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## Developing Reflexive Skills in Future Social Educators for Enhancing Their Acmeological Competence

### Abstract

*Introduction.* This paper examines the level of reflexive skills among prospective social educators as a foundation for developing acmeological competence. Acmeological competence is essential in the training of social educators, as it enhances their professional competitiveness and effectiveness. This study aimed to explore the significance of reflective skills in the development of acmeological competence among future social educators, as well as to assess the current level of their reflective skill formation. *Methodology and Methods.* To achieve this, the authors conducted a theoretical analysis of existing literature and utilized a survey method to gather data from prospective social educators. *Results.* The findings indicate that while the respondents demonstrate an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, there remains a need for further development in areas such as critical thinking, value awareness, and other key reflective dimensions. *Scientific novelty.* The study highlights the necessity of designing and implementing specialized techniques or training programs to foster reflective abilities within the educational process for social educators. To achieve higher levels of professional accomplishment, social educators must be able to adjust their behavior, clearly understand their goals, and evaluate their outcomes. *Practical significance.* Without well-developed abilities in self-awareness and self-understanding, the growth of their professional identity and expertise becomes unattainable.

*Keywords:* reflexive skills, social educators, acmeological competence, training, professional competence, foundation.

**Introduction.** Modern society demands the highest professional training from social educators, whose activities are aimed at accompanying and supporting the individual in the process of their development and socialization. In the context of rapid socio-cultural changes, the development of acmeological competence as an integrated characteristic of a specialist, guaranteeing his or her professional and personal growth, the drive for self-improvement, and reaching professional heights, is especially important in the context of fast changes. The acmeological component in the context of training social instructors refers to an integral characteristic that encompasses professional knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and a commitment to continuous self-development. It involves not only mastering

theoretical knowledge and methodologies but also the ability to apply them effectively in practice, adapt to changing conditions, solve professional tasks independently, and engage in long-term personal and professional growth.

The development of reflexive skills, which enables future social educators to acknowledge their own experiences, analyze their professional activities, pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses, and create plans for both professional and personal growth, is one of the most crucial prerequisites for the formation of acmeological competence. In addition to being a tool for self-awareness, prospective social educators' reflexive abilities are seen as the cornerstone of long-term professional growth that helps them accomplish academic goals.

Enhancing reflexive abilities is a crucial part of forming the academic component of future social educators. The ability to self-analyze and conceptualize an action is known as reflexive skills, and it enables aspiring social educators to evaluate their work critically, see issues, and come up with solutions. All of these abilities support the professional development and attainment of professional excellence of prospective social educators. The following factors determine the need to study this problem: first of all, contemporary society places high demands on social educators, expecting them to demonstrate exceptional professional competence, a capacity for self-analysis, critical reflection on their experiences, and a commitment to continuous professional growth. In this context, a specialist equipped with well-developed reflexive skills can evaluate the outcomes of their work, make necessary adjustments, and strive toward higher standards of professional excellence.

Secondly, the acmeological approach implies that professional excellence is the outcome of both personal and professional development, representing an individual's aspiration to reach their "acme"- the highest level of growth. However, it is impossible to construct a meaningful self-development plan without self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and self-regulation. Therefore, reflexive skills are considered a foundational component of acmeological competence in prospective social educators. The study of prospective social educators is contemporary, relevant, and in demand. It makes it possible to provide the pedagogical community with specialized instruments for raising the caliber of professional training in addition to expanding theoretical knowledge of a specialist's professional growth. The purpose of this article was to demonstrate the value of reflective skills in the process of developing future social educators' acmeological competence and to determine the degree of reflective skill formation to support future social educators' growth within the framework of acmeological competence.

The term acmeology originates from the Greek word "acme", meaning "peak" or "highest point", and the phrase "en akmy",

which is translated as "at the height" or "in full bloom", referring to the highest stage of development. Acmeology is an interdisciplinary science that explores the optimal development of individuals or groups and the conditions that contribute to achieving their highest potential (Beysman, 1991). Kuzmina (2022) was among the first researchers to introduce the concept of acmeology within the framework of human studies and pedagogy, emphasizing its anthropological foundations in self-improvement and reflection. This gave rise to two interconnected directions of a single idea: the study of the human being and the dynamics of their development. From this concept emerged a tendency toward progress - a striving for personal growth through the enhancement of behavior, knowledge, abilities, and skills (Kuzmina, 2022).

