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ASSESSMENT OF COLLEGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS: A CASE STUDY FROM KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract

The article presents the results of a study aimed at evaluating the alignment of college teachers' professional competencies with the Teacher Professional Standard requirements. The research objective was to analyze the current competency levels among college teachers and develop recommendations for their further professional development. This study involved teachers from pedagogical colleges in Kazakhstan and focused on a comparative analysis of data based on indicators such as education levels, urban/rural location, and language of instruction. A quantitative research method was employed for the assessment of teachers. A closed-ended questionnaire, developed based on the competency framework of the Professional Teacher Standard, utilized responses on a

five-point Likert scale. The survey was conducted online using the 360° method. The results identified "risk zones" in the development of professional competencies of college teachers concerning education levels, urban/rural location, and language of instruction. Compared to teachers in preschool and secondary education, college teachers' professional competency development indicators are at an average level. The competency framework highlighted a need for the development of college teachers' competencies, especially for those working in urban colleges and teaching in the Kazakh language. Based on the research data, recommendations were developed for the further professional development of pedagogical college teachers.

Keywords: professional competencies, Teacher Standard, college teachers, 360-degree evaluation method, survey.

Basic provisions. To equip the upcoming generation for the difficulties of the modern century, Kazakhstan is revamping its educational system**.** This study assesses how well college instructors' professional competencies match the demands of the Teacher Professional Standard for the reformation of Kazakhstan's educational revamp. The study shows that compared to schoolteachers; college instructors have a lesser level of professional competence formation. It is not entirely appreciated that college instructors can engage in several kinds of professional development. The study confirms researchers' conclusions about the existing low level of teacher training, where one-third of future teachers «do not possess subject knowledge and teaching methodology according to knowledge assessment results. The current research provides recommendations for the improvement of teachers' professionalism, such as teachers must prioritize the development of specific professional competencies; urban environments place demands that are more stringent on college teachers than their rural counterparts.

Introduction. Alongside the international community, Kazakhstan is reforming its educational system to prepare the next generation for the 21st-century challenges. Educational programs at schools, colleges, and universities are oriented towards social constructivism in teaching and learning. This approach fosters active interaction among students and emphasizes their participation in the educational process, focusing on critical thinking (Erdem, 2020). Teachers are pivotal in achieving the expected learning outcomes. Consequently, a teacher's professional competence is crucial, and developing a model or framework for these competencies is a key stage in advancing Kazakhstan's pedagogical education (Janswgwrova et al., 2024; Guerriero, 2017).

Teachers are central to educational changes (Zandvliet & Paul, 2023). As student competency requirements evolve, so must those for teachers (Soysal & Soysal, 2023; Roll & Ifenthaler, 2021). Teachers need to update their values, knowledge, and skills to effectively prepare future generations for emerging challenges. As Abylkasymova (2021) notes, 'Pedagogical education today is becoming the foundational system that shapes social progress'.

The competencies of a teacher are defined as «a set of knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for the future, manifested in professional activity» (Abylkasymova, 2021). Additionally, these competencies include the ability to continually and progressively meet complex demands in specific contexts by activating comprehensive psychosocial resources (cognitive, functional, personal, and ethical (Guerriero, 2017).

The structure of a teacher's competencies encompasses cognitive and affective-motivational characteristics (Guerriero, 2017):

– *Professional knowledge*: the content of subject knowledge (what to teach?), knowledge of learners' characteristics and their peculiarities (whom to teach?), and pedagogical content knowledge (how to teach?).

– *Affective-motivational characteristics*: the teacher**'**s beliefs and attitudes towards the subject content and teaching; their motivation to work, personal qualities, and stress resistance.

Based on international experience, researchers have determined that the requirements for a teacher are contained in one or more regulatory documents: (1) the teacher model, which includes general professional and

special professional qualities; (2) the teaching standard (Teacher Professional Standard), describing the requirements for various qualification levels; (3) the job responsibilities of a teacher (Margolis, 2019). In Kazakhstan, the Teacher Professional Standard defines these requirements.

Kleinhenz & Ingvarson (2007) identify the following types of Teacher Standards:

- *Standards as professional values*: These definitions or expressions describe what is valued in the teaching profession, what constitutes quality education, and how quality teaching is defined.
- *Standards as measures*: These standards are used to reasonably determine and assess the quality of teaching. It is essential to develop an understanding of what effective teaching looks like and how teachers can demonstrate high-quality teaching. It is also crucial to define what compliance with standards in teaching and learning entails.

