

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH TRAJECTORY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the problem of building a professional growth trajectory for primary school teacher. The interpretation of the concept "professional development of a teacher" has been explored within the frames of innovative processes in education. Different levels of professional development of a modern teacher have been described (from pedagogical skillfulness to pedagogical innovativeness). The authors paid special attention to analyzing the motivational component of continuous professional education (motivation of professional growth, double assessment of professional competence). It has been asserted that building an individual professional growth trajectory for each teacher with account of their personal motivation will improve the teacher's competitiveness.

Keywords: professional competency, professional development of a teacher, professional growth trajectory, motivational sphere, pedagogical activity.

1 Introduction

High demands for professional competency and competitiveness of a teacher place major emphasis on the teacher's professional growth.

Contradictions between numerous studies dealing with the mechanisms of work of a primary school teacher and unsolved problems associated with the pedagogical practice become more and more acute.

It should also be taken into account that in the modern world the constant changes and challenges become the new normal. Intense digitization in all areas of life, determination to train future competitive specialists in all fields of knowledge on the global arena require that the pedagogical community changes approaches to education of the next generation. Correspondingly, for developing the skills of the 21st century in modern children the teachers, who are the meta-resources conveying knowledge, need recalibration to make them capable of developing their own universal competences and to tie the subject content down to getting hold of the most relevant principles and basic ideas at each particular moment in various types of educational activity.

The teacher's competency is a dynamic category which requires ongoing advancing. As is known, the higher is the level of competencies, the more valuable is the specialist. It should be noted that development is only possible when teacher has a proactive approach to life and has a true idea of own level of professional competence. However, the analysis into pedagogical activities of educational facilities seeking to help primary school teachers achieve professional excellence, led us to the conclusion that the use of unified work practices does not transform a teacher who is the passive object of influence into the active purpose-driven and competitive subject. A professional growth trajectory of each primary school teacher should be individualized. By building individualized educational trajectories, it becomes possible to embrace professional and personal needs, current level of training, experience of pedagogical activity, personal qualities of each teacher, and to identify the developmental prospects and professional growth opportunities of each primary school teacher.

The aforesaid highlights the need to define the main areas of focus when building professional growth trajectories for primary school teachers based on their level of professionally relevant qualities.

2 Literature Review

The basic concept in terms of the considered problem is the teacher's professional development. This process has been analyzed by many scientists, including K. A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1991), E. F. Zeer (2007), N. V. Kuzmina, A. L. Rean (1993), A. K. Markova (1996), V. A. Slastenin (2006), V. D. Shadrikov (1982), L. M. Mitina (2004) and others.

Some researchers examine professional development through the lens of psychological dimension of the teacher's personality, while others rely on the activity-based approach for comprehending the progressive advancement forward which triggers qualitative transformations in professional skills of teachers.

Professor E. F. Zeer (2007) describes professional development as a mental change within the framework of professional-educational, labour and professional activity (p. 22). V. A. Slastenin (2006) characterizes the same concept of development as "a process of personality formation focused on high professional accomplishments and achievement of personality, professional activity and professional interactions" (p. 15). L. M. Mitina (2004) sees pedagogical orientation and flexibility as "effective factors of professional development" (p. 15).

Professional development of a teacher is a continuous process that involves creation of a trajectory and step-by-step movement along a certain route. In their works, scientists N. A. Krivolapova, N. N. Voytkovich (2018), as the goal of continuous professional education put forward the growing of versatile creative personality of a teacher, which is harmonious and free thinking.

Professional advancement of a teacher hinges on the development of all kinds of competencies and literacies. Information and communication technologies and digitalization of all spheres of human life have become the main trend of modern society. The modern society is steadily coming to grips with the need to raise people of a new kind who will become the representatives of yet non-existing professions (Kirschner et al., 1997; Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2020).

A number of studies focus on the development of information competence, which becomes a necessary component of the development trajectory for teachers, who are the transmitters of educational content through the lens of the development of competencies and functional literacy in children from the very first lessons at primary school (Tsareva et al., 2018; Pöntinen & Rätty-Záborszky, 2020).

The issues concerning development of professional competencies in the process of training of future teachers were considered at the level of content transformation (Nguyen et al., 2020; Shukshina et al., 2018) and at the level of technologies used in pedagogical practice (Vardanyan et al., 2018; Julia et al., 2020; Chiranova et al., 2020; Molchanova et al., 2020).

3 Research Methodological Framework

The research purpose is to explore the approaches to building individual professional growth trajectories for primary school teachers. The research objectives are to explore the motives for professional growth; to propose the methods to build professional growth trajectories for primary school teachers based on the revealed motives.

The research employed both theoretical methods, with priority given to the analysis of scientific literature, systematization of material on the problem of research, and empirical methods, in particular, observation, interview and testing.