Based on these foundations, scholars started investigating the possibility of systematizing and implementing this path toward both professional and personal greatness. As a result, the idea of acmeological competence, which represents a person's ability to reach their full potential to the greatest degree of both personal and professional functioning, was developed. The concept of acmeological competence was explored by Abdalina (2009), who argues that it encompasses the ability of educators to actualize their personal potential through self-realization, self-improvement, self-development, and self-determination. Dereka (2016) concludes that educators should gain acmeological competence in order to reach the heights of professional excellence and fulfillment in the professional activity. The educational process should be aimed at developing acmeological competence (its motivational, cognitive, activity, and personal components), development of professionalism, and their ability to self-improvement. Acmeological competence is the integrated personality activity quality that allows educators to set and effectively solve the different levels of complexity problems for the sake of self-improvement and self-realization in the professional field (Dereka, 2016).

Halima & Ulugbek (2022) devoted their research to the issues of effective realization

of acmeological component in education and considered the importance of acmeological approach in the development of education and in the training of students for professional activities on the basis of acmeological approach. Yessenamanova et al., (2022) studied the level of acmeological competence of social educators. Through their research, they found out that there is an average positive correlation between the level of motivation and the level of propensity to take risks. The results of this work indicate the need for further scientific research on the issue of acmeological competence, not only of social teachers, but also of other educators, to achieve heights in personal development and improve the learning process. Their research concluded that in the future, the types of motivation and methods (self-motivation, affirmation, visualization) should be researched. To our mind, this list should be added by reflexive skills as well (Yessenamanova et al., 2022).

In the context of acmeological competence, reflexive abilities play a crucial role. For social educators, these skills are fundamental to professional growth and effective across diverse educational environments. Reflexive skills involve the capacity to critically reflect on personal and professional experiences, adapt practices accordingly, and engage in ongoing self-evaluation. This continuous process not only fosters personal development but also enhances educators' interactions with students and the broader community (Pillay et al., 2023). Acmeological reflection is one of the key factors in the growth of self-awareness. She highlights that educators may reach a better degree of professional and personal development by thoroughly comprehending their own experience and analyzing their accomplishments. The development of a comprehensive self-perception, which serves as the foundation for long-term motivation and self-realization, is facilitated by acmeological contemplation (Ryabisheva, 2012).

The process of reflection on teaching and learning emphasizes critical thinking, self-awareness, and the creation of fresh, insightful understandings. In order to prepare students for

cooperation, professional identity development, and building links with the outside world, educators work to instill in them the abilities of reflection and reflexivity. When students work in groups and reflect on their own and other members' activities as well as the dynamics within the group, it is beneficial to design courses that integrate the use of reflection (Dutta et al., 2023). Indrasiene et al., (2023) consider critical reflection as the combination of new information and study material with personal experience, which results in a fresh perspective on oneself, one's education, one's research, and environmental phenomena. According to Usaki (2009), the abilities that students should acquire before the start of the school year, such as interacting, introducing themselves, and asking questions, are known as social skills. Teachers can acquire those abilities. For educators, reflective teaching is crucial. Throughout their lesson, teachers observe everything in the classroom. They consider the goals and aims to be achieved, conduct unbiased observations, and then vary the approaches in light of the classroom environment. One of the most often used strategies that has been researched recently is reflective teaching (Usaki, 2009).

Working on self-use with social education professionals from the very beginning of their training is frequently seen as an essential component of their professional and personal growth, according to Pallisera et al., (2013). Even yet, it is challenging to locate mentions of initiatives and experiences that have been carried out from this angle. Their study sought to improve students' professional identities and self-awareness by applying the reflective learning paradigm before their hands-on job experience. Their study pinpointed the advantages and disadvantages of students' reflective skills while contextualizing the experience of educating social educators in Spain (Pallisera et al., 2013). Christensen et al., (2020) consider reflexive skills as a component of social educators' reflective abilities, which allow them to better comprehend both themselves and others in certain social contexts. Transformative learning results from this process, which encourages critical evaluation of prior experiences and

raises understanding of how social settings affect behavior and cognition (Christensen et al., 2020).