The purpose of the Professional Standard can be:

- a «core base», representing a universal set of competencies necessary at all stages of career growth or professional development.
- a roadmap for a teacher's professional development, describing professional competencies at various career stages, from basic to advanced.
- a semi-roadmap, including some professional career stages (e.g., entering the profession) (Toledo et al., 2017).

In 2022, a new Teacher Professional Standard was developed in Kazakhstan (Law, 2022). A distinctive feature of this standard is its inclusion of a general description of professional activities, incorporating a framework of professional competencies for teachers, along with criteria for competency by qualification categories. This framework integrates four areas of practice: professional values, professional knowledge, professional teaching/learning practice, and professional development.

The professional competencies of a teacher are presented on the principle of «building up» professional qualities from the beginner level «teacher-intern» to the « teacher-master» level. Research emphasizes that Standards can constructively influence pedagogical education if they are developed and used as a normative basis for a strategic vision of what a teacher should be (Ingvarson, 2019; OECD, 2018; Nawab et al., 2021). The pedagogical community worldwide uses Standards to reasonably determine and measure quality teaching and strategies to enhance the professionalism of teachers (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007). Ensuring the quality of pedagogical education is a global priority (OECD, 2023).

In Kazakhstan, the Teacher Professional Standard (Law, 2022) serves as both a measure for determining and measuring quality teaching and as a roadmap for a teacher's professional development, detailing professional competencies by the principle of building up. The research objective was to analyze the current competency levels among college teachers and develop recommendations for their further professional development.

Materials and Methods. The study was conducted to identify the level of development of teachers' professional competencies according to the norms of the Professional Standard.

Participants. The study used the 360° method, a tool that assesses a teacher's professional activity from four distinct perspectives: administration, colleagues, students or parents/guardians, and the teacher's self-assessment.

Colleague assessments provide an expert opinion on the teacher's soft skills and their interactions, offering a deeper assessment of teaching quality than other study participants can provide.

Student or parent/legal guardian assessments evaluate the teacher's soft skills and their impact on learners. This tool fosters critical thinking among students, contributing to more conscious learning. Student feedback aids the development of future learning skills and allows teachers to view their professional activities from another perspective. Likewise, parents/legal guardians independently assess the impact of the teacher's pedagogical influence on their children.

A teacher's self-assessment facilitates reflective evaluation of their professional

competencies, proving to be one of the most effective methods for self-improvement and self-awareness.

Thus, the 360° method effectively organizes education to assess and understand teachers. Feedback from various viewpoints yields a complete and more balanced picture, facilitating the formation of a teacher's portrait from all participants' perspectives in the educational process. However, the results must serve as a starting point for further professional development of the teacher, not as a source of censure.

Data collection instrument. The researchers developed and tested questionnaires based on the Teacher Professional Standard: «Teacher Self-Assessment Sheet», «Survey Sheet for Administration/Colleagues», «Survey Sheet for Students», and «Survey Sheet for Parents/ Guardians».

These surveys contained closed questions based on indicators of the teacher's professional competencies as defined by the Professional Standard. Researchers asked respondents to reflect on their attitudes toward the professional competencies of the assessed teacher on a five-point Likert scale.

The team used quantitative research methods in the study. They evaluated respondents' statements using the Likert scale, where responses of «strongly agree» scored 4 points; «agree» 3 points; «undecided» 2 points; «disagree» 1 point; and «strongly disagree» 0 points.

They averaged the data obtained from the evaluation of each teacher from four perspectives using the formula (1):

$$a+k+s+or\ /4, \quad (1)$$

where a represents scores from the administration, k from colleagues, s from self-assessment, and or from students or parents/ guardians.

Data analysis. The results were rounded that scores from 3.5 to 4 were categorized as «strongly agree»; scores from 3.0 to 3.4 as «agree»; scores from 2.5 to 2.9 as «undecided»; scores from 2.0 to 2.4 as «disagree»; and scores from 1.0 to 1.9 as «strongly disagree».

Finally, they conducted a comparative analysis of the data on the development of professional competencies of college teachers by levels of education, as well as across urban/ rural colleges and language of teaching.

Researchers selected respondents for the study using the 3*6*6 principle. Representatives from three regions participated in the survey: Kostanay, Karaganda, and Zhambyl. The regions were selected based on geographical location. In each region, six educational organizations participated: two preschool education organizations, two secondary education organizations (SEOs), and two technical and vocational education organizations (VET). The organizations were chosen by regional education departments according to criteria such as education levels, location of pedagogical colleges, and language of instruction. In each educational organization, six teachers of various qualifications were assessed.