The experiment was held in the academic year 2020 - 2021. It included 520 primary school teachers from 39 municipal educational facilities in Saransk (Republic of Mordovia, Russia). The first stage of experimental research using the achievement motivation questionnaire of A. Mehrabian (1981) helped to reveal motivational tendencies of teachers directed towards their professional growth. The questionnaire for measuring the achievement motivation is aimed to reveal two generalized stable motives of personality: the motive to achieve success and the motive to avoid a failure. Each person has a combination of two, with one of them prevailing. The experimental research assessed which of the two motives is dominant in a respondent. Since the test is essentially a questionnaire of two options (for males and for females), the anonymous respondents were only asked to identify their sex. The second stage of experimental research included the double (subjective and objective) questionnaire survey with the use of the teacher's professional competency assessment method (Tikhomirova, 2020).

4 Results and Discussion

Presently, the education goals are undergoing major revision. The innovations extend not only to the vector of pedagogical process, but also the development of professionally relevant qualities of the modern teacher. Before the first priority of education was to ensure that students possess a certain set of knowledge, skills and abilities, but today the primacy is given to the healthy lifestyle, to raising creative personalities while cherishing their distinctness and authenticity. For a teacher to be able to help a child develop the above-mentioned qualities, the teacher himself/ herself should be continuously seeking professional self-improvement. Only a professional teacher will be capable to handle the arising problems.

Continuous professional development is necessary for a teacher to adjust to ever changing content and forms of education, to adequately respond to the need to develop new learning programs, methods, techniques and ways of their implementation in practice. This renders high flexibility to the process of professional development envisaged by the Bologna Agreement.

Presently, it seems reasonable to distinguish four steps which a teacher climbs up in their professional advancement.

The first step corresponds to the level of a fledgling teacher, or pedagogical skillfulness. When on this step, a teacher gets the right to undertake pedagogical activities after obtaining diploma and completing all qualification tests satisfactorily. This level is virtually the foundation for professional growth of a teacher, and when there is no such foundation, it means the impossibility to teach at school. The fledgling teacher is able to set goals and formulate objectives, knows the lesson's structure, may select the content adequate to the studied topic and use the educational technologies appropriate to a certain situation.

The second step is the level of advanced teacher, or pedagogical excellence. The activity of a teacher who is firmly standing on this step can be characterized by demonstration of high level of professional competencies in practical activities. An excellent teacher has deep knowledge of their subject, and skillfully uses in practice their psychological and pedagogical knowledge, incorporates the recent advances in organizing the process of teaching and upbringing.

The third step is the level of a methodologist-teacher, or pedagogical creativity. A teacher who reaches this level has the ability to transmit teaching methods and technologies to other teachers; and uses innovative approaches without breaking the conventional teaching system. These teachers make great mentors.

Mentoring teachers are worth a separate discussion. Within the frames of this discussion, a mentor is important because he or she can guide and stimulate a novice teacher's professional growth from the very beginning. Emotional stress associated with the beginning of a new activity requires activation of all

internal resources, which is possible sometimes only through the help of a person from outside, a mentor. The correctness of the initial vector will determine all the further way of the fledgling teacher up the steps of the pedagogical ladder.

And the fourth step is the level of a researcher-teacher, or pedagogical innovativeness. A teacher who has reached this level has the ability to consolidate the existing professional experience and develop new educational technologies, to test them and to implement innovative technologies into the educational process, thereby improving the quality of education in general.

The demands placed on modern teachers sound louder every day. It becomes crucial that each of the modern teachers sets goals for themselves, achieves them, and becomes able to apply the obtained results not only within the school walls, but also outside them. The teacher should be able not only to learn from the experience of others, but also to transmit their own experience, which means that building a trajectory of professional growth should be the teacher's own initiative coming from within.

But do all representatives of the teaching profession have a strong motivation to climb up the numerous steps on their way to excellence?

In the academic year 2020-2021, an experimental study into the motivational sphere was conducted among 520 elementary school teachers from 39 general educational facilities of the city of Saransk (Republic of Mordovia, Russia). Conducted experimental research allowed to identify motivational tendencies which, according to psychologists, can be divided into two opposed groups: striving for success (the motive to achieve success) and anxiety to avoid a failure (the motive of avoiding failure) (McClelland, 1965; Atkinson, 1974; Heckhausen, 1986).

If somebody is motivated by the avoidance of failure, they try to organize their behavior, and when they are teachers, their pedagogical activity in such a way that there are as few mistakes, miscalculations, inaccuracies as possible. Such a person will never take risks, which means will never experiment or try to use something new and extraordinary in their work. Naturally, in case of such a teacher, new technologies will remain new, untouched, and unused. Such an attitude hinders not only the professional growth of a certain teacher, not only impedes the development of certain students, but also obstructs the educational process as a whole.

If somebody is motivated to achieve success, they are ready to overcome obstacles, solve problems and are looking for new approaches. Such a teacher is not afraid to take risks, use innovative approaches and cutting-edge methods in his/her work. Such an attitude spurs the teacher's professional growth, invigorates students and makes a positive contribution to the development of the educational process in general.