Developing reflective abilities throughout professional training is essential since reflection is a critical teaching attribute that is required for successful professional activity. This idea was analysed in the scientific article written by Usheva et al., (2020). They suggest that developing these abilities through educational programs and by establishing the following pedagogical conditions: training in the analysis of pedagogical activities from various perspectives; educational activities within individual educational programs; educational dialogue during training; and subject-subject relations through educational interaction. These authors think that ability to evaluate and appropriately perceive oneself, to identify and analyze the reasons behind one's behavior, as well as its performance elements and mistakes, to comprehend one's own qualities in the present as compared to the past and to predict the prospects for further development, to comprehend the reasons behind another person's actions during interaction, to analyze experienced situations, and to take into account the actions of others within your behavioral strategies are all examples of reflexive skills, which are thought to be an essential and meaningful quality of a teacher (Usheva et al., 2020). The ideas put forward by earlier researchers were further supported by Kurniati and Nuraeningsih (2019), who emphasized that teachers should engage in reflective teaching. Reflective teaching involves critically analyzing classroom experiences and considering alternative strategies for achieving educational goals and objectives. According to their view, reflective teaching serves as an essential tool for continuous professional development (Kurniati and Nuraeningsih, 2019) As future social educators constantly engage with diverse groups of students and encounter a wide range of social, emotional, and ethical challenges, the ability to recognize their own attitudes, assess the effectiveness of their actions, and adapt their behavior to specific contexts becomes essential. Reflective practice not only fosters professional

growth but also plays a crucial role in building trustful and respectful relationships with clients (Kurniati and Nuraeningsih, 2019).

Through reflection, social educators cultivate empathy, critical thinking, and self-regulation competencies required for effective and sustainable professional practice. The ability to step outside oneself and critically reassess one's perception of reality lies at the core of reflective processes. This capacity is especially crucial for future social workers, as they are constantly engaged with diverse individuals and must navigate a range of social, emotional, and ethical challenges. The ability to recognize one's own beliefs, evaluate the effectiveness of one's actions, and adapt behavior in response to situational demands fosters both personal and professional development. Through reflection, aspiring social workers cultivate empathy, critical thinking, and self-regulation - key competencies essential for effective and sustainable professional practice. Without the capacity for self-analysis, meaningful personal growth is fundamentally unattainable.

**Materials and Methods.** A quantitative method was employed in the research. The primary objective of our study was to highlight the significance of reflective skills in the development of acmeological competence among future social educators and to assess the extent to which these skills are formed. A review of the theoretical foundations of the concepts of acmeological competence and reflective skills, as well as the relationship between them, revealed a gap in this area of research. From our perspective, identifying the level of reflective skills in prospective social educators provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue and enables us to offer recommendations for further advancement in this field.

To achieve this goal, we conducted a survey aimed at assessing the level of reflective skills among future social educators. The purpose of the survey was to determine the degree of development of these skills to support their further enhancement within the framework of acmeological competence. The survey was structured into five blocks, each containing five statements, making a total of 25 items.

Responses were collected using a Likert scale, which included the following options: 1 – completely disagree; 2 – rather disagree; 3 – difficult to answer; 4 – rather agree; 5 – completely agree.

The participants of this study were prospective social educators (Bachelor's degree) from three universities across Kazakhstan. These are L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University,

Abai Kazakh Pedagogical University named Abai, and Al.Farabi Kazakh National University. A total of 50 students responded to the survey. Since the number of students enrolled in the "Social Pedagogy" program is relatively small, respondents were selected from all academic years, from first to fourth year. The following table gives the information about the number of respondents from each university.

**Table 1**

*The number of respondents from each university*

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University	Al.Farabi Kazakh National University
23	17	10

Since the students were from different academic years, their ages also varied, ranging

from 18 to 32. The following table gives the information about the age of respondents.

**Table 2**

*The information about the age of respondents*

18	19	20	21	22	24	32
5	16	14	12	1	1	1

Among the 50 respondents, only four were male, while the remaining 46 were female. This reflects the fact that the "Social Pedagogy"

specialty is predominantly chosen by female students. The following table gives the information about the academic year of participants.