Results. The assessment of pedagogical college teachers according to the norms of the updated Professional Standard in Kazakhstan is being conducted for the first time. The study engaged 342 respondents, comprising 108 teachers conducting self-assessments, 18 administrators from educational organizations, 108 peers evaluating teachers, 36 school students, 36 college students, and 36 parents of preschool students.

Of these respondents, 173 (50.6%) completed the survey in Kazakh and 169 (49.4%) in Russian. The survey that assessed the engineering-pedagogical staff in colleges included 114 participants, featuring 36 teachers -17 (47.2%) teaching in Kazakh and 19 (52.8%) in Russian along with 6 college administrators, 36 peers, and 36 students. Teachers from three educational levels participated, enabling a comprehensive comparative analysis of professional competencies' development and the identification of «risk zones» in the competency matrix for engineering-pedagogical staff in colleges.

The matrix of professional competencies for engineering-pedagogical staff is represented by: professional values (1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession; 1.2 Citizenship;

1.3 Adherence to professional ethics; 1.4 Responsibility; 1.5 Proactivity), professional knowledge (2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching; 2.2 Knowledge of the subject, teaching methodologies, and student assessment tools), practice of teaching/learning and education (3.1 Planning the teaching process; 3.2 Creating a safe, supportive, and developmental learning environment; 3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process; 3.4 Assessing educational achievements of students; 3.5 Collaborating in education processes), professional development (4.1 Reflecting on personal and colleagues' practices; 4.2 Managing self-development quality and aspiring for leadership).

The results of the study indicate an insufficient level of professional competence formation among college instructors based on the following criteria: (1) 1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession; (2) 1.4 1.4 Responsibility; (3) 2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching; (4) 3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process; (5) 3.5 Collaborating in education processes (Figure 1).

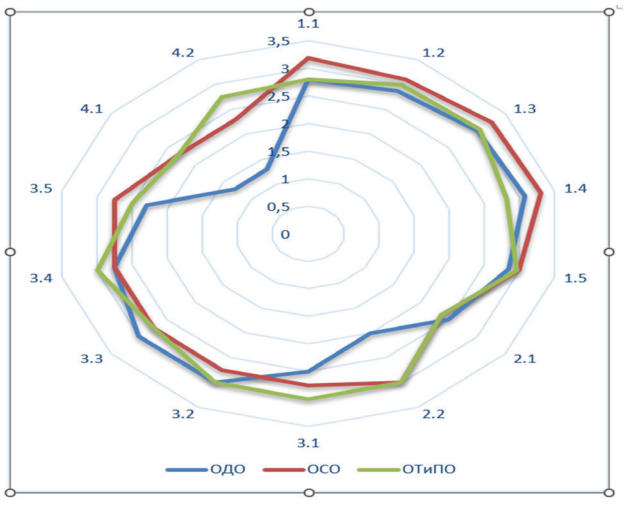

Figure 1: Matrix of indicators across education levels

According to the Professional Standard for Teachers (Law, 2022), the indicators of professional competence under the criteria «1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession» are demonstrating confidence in the ability of all students to achieve educational goals; showing dedication to the teaching profession; and adhering to the applicable legal and regulatory acts in their activities.

For the criteria «1.4 Responsibility», the indicators are demonstrating responsibility for maintaining and developing one's professional level, as well as the academic success and upbringing of students; contributing to the safety of students within their competencies; and sharing the educational community's responsibility for the educational and upbringing process.

The criteria «2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching» include indicators such as: understanding the age-related, personal, and socio-cultural characteristics of students; possessing strategies for creating an inclusive environment and engaging students in the learning and upbringing process; having theoretical knowledge and practical skills for effective teaching in a multilingual environment, ensuring quality assimilation of the subject, language, and cultural values; and organizing the teaching, learning, and upbringing process considering the individual characteristics of students.

The criteria «3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process» is reflected through indicators such as: achieving the goals of teaching and upbringing during lessons; motivating students to achieve high learning and upbringing results and supporting them in

this; and using teaching technologies by the teaching and upbringing goals, considering the individual characteristics and needs of the student.

The criterion «3.5 Collaborating in education processes» is expressed through indicators such as: interacting with parents/ legal representatives to build an individual development trajectory for the student; and cooperating with colleagues within professional communities and interested parties to improve the educational process.