It is believed that people strongly motivated to win, achieve much more in profession, compared to those who have a weaker motivation or no motivation at all. Possessing information about motivation of each teacher, it becomes possible to predict with a high degree of accuracy the probability that this teacher will express creativity in their professional activity.

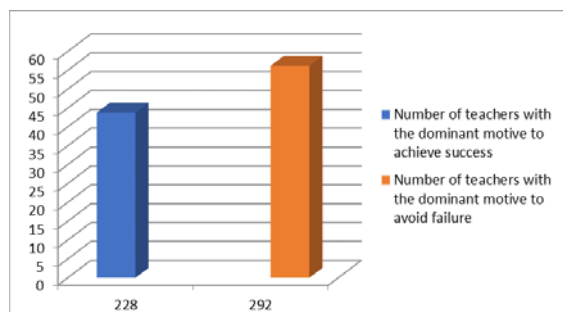
For assessing the motivation for professional growth, the achievement motivation questionnaire of A. Mehrabian (1981) was used.

Analysis of the obtained data led us to the conclusion that, unfortunately, 56.2% of the primary school teachers who took part in the survey demonstrated motivation to avoid failure. This indicates that in order to facilitate their productive creative activity specific organizational-pedagogical efforts should be taken. 43.8% of the respondents who agreed to participate in the experiment demonstrated their striving for success, and readiness

to overcome obstacles that may be encountered in pedagogical activity and to adequately solve arising professional problems.

The results of the survey based on the achievement motivation questionnaire of A. Mehrabian (1981) are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The survey results based on the achievement motivation questionnaire of A. Mehrabian (1981)



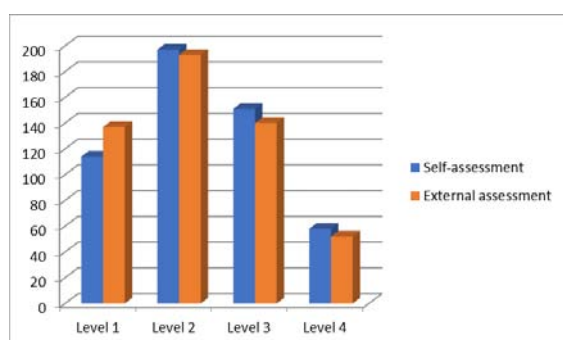
Source: authors' own processing

Having analyzed the differentiation of primary school teachers in the motivational sphere, we conducted a study using the teacher's professional competency assessment method (Tikhomirova, 2020) to find out how teachers see themselves on the ladder of professional growth. The validity of this assessment method has been tested and verified. The method consists of a questionnaire with 45 binary questions (two alternatives are offered as answers - Yes or No).

For objectivity of the conducted research, the teachers' self-assessment was supplemented with non-participant observation carried out by methodologists and deputy principals of general education facilities. The observation sheets included items correlating with the questionnaire items. Statistical processing of the collected data showed that there were some differences in assessment, but they were insignificant, from 0.8 to 0.9. Correlation between the observation results and the questionnaire results was found to be 96%.

Figure 2 shows the results of self-assessment and non-participant observation under the method of O. V. Tikhomirova (2020).

Figure 2 The results of self-assessment and non-participant observation under the method of O. V. Tikhomirova (2020)



Source: authors' own processing

Based on the data obtained in the experimental study, we can distinguish two main directions in building the professional growth trajectories of primary school teachers. The first direction, creation of a competitive and professional environment, will contribute to satisfaction of the teacher's need for continuous self-development and self-improvement. This may include participation in research and practice conferences, seminars, meetings, pedagogical marathons and professional competitions. Teachers may present their creative work on their own website, in messengers.

The second direction, creation of conditions for comfortable pedagogical activity for minimizing the level of anxiety and uncertainty, is important in helping those teachers whose motivation for professional growth leaves much to be desired.

It is known that in all spheres of activity, and educational activity is no exception, more and more weight is given to such personal qualities as social responsibility, adequate perception and agile response to new factors, independence and efficiency in decision-making, readiness for democratic communication, social engagement, the ability to quickly adapt to new conditions. All these qualities predetermine the competitiveness of a teacher.

With the data on the dominant motives of teachers and their current level of professionalism in hand, it becomes possible to build individual professional growth trajectories for each teacher.

5 Conclusion

A modern primary school teacher, pursuing continuous development in pedagogical profession, should be ready not only to strengthen the competences of students, but also to wisely build own trajectory of professional growth and continuous professional self-improvement.

A professional growth trajectory of each teacher should be individualized. An individual educational trajectory makes it possible to take into account professional and personal needs, experience of pedagogical activity, personal qualities of each teacher, and analyze their motives for this type of activity. The teachers in their work should be driven by the motive of professional growth and adequate professional self-assessment, and should have an aspiration to achieve the level of pedagogical innovativeness in a stepwise fashion.

Thus, the teacher will become able to successfully climb all steps up the ladder of professional development, while the individual professional growth trajectory will help the modern primary school teacher to become proactive, goal-oriented and competitive.

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