**Table 3**

*The information about the year of the respondents*

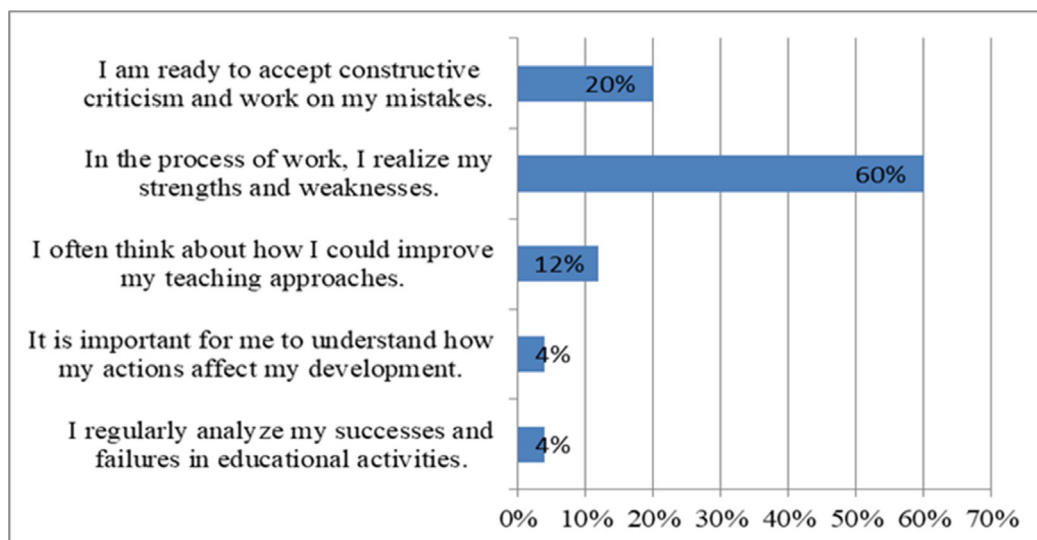
Year	1	2	3	4
	20	1	7	22

From this table, we can see that most respondents were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students. The survey was conducted within two months. The participation of students was voluntary, and they were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality. Collected data were processed through the use of descriptive statistical methods: frequency calculation, percentage distribution, and analysis of

variation by age, course, and university. This allowed us to reveal the peculiarities of the formation of reflexive skills in future social educators.

**Results.** The first block of statements focused on the respondents' awareness of their own learning activity. The figure below presents the data obtained from the survey related to this block.

**Figure 1**  
*Respondents' evaluation of awareness of their learning activity*

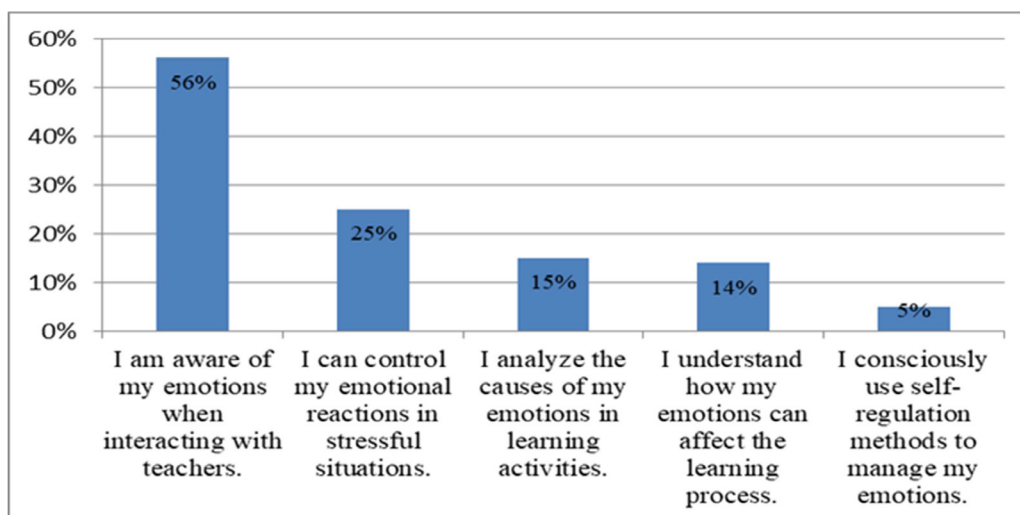


From the data, it is observed that most respondents (60%) understand their strong and weak sides. This means that a significant portion of respondents have developed a basic reflexive ability to understand their learning goals. This level of awareness of their personal characteristics allows students to more effectively plan their educational activities and build a self-development strategy. 20 % of

respondents consider that they accept criticism and that they can work on their mistakes. We consider that this point should be improved in the future. 4% of respondents think that they can analyze their achievements in studying.

