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Young teacher's educational activity in improving professional competencies of the school staff

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze the experience of self-organization of the educational activity of a young teacher as a resource for improving the professional competencies of the school staff. The article conceptually presents a comparative analysis of scientific approaches to the concept of «educational activity» in foreign and Russian research practice. On the basis of generalization of sources, clarification and interpretation of formulations, a new approach to understanding educational activity is proposed for the professional readiness of a young teacher to improve the professional competencies of the teaching staff of a general education school. The author solves the urgent problem of improving the professional competencies of teaching staff with work experience who have not undergone special training for organizing the educational process in a distance format. Young teachers acted as advanced translators of online communication tools in the school pedagogical community. The article presents the results of an online survey of 170 young teachers from 30 general education organizations of the Volga Federal District using the Google Docs application. The undertaken research and the conclusions drawn based on its results expand the discourse on the national system of lifelong pedagogical education. It is emphasized that the educational activity of a young teacher allows you to design an individual trajectory of professional growth «in the workplace», to build relationships that create space for improving the professional competencies of colleagues.

Keywords: educational activity, young teacher, professional competence, professional growth, continuing education, teaching staff.

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Introduction

In the modern world, education is becoming a key source of growth in human capital, the most important resource for sustainable socio-economic development of the state and the progressive increase in the well-being of its citizens. In the context of a continuous increase in the volume of new knowledge, society requires information literacy from the younger generation in many areas for a successful existence in the world, and this, in turn, presupposes high professional competence. The Manifesto (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2016) emphasizes the need to support educators in their quest to develop universal skills and competencies. The Council recommendation of the European Union (Council recommendation, 2018) has determined that «the right set of skills and competencies» is due to the need to «maintain a decent standard of living for the population» through the mechanisms of lifelong learning styles. The expanding space of the teacher's professional activity as a socially significant result of the national state educational policy is updated in the course of the analysis of the fundamental normative documents. The professional standard «Educator» (educator, teacher) regulates the mechanism that ensures the development of pedagogical activity in accordance with labor functions. The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation «On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Development of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2024» presupposes Russia's entry into the top 10 countries in the world in terms of the quality of general education, and also actualizes the implementation of a national system of teacher growth. The federal project «Teacher of the Future» of the national project «Education» projects growth points for the professional lift of teachers, which stimulates independent educational activity in the process of continuous development of qualifications.

Thus, the main measures of state policy in the field of pedagogical support of the educational activity of a young pedagogue are: advanced training (seminars, courses), transfer and generalization of professional experience (subject methodological associations, methodological banks, competitions of pedagogical achievements), individual work with a teacher to minimize burnout factors.

A qualified young teacher should be proficient in different functional styles of education, have the ability to organize the communication process, taking into account the characteristics of developmental psychology, and be open to innovation. The rapid development of technology, the growing volume of subject information, the «innate» interest of the younger generation in IT and everything connected with it, necessitate continuous updating of professional competencies based on the principles of lifelong learning. Ideally, a young teacher should be both a translator of new ideas in the school teaching community and an advanced technical specialist.

This article formulates the author's position on the influence of the educational activity of a young teacher on the process of improving the professional competencies of the school staff in the post-industrial era of global transformations of the general education system, the demand for a high level of education in society and the duty of teachers to possess functional literacy.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this publication is to analyze the experience of self-organization of the educational activity of a young teacher as a resource for improving the professional competencies of the teaching staff in the context of the formation of such a model as a digital school.

In the research, we wanted to study, relying on the labor actions of the teacher, the implementation of individual trajectories of the continuous development of the qualifications of a young teacher, strengthening the teacher's independence in acquiring knowledge and skills, the formation of a culture of psychological and pedagogical readiness for self-educational activity, the introduction of experience in improving the professional competencies of the teaching staff in the formation of a digital school model. Labor actions and the required level of knowledge and skills indirectly allowed us to identify the risks of educational activity and professional development of a young teacher. Therefore, the most important strategic task in the context of the requirements of the national system of teacher growth is the need for self-organization of educational activity, which is dictated, on the one hand, by the specifics of teaching activities, its social role, on the other hand, by the real situation of lifelong education, which is associated with the constantly changing conditions of pedagogical work, readiness to restructure activities and take an active part in the life of the entire school staff.