It should be noted that compared to other levels of education, college teachers should pay special attention to forming such a professional value as responsibility. Table 1, comparing other levels of education, reflects a low indicator of professional competence of college teachers in the formation of the criterion «1.4 Responsibility» (2.83).

Table 1. Indicators by level of education

Indicators	Education levels		
	PE	SE	VET
1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession	2,8	3,19	2,8
1.2 Citizenship	2,87	3,1	3
1.3 Adherence to professional ethics	3	3,25	3,04
1.4 Responsibility	3,08	3,31	2,83
1.5 Proactivity	2,86	3	2,97
2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching	2,5	2,37	2,37
2.2 Knowledge of the subject, teaching methodologies, and student assessment tools	2	3	3
3.1 Planning the Teaching Process	2,5	2,75	3
3.2 Creating a safe, supportive, and developmental learning environment	3	2,75	3
3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process	3	2,75	2,75
3.4 Assessing the educational achievements of students	2,75	2,75	3
3.5 Collaborating in Education Processes	2,3	2,75	2,5
4.1 Reflecting on personal and colleagues' practices	1,3	2,3	2,3
4.2 Managing self-development quality and aspiring for leadership	1,3	2,3	2,75

It should be noted that *across educational levels*, college teachers demonstrated a sufficient level of development in professional competencies according to criteria such as 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 4.1, and 4.2.

The study results from *urban and rural colleges* reveal that engineering-pedagogical staff in urban colleges display lower professional competencies than their rural counterparts (Figure 2).

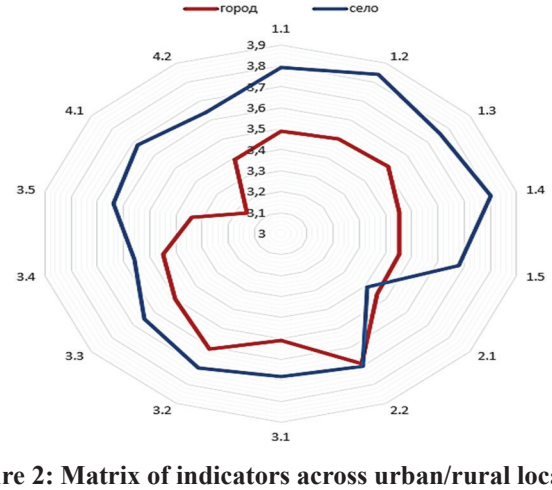

Figure 2: Matrix of indicators across urban/rural location

To determine the extent of existing differences in the indicators of professional competence of college teachers between urban and rural areas, the difference was calculated, where «-» indicates lower scores for urban college teachers, and «+» indicates higher scores.

Significant differences were noted in criteria such as 4.1 «Reflecting on personal and colleagues' practices», 1.4 «Responsibility», 1.2 «Citizenship», 1.1 «Commitment to the teaching profession», and 3.5 «Collaborating in education processes». According to these indicators, respondents rated urban college teachers lower than their colleagues from rural colleges. Conversely, in criterion 2.1 «Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching», urban college teachers showed higher (+0,05) competencies than their rural peers (Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators by urban/rural location

Indicators	Differences
1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession	-0,30
1.2 Citizenship	-0,34
1.3 Adherence to professional ethics	-0,25
1.4 Responsibility	-0,35
1.5 Proactivity	-0,23
2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching	+0,05
2.2 Knowledge of the subject, teaching methodologies, and student assessment tools	-0,01
3.1 Planning the Teaching Process	-0,17
3.2 Creating a safe, supportive, and developmental learning environment	-0,10
3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process	-0,15
3.4 Assessing the educational achievements of students	-0,11
3.5 Collaborating in Education Processes	-0,30
4.1 Reflecting on personal and colleagues' practices	-0,52
4.2 Managing self-development quality and aspiring for leadership	-0,25

The study examining differences *across teaching languages* indicates that engineering-pedagogical staff teaching in Kazakh exhibit lower professional competencies than those teaching in Russian (Figure 3).