The next section of our survey focused on emotional and cognitive reflection. Respondents were evaluated based on specific criteria, and the survey revealed the following data.

**Figure 2**  
*Respondents' evaluation of emotional and cognitive reflection*



The figure shows that the majority of respondents (56%) are aware of their emotions when interacting with teachers. However, only 5% believe they use self-regulation techniques

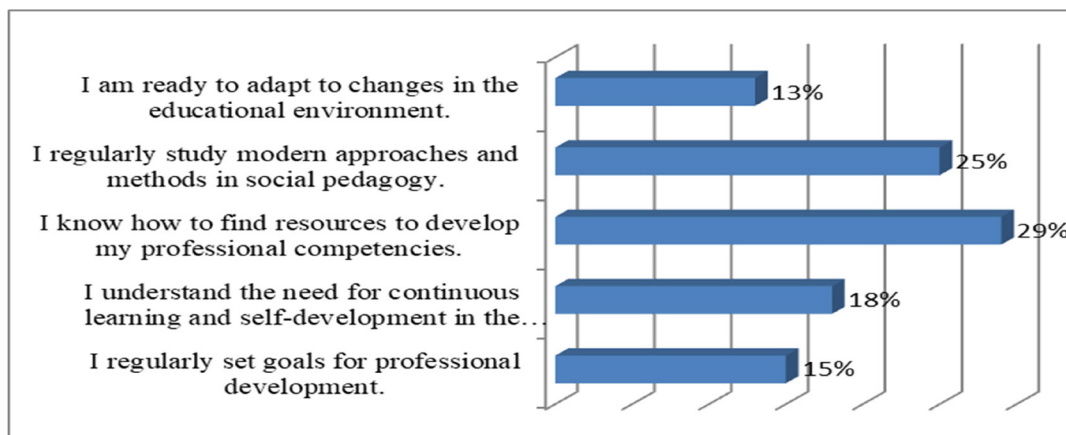
to manage these emotions. About a quarter of the participants consider that they are capable of controlling their emotions in challenging situations. A similar proportion of respondents

report that they analyze the causes of their emotions during learning activities, and they understand how emotions affect the learning process. The third block of our survey focused

on respondents' ability to engage in self-improvement. Participants were asked to select the statement that best reflected their views. The results are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Respondents' evaluation of their ability to self-improve*



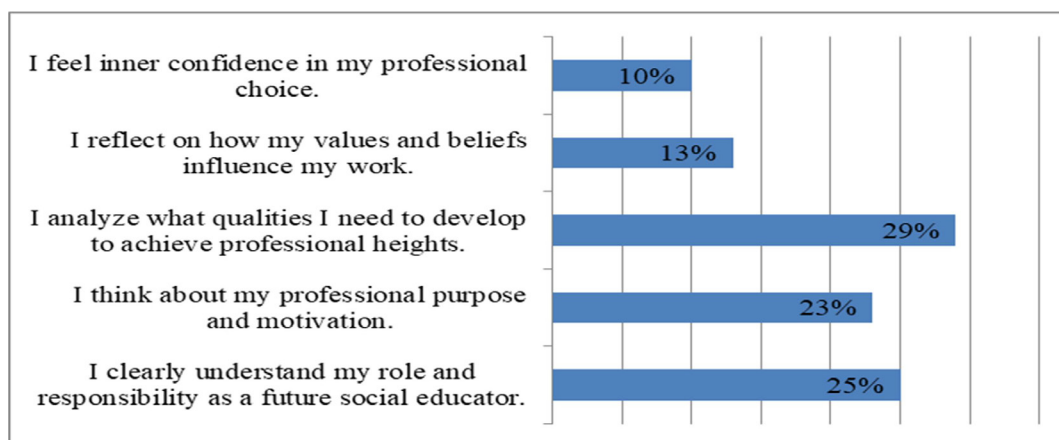
The majority of respondents (29%) reported being able to locate resources to advance their professional skills. Twenty-five percent of students routinely study contemporary social pedagogical techniques. 18% recognize the importance of ongoing education and personal growth in work-related endeavors. Just 13% of respondents said they were prepared to adjust to changes in the educational environment, and only 15% said they often established goals