Literature review

The term «educational activity», taking into account dual pedagogical and psychological nature of the phenomenon, is traditionally included in the conceptual apparatus of general pedagogy (Rooij, 2020; Kojaspirova, 2021), in the framework of which it is understood as a kind of emotionally colored evolving and as a result of social cognition of the image. This interpretation is most common in practical pedagogy and in other related sciences (Anagnostopoulos, Wilson, & Charles-Harris, 2021).

The authors of publications devoted to various aspects of educational activity abroad note that this area needs close attention of researchers. Every year, millions of dollars are invested in teacher professional development (PD) to improve teaching quality, and elaborate regulatory frameworks which are developed to ensure that young teachers participate in lifelong learning (Avalos, 2011; Gore, Lloyd, Smith & Bowe, 2017; Hollins, 2018). What characterizes a good teacher?

How seriously do we understand and take into account the development of a young specialist as a whole (taking into account the intellectual, social and emotional aspects of personal and professional development) when we develop and implement our programs to improve the professional competencies of the school staff? The answers to these important questions are conceptually reflected in the policy paper on the quality of school teachers prepared by the World Federation of Associations of pedagogical education. Today, the success of a young teacher as a professional is as relevant as it once was, since modern educational standards aim at the activity of the individual, and the demand of society constantly requires information enrichment to implement creative interaction with colleagues (Grissom & Youngs, 2015). This line of work promotes teaching improvement by using robust quality criteria to weed out the worst teachers and learn from the best (Metzler, 2014). In turn, even setting aside complex and unresolved measurement issues, assessing teaching quality will have limited impact on improving teaching quality if not linked to an effective approach to PD.

Educational activity in the professional development of teachers is not a new concept. In the studies of foreign colleagues, the analysis of the experience of young teachers who develop their practice at school prevails: experimentation, reflection and adaptation of new theories, practices and content that they have become acquainted with in their professional activities. This process can be individualized with reflection, used as a tool for self-guidance (Minott, 2010), or collaborative through professional development activities such as learning lessons (Fernandez, 2002) and participating in professional learning communities (Grissom & Youngs, 2015). However, these professional development activities cannot fully meet the needs of initial professional development in the context of improving the professional competencies of the school staff (Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016). In the 21st century, the emphasis is shifting towards other skills: the ability to interact with colleagues, the willingness to work in a team, leadership, creative and critical thinking, the ability to work in the changing conditions of pedagogical reality and achieve high results in the profession.

Comprehension of the problems of educational activity of a young teacher of a Russian school in the context of effective foreign experience is carried out in the following areas: analysis of models of professional development of teachers in foreign countries (Gracheva, 2020), study of the content, forms and practices of continuous teacher education in developed countries (Dzhemileva, 2011), determination of strategies for the development of human resources in the education system in a number of states (Bautista, Wong J., & Gopinathan, 2015; Matveeva, 2017).

We will adhere to the one proposed by N.V. Ivanova's interpretation of the concept of «educational activity»: «this is a multidimensional personal education, characterized by such manifestations as self-actualization and self-regulation in achieving individual educational goals, the synthesis of educational motives and methods of independent behavior, a stable positive attitude to learning throughout life» (Ivanova, 2008).

A number of researchers (Bogoyavlenskaya, 1983) see the source of activity in the forms of organizing professional relationships and interaction of members of the school's teaching staff.

Nevertheless, despite the complex of previously performed studies, the problem of the educational activity of a young teacher in modern conditions remains insufficiently studied. In particular, issues related to the readiness of a young teacher to design a trajectory of professional growth in the process of continuous professional development, the formation of personal organization in self-education, the ability to manage their educational activities, the implementation of high educational results are the most vital. These questions became the subject of our research.

The current federal legislation (Labor Code of the Russian Federation, federal laws adopted on the regulation of labor relations) does not contain the concept of «young specialist». In the local acts of general education schools, teachers who have worked in the field of teaching for no more than three years are classified as «young». During the analysis of scientific literature, we determined that the category of young teachers includes specialists of any age with continuous teaching experience of up to three years, or with a gap in teaching practice, having higher professional education or secondary vocational education in the direction of training «Education and Pedagogical Sciences» or in the field corresponding to the subject taught, or higher vocational education or secondary vocational education and additional vocational education in the direction of activity in an educational organization (Barzhanova, 2015).