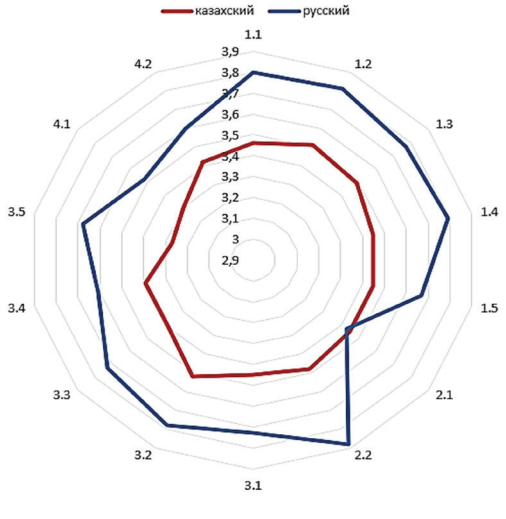

Figure 3: Competency matrix of college teachers across teaching languages

Significant disparities emerged in criteria such as 3.5 «Collaboration in the educational and upbringing processes», 2.2 «Knowledge of the subject, teaching methodologies, and assessment tools», 1.1 «Commitment to the teaching profession», 1.4 «Responsibility», 3.3 «Implementing the learning and upbringing process», and 1.2 «Citizenship».

Respondents rated teachers who teach in the Kazakh language of instruction lower than other colleagues. The difference in the performance of teachers teaching in the Kazakh language of instruction is marked with a «-» sign (Table 3). However, for criterion 2.1 «Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching», Kazakh-speaking teachers demonstrated a higher (+0,02) competency level than their Russian-speaking colleagues.

Table 3. Indicators by teaching languages

Indicators	Differences
1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession	-0,34
1.2 Citizenship	-0,30
1.3 Adherence to professional ethics	-0,28
1.4 Responsibility	-0,34
1.5 Proactivity	-0,22
2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching	+0,02
2.2 Knowledge of the subject, teaching methodologies, and student assessment tools	-0,40
3.1 Planning the Teaching Process	-0,28
3.2 Creating a safe, supportive, and developmental learning environment	-0,26
3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process	-0,34
3.4 Assessing the educational achievements of students	-0,22
3.5 Collaborating in Education Processes	-0,41
4.1 Reflecting on personal and colleagues' practices	-0,22
4.2 Managing self-development quality and aspiring for leadership	-0,18

Several key findings emerged from the analysis:

- *data comparing* the development of teachers' professional competencies across various educational levels showed a particularly low competency level among preschool education teachers, while college teachers typically demonstrated a moderate competency level.

- researchers identified *«risk zones»* in the professional competencies of college teachers, particularly in the areas of Professional Values (1.1 Commitment to the teaching profession; 1.4 Responsibility), Professional Knowledge (2.1 Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching), and Professional Practice (e.g., 3.3 Implementing the learning and upbringing process; 3.5 Collaborating in education processes).

- the study also profiled a *«typical college teacher»* with low professional competency levels, specifically one teaching in the Kazakh language within an urban college context.

Discussion. The general insufficient level of training of teaching staff is noted by domestic researchers who analyzed the results of Kazakhstan in international studies (Irsaliev et al., 2020) and the current state of education quality in the country context (Akhmetzhanova et al., 2023). Given that the method of observing teachers during lessons is labour-intensive and requires extensive documentation (Sartain et al., 2024), and testing is not sufficiently effective (Swisher & Saenz-Armstrong, 2022), the current study adhered to the viewpoint of researchers (Aygunova et al., 2017) who note that the advantage of the 360° method is «the ability to assess the teacher's everyday work, their actions and behavior in real professional situations, their impact, and the result of their influence on students, parents, colleagues, and school administration, which aligns with the idea of

the competency-based approach». Additionally, Fauth et al., (2020) highlight the benefits of receiving feedback from students about teaching and the limitations of the survey method.

According to the research results, college teachers have a lower level of professional competence formation compared to schoolteachers. As a result of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools' experience being shared, educators now have more favourable circumstances for professional growth, even within the institution (Amirova, 2020). At the same time, the potential for college teachers to participate in various forms of professional development is not fully realized (Kariyev et al., 2022). College teachers need planning for continuous professional development, and one of the tools for identifying the current state of professional competence formation among college teachers is the 360° survey (Margolis, 2019).

Using this method, the current study received positive feedback, especially from students who objectively expressed their opinions on the impact of teaching practices on them (Fauth et al., 2020; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2020), and from the teachers themselves, who noted the opportunity for self-reflection on the results of their teaching practice compared to the best examples, as well as the need to conduct such surveys with feedback. The results of this study allowed us to obtain data on the current state of professional competence formation among college teachers, which can serve as a starting point for developing internal college plans for teachers' professional development.

The study by Sharimova (2021) emphasizes the professional isolation of rural schoolteachers, which is proposed to be addressed through their participation in professional communities. At the same time, the results of this study indicate a higher level of professional competence formation among rural college teachers compared to urban ones. However, there is a threat that the survey data was obtained due to the possible professional stagnation of rural college teachers who are satisfied with the general level of professional skills development and resist innovations (Cheng et al., 2023).