for professional growth. According to these findings, the majority of respondents recognize the value of self-improvement, but fewer participants have developed the practical skills necessary to create objectives and adjust to changes.

The fourth block of the survey provided insights into the respondents' development of professional self-awareness. The corresponding data are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Respondents' evaluation of professional self-awareness*



The figure demonstrates that the largest proportion of respondents (29%) said they examine the traits they must cultivate to succeed

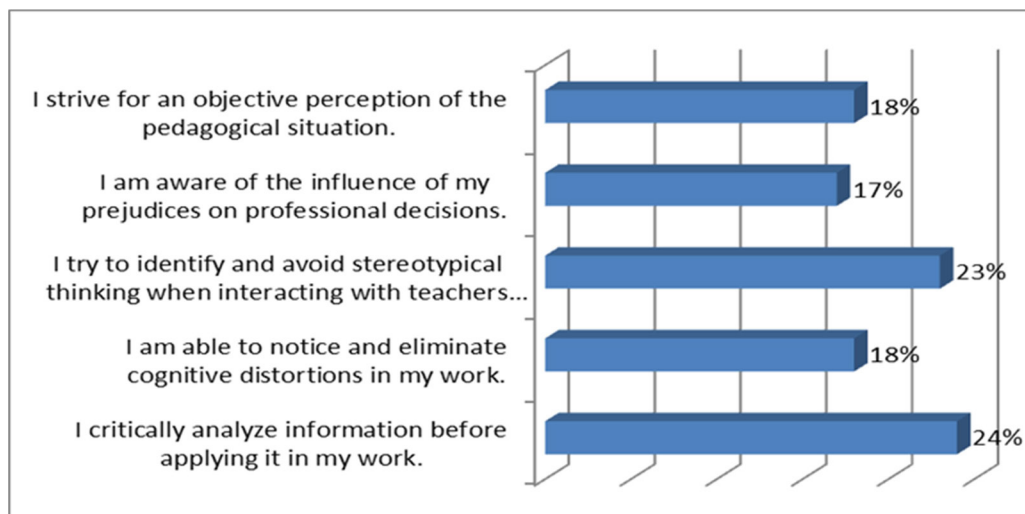
professionally. 23% consider their motivation and career ambitions, and 25% are well aware of their role and responsibilities as aspiring

social educators. Just 10% of respondents say they have inner confidence in their career decision, and only 13% say they consider how their values and beliefs affect their work. We may infer from these statistics that the majority of respondents prioritize professional

development and role awareness, but there is less clarity in their expression of confidence and personal values. These data were obtained from the fifth block of statements, which focused on the respondents' ability for critical thinking and self-reflection.

**Figure 5**

*Respondents' evaluation of their ability to think critically and self-reflection*



The data illustrate how respondents evaluated their ability for critical thinking and introspection. Approximately 25% indicated that they make an effort to avoid conventional thinking when interacting with professors and carefully analyze information before applying it. A similar proportion of respondents (around 17–18%) reported that they strive to assess pedagogical situations objectively, recognize the influence of personal biases on professional decisions, and identify and eliminate cognitive distortions in their work. The results of the study showed that the majority of participants had just rudimentary reflexive abilities. They can recognize their strengths and shortcomings thanks to these abilities. This is the main stage of their professional and personal reflection, which serves as the foundation for organizing their own area of personal growth.

Respondents are seen to be emotionally attuned, particularly while interacting with teachers. However, there is a lack of development in the ability to control and manage emotions. This suggests that components for building

emotional intelligence and resilience in work-related settings should be incorporated into the educational process. Particular consideration should be given to the professional identity component. Not all participants exhibit internal confidence in their professional decisions and a significant attitude toward their own values and beliefs that impact their professional actions, even when they are aware of their position and duties. This suggests that further research into the axiological component and the growth of introspection is necessary.