High demands are placed on young teachers at the beginning of their professional career, when they must master not only all the basic teaching skills, but also the skills of managing their continuous self-education. Therefore, a young specialist should be able to flexibly respond to changes in the educational situation, take into account the specifics of existing pedagogical systems, quickly adapt to new conditions of professional activity in order to successfully realize their professional and personal potential.

Methodology

The methodological basis for the development of a person's educational activity is formed by the theory of self-organization of lifelong education (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), the concept of the structure of educational activity as an object of its organization (Slastenin, 2020) and the theory of self-regulated learning (Markova, 1996). It is important to disseminate the achievements of individual educational goals to improve the professional competencies of the teaching staff of the school (Ivanishcheva, 2020).

Educational activity was assessed according to the following characteristics:

- motives of professional activity (questionnaire by K. Zamfir modified by A.A. Rean «Motivation of professional activity»);
- representations of a young teacher about building a model of educational activity in the context of the process of continuous education (modified technique «unfinished sentences»);
- availability in young teachers basic psychological, pedagogical, subject and methodological knowledge (author's test) and their successful application in educational practice (solution of pedagogical situations);
- productive interaction with colleagues (author's method);
- involvement in the activities of the professional pedagogical community (author's methodology).

To assess the significance of the differences obtained, the methods of statistical data processing were used: Spearman's test, Mann-Whitney test (U), as well as correlation analysis.

Without setting the task of an exhaustive review of various approaches to the problem under study, we will designate the leading ideas of the systemic, subject-activity and prognostic approaches. The systematic approach allows us to consider educational activity as an integrative personality trait generated by a cognitive need and reflecting the integrity of a person's socio-cultural development in professional activity. The subject-activity approach determines the degree of manifestation of mental actions based on knowledge, individual motivation, intellectual abilities and skills that reproduce the essential aspects of the educational activity of a young teacher in the trajectory of increasing pedagogical competence. The predictive approach actualizes effective resources for alternative scenarios for improving the professional competencies of the teaching staff in the context of the formation of the digital school model.

The situation of self-isolation in the context of the spread of COVID-19 dictated the need for an online study. This paper presents the results of an online survey conducted by the author of the article in order to substantiate the educational activity of a young teacher as a resource for improving the professional competencies of the school staff.

The survey was conducted in the form of an anonymous questionnaire through the Internet platform Google Docs. The recruitment of respondents was carried out in September 2020 using the official group of the program on the social network Facebook, as well as sending a questionnaire by e-mail. The sample was 32% of the general population; it was formed randomly according to the territorial principle and depended on the consent of the respondents to provide data characterizing their own position in relation to educational activity. The socio-demographic portrait of the participants is presented by 170 teachers aged 22 to 24 (older teachers also expressed their opinion), of which 87% are women and 13% are men. 27.1% of the interviewed teachers have up to one year experience, 38.7% – 1-2 years, 34.2% – 3 years. Most of the respondents were subject teachers teaching Russian language and literature, mathematics, physics, biology, geography and other disciplines. The group of interviewed teachers also included primary school teachers. The experts were representatives of the school management, honored teachers of the Russian Federation, teachers of higher education. The study included general educational organizations (N = 30) of the Volga Federal District. The geography of the survey is presented by the cities: Orenburg, Ufa, Samara, Nizhny Novgorod, Saransk, Kazan, Perm, Glazov. The results obtained were processed using the SPSS-19.0 package.

Results

The strategy of educational activity of a young teacher.

