantage of others for one's own ends, immorality in actions and deeds, arrogance, greed, deceit, dishonesty, and egoism. Furthermore, this attitude is promoted by personal qualities that involve an aspect of immorality, i.e. greed and corruption, the negative impact of the latter being especially acute in most post-Soviet countries.

Kazakh student youth believes that such qualities as greed, dishonesty, egoism, envy, and imperiousness lead a person to commit immoral actions and deeds in various spheres of life. However, such qualities as decency, conscientiousness, integrity, benevolence, fairness, good upbringing, responsibility, and noble goals keep a person away from immoral behavior and actions.

5. Discussion

The conducted study leads us to conclude that in the moral sense, a successful person is viewed by Kazakh student youth as one possessing such moral qualities as conscientiousness, decency, and responsibility, which greatly corresponds to the views of Kazakh society, such as commitment to family values traditional for Kazakhstan. Students perceive the family as the main pillar and symbol of their lives (Sadvakassova et al., 2022; Medez, Gayoles, 2021).

We also found that traditional values and ideas about a successful person among Kazakh youth are greatly influenced by their socialization environment, which is made up of the established economic culture of the region and the orientation of professional training.

Our study's conclusions align with previous research (Togaibayeva et al., 2023; Rostovskaya, Kaliyev, 2018) in finding that regional economic culture is an important factor in the formation of the values and ideas of success and moral qualities among Kazakh Gen Z youth. First and foremost, economic culture influences their professional orientation and the perception of what constitutes success.

Semantic analysis of the responses of students in different specialties shows that economics students are more prone to noting qualities that prevent a person from acting immorally. Humanities students focus more on the qualities that push an individual to commit and maintain immoral actions and deeds. The tendency to a pragmatic approach (disregard for moral qualities) to understanding the notion of success is not unique. Research conducted in other countries, such as the US (Maloni et al., 2019; Dryden et al., 2021), finds that respondents do not associate success with

having moral qualities. In the representatives of Gen Z, the choice of direction of professional training is connected with the economic culture of the region of socialization and the regional labor market. Differences in regional economic culture and labor market development may affect the perception of what success is and how it should be achieved.

Our study is consistent with other research conducted in recent years (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021; Effendi et al., 2020). Previous studies demonstrate the elevated interest of Gen Z in entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity as a means of achieving success in life. Our findings point to the conclusion that young people grow to be more pragmatic in their approach to life and attach more importance to career opportunities. For instance, a study conducted in Canada indicates that Gen Z perceives success from the position of reaching personal goals and searching for life purpose and not only in the sense of financial welfare (Younger Working Canadians more likely to value virtual healthcare and to use it for mental health services, 2020). This suggests the departure of this generation from the traditional values of its predecessors. The perception of success among Gen Z is no longer limited to traditional family values, which is supported by other research findings. Specifically, a Spanish study gives evidence that representatives of Gen Z give priority to social responsibility and work-life balance (Fuchs, 2021).

We determined that the social factors of socialization have an important part in the formation of youth's value orientations. Analysis of the students' responses shows that in the moral sense, a successful person is marked by such qualities as determination, fairness, conscientiousness, integrity, humanity, good upbringing, decency, responsibility, humility, conscientiousness, and law obedience.

We conclude that although the overall value orientation of young people may change under the influence of information technology (Nakisbaev, Dugalich, 2022) and geopolitical conditions (Oliveira et al., 2021); the socialization process, regional economic culture, and established traditional values continue to play a major role in the formation of convictions and behavior of Gen Z.

6. Conclusion

The study results demonstrate that young people of Gen Z still share traditional Kazakh cultural values and deem them important in achieving success. The study highlights the ongoing shift toward more pragmatic values and attitudes, such as personal welfare and career opportunities, although traditional values remain a part of the belief system of Gen Z. However, it is important to note that the study shows the non-static nature of traditional values and their ability to change with time. Such factors as the region's economic culture and the professional orientation of training markedly affect the formation of value orientations in young people. The research findings evidence that the socialization environment affects the formation of the beliefs and views of Gen Z about the moral qualities of modern people. Thus, it is important that the study of factors forming the convictions and behavior of Gen Z considers the professional and regional context of the socialization of Gen Z youth.

Despite the fact that the study demonstrates the general views of Kazakh youth on success and moral values, it is important to note some of its limitations. Among the primary ones is the size and type of the student sample included in the study. On the one hand, there were no quantitative quotas for the respondents by the regions of Kazakhstan in which they had been socialized. Given that all students in the research sample studied in different regions of Kazakhstan before university, the total sample of the study can be characterized as having a mixed economic environment of socialization. On the other hand, the study focused on students in only two specialties, economics and the humanities. Students in other specialties may have different views on success and moral qualities formed by their professional socialization.

Prospects for further research lie in the development of a program for the development of moral foundations of economic socialization in Kazakh youth.

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