Regarding the risk areas in the development of college teachers' professional competencies, the results obtained in the study confirm researchers' conclusions about the existing low level of teacher training, where one-third of future teachers «do not possess subject knowledge and teaching methodology according to knowledge assessment results ...» (Akhmetzhanova et al., 2023) and «the need to analyze teachers' actual competencies» (Irsaliev et al., 2020). The issue of differences in the development of professional competencies in the context of the language of instruction can be addressed by microlearning, perceived as a flexible and stress-free phenomenon, allowing teachers to focus on relevant tasks using small learning segments (Kohnke et al., 2021).

An important aspect of college teachers' professional development is the support of educational organization leaders in building trusting relationships with teachers (Sartain et al., 2024). Leaders of pedagogical colleges need support in implementing initiatives to improve the teaching quality of the teaching staff. The results of the study will allow the administration of pedagogical colleges to focus on developing the «lagging» professional competencies of teachers when planning professional development. Additionally, when planning teachers' professional development, it is important to emphasize the need for mentoring support for teachers and the creation of conditions (professional comparison and cooperation within and beyond the school) for their self-efficacy (Sharimova, 2021).

Finally, as a contribution to the growing body of research on finding effective methods for teacher assessment for their professional development, this study highlights the importance of alternative teacher assessment (360° method) to address the problems of professional development of pedagogical college teachers.

Conclusion. College teachers, alongside college administrations, educational authorities, professional development providers, and other stakeholders, must consistently oversee the quality of continuous professional development for teachers.

Addressing issues in teachers' continuous professional development effectively involves conducting an initial state analysis. In this context, we conducted a study using the 360° method, which offered insights into the status of this issue. This research led to the creation of an evaluative framework based on Professional Standard norms to assess teachers' professional activities.

Based on the results of the study, recommendations were developed for planning further professional development of teachers.

Firstly, teachers must prioritize the development of specific professional competencies:

- Professional Values: 1.1. Commitment to the teaching profession; 1.4. Responsibility;
- Professional Knowledge: 2.1. Understanding individual student characteristics and applying them in teaching;
- Professional Practice: 3.3. Implementing the learning and upbringing process; 3.5. Collaborating in education processes.

Secondly, urban environments place demands that are more stringent on college teachers than their rural counterparts. The urban environment imposes higher demands on teachers in urban colleges compared to those in rural areas. This is because urban colleges are compelled to compete with universities in terms of specialist training, as colleges and universities are competitors under conditions of academic freedom. The data obtained in the study suggest that teachers in urban colleges require targeted professional development efforts, with special attention to the identified "risk areas" in the formation of their professional competencies.

Additionally, it should be noted that in rural colleges, there is close interaction between teachers and all participants in the educational process. As a result, the assessment of teachers' professional activities is influenced by subjective factors, primarily based on individual relationships between the evaluator and the evaluated. Consequently, the evaluation of a rural college teacher may be distorted due to the underestimation or overestimation of indicators influenced by subjective preferences.

Thirdly, teachers whose language of instruction is Kazakh are in dire need of high-quality continuous professional education. The professional development of pedagogical college teachers should include all forms of training aimed not only at enhancing knowledge and teaching practice but also at fostering professional values among teachers. Organizing professional development within educational institutions is of particular importance.

In this regard, we believe that the results of the analysis will enable teachers, college administrations, methodological centers/ cabinets, regional education departments, and professional development providers to plan further professional development for teachers, taking into account the existing professional needs of educators.

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CONTENTS AND ORGANIZATION ASPECTS OF PREPARING FUTURE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FOR PROFESSIONAL CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Abstract

This article is dedicated to the issues of improving the professional training of future elementary school teachers. The article justifies the relevance of developing the creative abilities of younger students and preparing future elementary school teachers for professional creative activity. To determine the organizational and substantive aspects of preparing future primary school teachers for professional and creative activity, a survey was conducted among 114 teachers, including 93 teachers of grades 1-4 and 21 teachers of preschool education. The results of a search and analytical work are presented. The authors considered the methodological approaches that underlie the preparation of future teachers, the structure and content of the preparation of future elementary school teachers, as well as the conditions and organizational-content aspects of preparing future elementary school teachers for professional-creative activity, which include interdisciplinary interaction and integration of disciplines within the educational program.

Keywords: academic disciplines, creativity, creative activity, educational program, methodological approaches, primary school teacher, professional activity.