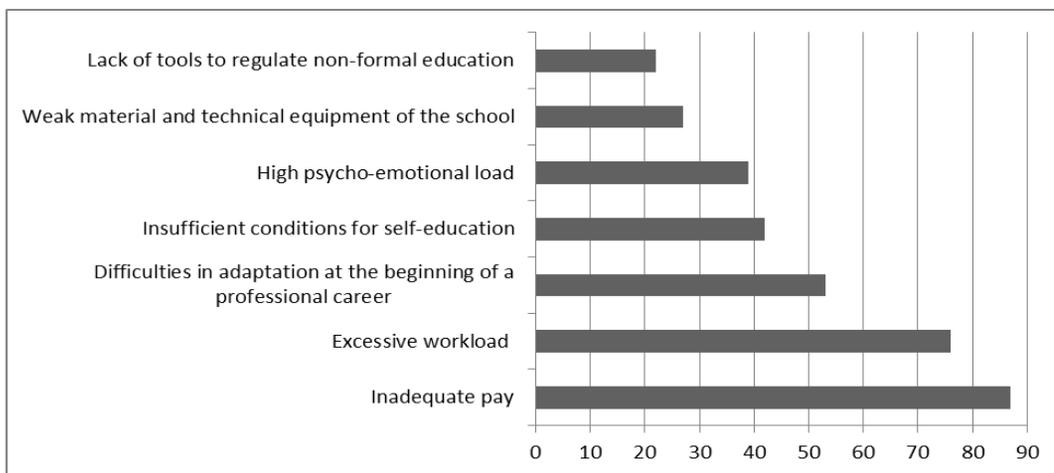
The analysis of the results of the online survey revealed problem areas both in the readiness of young teachers to manifest educational activity and in other types of their activity that are important for improving the professional competencies of the school staff. A study of the demonstration of educational activity by young teachers (N = 170) showed that only 9.4% have been trained in professional development programs (including courses, seminars, internships provided at the place of work) during the last 12 months, 32.8% say about themselves at competitions of various grants and projects, 25.1% are involved in the work of methodological associations of teaching staff.

We especially note the low level of such a component of educational activity as «systemic communication with young teachers of other schools». Of 87% of respondents who answered negatively to this question, 23% admitted that such contacts were completely absent, and 64% that such connections are, as a rule, «personal» (we were only interested in the scientific and educational context of communications) ... The data obtained look very contradictory against the background of the growing availability of various professional, scientific and educational networks, including global ones.

To compile a multidimensional picture of the educational activity of a young teacher, we analyzed their ideas about training programs for labor skills (professional training right at the workplace) and the motives for participating in them, indicating the degree of readiness to improve the professional competencies of colleagues. The respondents were asked the question: «What methods have you used to acquire new knowledge and skills?» The vast majority of respondents (84%) received non-formal education (seminars, trainings, educational videos on YouTube). To the question: «When was the last time you attended a master class at your school?» The answers were distributed as follows: last month – 31%, 2-4 months ago – 11%, 5-6 months ago – 15%, last year – 23%, never participated in professional development – 19%, did not answer the question – 1%. The respondents named the most valuable result of participation in such forms of training as obtaining additional knowledge to those already available (31%), acquiring knowledge relevant to the subject being taught in a short time (23%), mastering methodological and practical skills (18%), developing the necessary professional skills (17%) and the implementation of the trajectory of their professional growth (11%). There were no statistically significant differences in the respondents' answers to this question.

In addition, in an empirical study, the reasons were identified that limit the educational activity of a young teacher.

Figure 1. Reasons limiting the educational activity of a young teacher



It is noteworthy that in the answers, 23% of respondents, among other reasons, indicated the absence of domestic instruments for regulating non-formal education of beginners, which exist abroad: European Skills Passport/Europass – a resource for creating and placing a portfolio of skills and competencies in 35 European countries; Youthpass – a pan-European tool available to young people to participate in projects;

UNIQUE Learning Badges of the Council of Europe is a system of educational badges for specific skills and competencies.

Interrelation of indicators of motivation of professional activity with educational activity.

Assessment of the influence of internal and external motivation of professional educational activity was carried out using a standardized questionnaire by K. Zamfir modified by A.A. Reana «Motivation of professional activity» (Rean, 2017). Correlation analysis was carried out using Spearman's coefficient on the general sample (N = 170). Indices of intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic positive motivation (EPM) and extrinsic negative motivation (ENM) were determined in points. The obtained school values were divided by 2, and then the participant's profile was calculated, which had one of the following types: 1) IM > EPM > ENM; 2) IM = EPM > ENM; 3) ENM > EPM > IM.

Table 1. The relationship of internal and external motivation of professional activity with professional development

Scale	IM	EPM	ENM
Interaction with school colleagues	0,23*	0,33**	-0,33**
Desire to be a mentor	0,26*	-0,25*	-0,18
The need to broadcast the experience to senior colleagues	0,38**	0,16	0,05
Responsibility for someone else's result	0,11	0,16	0,34**
Commitment to continuous professional growth	0,33**	0,15	-0,07
Completing the required amount of work	-0,05	0,09	-0,30**
Assessment of the results of own labor	0,35**	0,05	0,00
Discussion with the school administration, teaching staff	0,00	0,34**	0,16
Positive impact on improvement professional competencies	-0,12	0,07	0,24*

Note: * – $p \leq 0,05$; ** – $p \leq 0,01$.