Some responders also exhibit the rudiments of critical thinking, the desire to evaluate educational circumstances objectively, and an understanding of professional behavior. These abilities need focused development, though, as they are not yet systematic. The development of reflexive skills, such as emotional self-regulation, awareness, critical thinking, and the capacity to link professional actions with personal values, requires comprehensive support, even though students possess the necessary elements for the formation of

acmeological competence. Individual reflexive competence is demonstrated by the responders, particularly in the areas of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and goal-orientedness. In addition, there is a deficiency in the practical abilities of self-control, flexibility, self-assurance, and value contemplation. These elements need more focus in the classroom and can serve as the foundation for future experts' development of acmeological competency.

**Discussion.** According to our study's findings, future social educators possess fundamental reflexive abilities (such as the capacity to identify their own advantages and disadvantages), but they lack emotional control, goal-setting, flexibility, and critical thinking. A similar profile is in line with the findings of contemporary research, which indicate that student teachers' reflections typically start at the descriptive level and only progress toward self-regulation and transformation when unique educational circumstances are present. Such a profile is in line with the findings of recent research, which show that novice teachers' reflections typically start with self-writing and basic awareness before progressing toward self-regulation and transformation only in the presence of particular circumstances (such as structured diaries, portfolios, or "scaffolds"). Therefore, it is demonstrated in Shiraly Gizi's (2023) research that the application of structured procedures raises student teachers' reflective skill levels greatly, which is consistent with our suggestion that such practices should be incorporated into the teaching and learning process.

Similarly, the research conducted by Haipa (2024) confirmed that portfolio management assists future social educators in thinking more deeply and critically, moving their thinking from descriptive to an analytical level. This research emphasizes that the development of education students' critical thinking and creative skills was significantly impacted by the building of portfolios. Building educational materials and fulfilling academic criteria required a careful, analytical approach that called for critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This suggests that organized mechanisms for

reflection and teacher evaluation might be helpful (Haipa, 2024).

Particularly of relevance are weak measures of emotional self-regulation, such as the application of emotion management techniques. According to available data, students' emotional competence and stability are greatly increased by focused programs that teach emotional intelligence with practical awareness and direct instruction of regulation techniques. These programs are also linked to students' self-efficacy and involvement. This concept was considered in the study conducted by Putri et al. (2024), where they conclude that emotional intelligence is important in enhancing students' self-efficacy, making its development in an educational setting crucial. The implications of his research highlight the necessity of instructional approaches that can improve emotional intelligence in order to promote both students' academic achievement and personal growth (Putri et al., 2024).

The research findings demonstrate that future social educators have only acquired fundamental reflexive abilities, leaving them lacking in emotional self-control, goal-setting, adaptability, and critical thinking. Current research confirms that students' reflection is restricted to the descriptive level and does not extend into the realm of self-regulation and transformation in the absence of unique educational settings, such as maintaining a portfolio, utilizing structured diaries, or other activities. At the same time, it has been demonstrated that the use of such activities greatly raises the degree of reflective abilities, fosters the growth of critical and creative thinking, and fortifies students' emotional competence and self-efficacy. Therefore, a prerequisite for social teachers' professional and personal development is the incorporation of organized mechanisms of reflection and programs for the development of emotional intelligence into the training process.

**Conclusion.** This study made an attempt to substantiate the importance of reflective skills in the process of forming the acmeological competence of prospective social educators, as well as to identify the level of formation

of reflective skills in prospective social educators for their further development in the context of acmeological competence. The conducted survey made it possible to identify prospective social educators' level of reflexive skills as a foundation of the development of their acmeological competence. Respondents comprehend their weaknesses and strengths; however, their levels of critical thinking, understanding their own values, and many other points should be enhanced in the future. These aspects are the components of acmeological competence and

should be the object of their attention in the educational environment. The limitations of the study are the fact that our survey covered respondents studying at three universities, which may restrict the representativeness and extrapolation of the obtained results to a broader student population. The creation and testing of unique techniques or training targeted at the formation and development of reflexive abilities, which would raise the degree of acmeological competence of students of educational specializations, might be future research suggestions on this problem.

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