The study of the relationship between motivation and the characteristics of educational activity demonstrates a significant ($p \leq 0.01$) positive relationship of internal motivation (0.23) and a negative relationship of external (both positive (0.33) and negative (-0, 33)) motivation with the ability to interact with school colleagues. Young teachers with a high level of motivation have a clear need to broadcast the experience to older colleagues (0.38), a desire to be mentors (0.26). Those who begin their labor activity as a teacher, motivated negatively, attribute additional responsibility (0.34), which is not rewarded financially, to the essential shortcomings of the mentor's function.

A connection was also established between motivation and the assessment of professional pedagogical activity: respondents with pronounced intrinsic motivation evaluate the results of their work (0.35) higher, external positive motivation – they constructively discuss problems with the school administration, the teaching staff (0.34), negative – they evaluate pedagogical work by the amount of work performed (-0.30). In addition, for young teachers with a favorable motivational profile, the resources of educational activity have a positive effect on improving the professional competencies of the general education school staff (0.24).

Improving the professional competencies of the school staff by a young teacher.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching staff of the general education system faced additional difficulties. On the one hand, not all students, especially younger students, and their parents were sufficiently prepared for distance learning. In particular, the difficulties were caused by the «low level of computer literacy» of the parents. On the other hand, the teachers themselves did not receive special training for organizing distance learning. Experienced teachers with more than 25-30 years of experience turned out to be less ready for the implementation of distance learning (conduct lessons online, upload assignments, control knowledge, etc.). In this regard, young teachers who do not just use the Internet and communication technologies, but live in a digital space, have taken the initiative in improving the professional competencies of the school staff in the use of educational online platforms, electronic programs, cloud services and etc.

Table 2. Comparison of the studied parameters of improving the professional competencies of teachers

Parameters	Seniority		U _{3MIL.}	p-value
	less than 30 years	more than 30 years		
General pedagogical competence				
Knowledge of the nature of the course of cognitive processes of the individual in conditions of distance learning	63,86	57,82	306,40**	0,01
Subject competence				
Ability to broadcast subject content in the electronic information and educational environment	60,34	53,22	289,00**	0,01
Innovative competence				
Willingness to implement state-of-the-art remote learning technologies	71,94	62,01	351,00*	0,05
Information and communication competence				
Possession of the basics of electronic communication to serve the needs of	54,11	39,04	321,00**	0,01

the educational process

According to the data obtained, experienced teachers with more than 30 years of experience are significantly higher than the rest of the subjects ($p \leq 0.01$) in need of «navigation programs» that would contain «useful tips» on working with educational platforms («Russian Electronic School», «Uchi.ru», «Yandeks. Textbook», publishing houses «Education», «Yaklass», etc.). On their part, one can trace the desire for an independent choice of information channels, mainly with flexible support by a young teacher.

The results obtained correlate with the conceptual ideas of the developers of the activity approach (S.L. Rubinstein, A.N. Leontyev), who considered labor activity to be the guarantor of fruitful social interaction. The involvement of a young teacher in the activities of the professional pedagogical community (the author's methodology) was largely determined by the presence of an individual experience of communication in social networks for organizing distance learning. 30% of novice teachers when familiarizing their experienced colleagues with the resources of online professional communities (the International Community of Teachers «I am the Teacher», the information and methodological association of pedagogues «Evolution», Scholar.google.ru, Academia.edu, Mendeley.com., Epistemio.com., Slideshare.net, etc.), as well as personal websites of teachers, demonstrated high educational activity, independence in managing their own career and the ability to transfer teaching skills to other professional environments.

Discussion

In the course of generalizing the obtained data and comparing them with the results of similar empirical studies conducted in other regions of Russia, we substantiate the following provisions.

First, the modernization of foreign and Russian education is associated with the process of professional growth of teachers, due to the introduction of educational and professional standards, measurement of the quality of learning outcomes, the transition to certification of qualifications. A young teacher is faced with new challenges of a rapidly changing reality, educational practice and an innovative economy. To respond to these challenges, he or she is required to be mobile in complex socio-cultural realities, solving pedagogical tasks as part of assessing the possible consequences of professional activity, to be in demand and competitive in the educational labor market, ready to carry out transformations in the country and its regions into educational process, to build an individual trajectory of lifelong education. Similar results are discussed in the publication by M.S. Yakushkina (Yakushkina, 2020) on improving the education level of teaching staff, especially young specialists. There are also scientific studies that consider the processes of professional reflection in the context of the requirements for the level of competence of teachers (Gevorkyan, Ioffe, Shalashova, 2020).

The study of the features of the professional development of a young teacher shows their dependence on psychophysiological characteristics (Ilyin, 2005), internal motivation for learning (Osborn, 2011) and the definition of value-semantic guidelines for their own professional activities.

Secondly, comprehending the educational activity of a young teacher makes it possible to identify such regulatory components of personality as the parameters of self-organization in achieving individual educational goals, strategies for the cognitive trajectory of self-education, the synthesis of educational motives and methods of independent behavior, target attitudes towards achieving high results of professional activity. ... Specialists who begin their pedagogical path with an active position demonstrate a focus on achieving goals, perseverance on the path to knowledge, they are characterized by openness to new experience, the desire to create pedagogical situations of interaction with colleagues. The available works are devoted to the intellectual activity of the teacher (Bogoyavlenskaya, 1983) and the assessment of the cognitive abilities of people of different ages (Staff, Hogan, Williams & Whalley, 2018).

Thirdly, the results of our research confirm the orientation of the educational activity of a young teacher to improving the professional competencies of the school staff. During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced serious difficulties. Most experienced teachers have a need to gain experience in the use of various information and communication technologies in their professional activities in connection with the transition to distance learning. The difficult process of a novice teacher entering the profession was further exacerbated by assuming the function of a mentor for experienced teachers in organizing lessons using various Internet services, educational platforms, Zoom conference services, etc. In the course of such professional interaction, experienced teachers formed their own skill of organizing the educational process on the basis of modern IT technologies, mastered previously unused e-learning tools and distance learning technologies.

The results obtained in the course of our research allow us to draw a conclusion about the educational activity of a young teacher as a resource for improving the professional competencies of the school staff. Similar conclusions were previously reached by L. Jong, J. Meirink, W. Admiraal (2019), who studied teacher collaboration in secondary schools and showed opportunities to support professional learning in teacher groups. The stimuli for the educational activity of a young teacher can be individual goals and personal effectiveness as key determinants of work motivation (Kooij & Kanfer, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we will draw inferences regarding the problem under study.

1. The educational activity of a young teacher in the collective experience of professional activity finds expression in the design of the trajectory of individual development in the context of lifelong education. The idea of educational activity is associated with the expectations of the state and the demands of modern society for successful personal development and professional growth. In essence, pedagogical activity aimed at preserving and transferring social experience and culture of society makes high demands on the level of education of the teacher, which, in turn, determines the need for self-regulation in achieving individual educational goals.

2. Ideally, a young teacher is a highly competent specialist who realizes the value of professional growth, self-education and self-development, acts as a spiritual and moral guide of the culture of society, focused on professional achievements, deeply knowledge of the subject area, psychological and pedagogical grounds for the implementation of the educational process, responsible for the results of their own activities and striving to improve the professional competencies of their colleagues. Conceptually, the general education system vitally needs young personnel who see the source of activity in the forms of organizing professional relationships and interaction between members of the school's teaching staff.

3. The results obtained in the course of empirical research indicate a positive motivational readiness of the majority of young teachers to implement the strategy of educational activity. An analysis of the results of an online survey showed that 84% of respondents are actively involved in non-formal education (seminars, trainings, educational videos on YouTube). 31% of the respondents named the main result in achieving individual educational goals «obtaining additional knowledge to those already existing». Among the reasons limiting educational activity, 87% of young teachers indicated «inadequate salary».

The motivation of teachers who begin their professional path turned out to be in different ways related to the parameters of educational activity. Thus, specialists with a high level of intrinsic motivation are more prepared to interact with school colleagues to exchange practical knowledge in a situation of real cooperation, jointly solve common problems and improve professional competencies. However, the dominance of external motivational attitudes leads to reluctance to take on the functions of a mentor to an experienced colleague due to additional responsibility.

It was also found that experienced teachers with more than 30 years of experience significantly higher than the rest of the testees demonstrate a desire for an independent choice of information channels (Internet services, educational platforms, conference call services, etc.), mainly with flexible support by a young teacher.

We consider tasks related to the study of the dependence of the level of development of the professional competence of a young teacher on the level of his educational activity and involvement in research activities as a prospect for the continuation of the study.

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