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Current problems of professional development of a prospective teacher

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Abstract

A large number of studies are devoted to the problem of professional adaptation of novice teachers. They emphasize various problems which must be overcome by a teacher at the initial stage of professional adaptation such as emotional exhaustion, professional crisis (Correa et al., 2015; Danilov & Schustova, 2018; Clandinin et al., 2015; Dicke et al., 2015; etc.). It is obvious that unpreparedness for complications at school not only increases the possibility of a teacher leaving the profession but also reduces his personal and innovative potential, worsens the quality of work with learners. This determined the relevance of this study. Based on empirical data, the article describes a predictive assessment of students-future teachers of the difficulties of their professional adaptation at an early stage of their career. It is shown that future teachers underestimate the “bureaucratic” and didactic difficulties, as well as such sources of overcoming the adaptation crisis as the support of the administration and the support of colleagues in comparison with working school teachers. The data obtained indicate that future teachers may not be ready to work in school, since they underestimate precisely those groups of difficulties that were identified as the most significant in the assessment of working teachers. The research results can be used to improve the quality of teacher training through the development of professional self-knowledge of prospective teachers, motivating them to self-education and self-development within the framework of new methods and ways of pedagogical education.

Keywords: prospective teachers, teacher adaptation, teacher professional development, pedagogical education, questionnaire

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Introduction

It is important to improve the quality of teacher training with a strong emphasis on the main difficulties, as well as those resources for overcoming them that subsist at the beginning stage of the teacher's professional activity. Recently it comes in many research recognized the great differences between the content of pedagogical education and the actualities of the schools in which novice teachers start to work. This issue are discussed in the works of Biktagirova and Valeeva, (2014); Kolesnikova (2016); Laptev et al. (2019); Seshadri (2005), etc.

The ways of a teacher starting work in a school are represented in the scientific papers as a professional crisis (Correa et al., 2015; Danilov & Schustova, 2018), which is followed by the rise of attrition (Clandinin et al., 2015; Dicke et al., 2015), improper early career choices (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012) and can lead to teachers abandoning the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017; Tricarico et al., 2015).

Thus, the student turns out to be unaware of the most diverse difficulties that are associated with the professional activities of a teacher in modern school. Is the student aware of these challenges and what coping strategies he intends to use to master them? Will his ideas about problems be realistic and correspond to the real situation in modern school? These questions determined the purpose and objectives of our research.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of our study was to identify the prognostic assessment of students-future teachers of the difficulties of their professional adaptation at an early stage of their career.

The research objectives were to compare categories of difficulties given pedagogical students with those of already working teachers and found that future teachers underestimate psychological and "bureaucratic" difficulties and overestimate their didactic and communicative competence in comparison with working school teachers.

Literature review

A large number of scientific works are devoted to the problem of professional adaptation of novice teachers, which emphasize various problems that must be overcome by a teacher at the initial stage of professional adaptation. These include emotional exhaustion, stress and a professional crisis (Baloğlu & Karadağ, 2009; Correa et al., 2015; etc.), as a result of which teachers may leave the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017).

The circumstances of the pandemic of the modern coronavirus infection and the necessity of organizing distance learning caused by it only exacerbated the problems of modern pedagogical education (Pozdnyakova & Kuleshova, 2020).

Significant conditions of the modern educational situation considerably affect teachers. These are innovations in educational policy and the pedagogical process, new information technologies, psychological and pedagogical characteristics of modern students and other factors. Continually reforms in the education system position beginner teachers in challenging conditions (Martin et al., 2007; Parcerisa and Verger, 2016, etc.), requiring the improvement of standards of teacher's training (Ruffinelli, 2014; Choi et al., 2018; Laptev, Pisareva, & Tryapitsina, 2019, etc.).

Responding to the challenges of the time, modern education is rethinking objectives of teacher education (Duffy, 2005; Feuer, etc., 2013; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Scales, etc., 2018; Timperley, etc., 2008, and others), which are associated with the changing role of the teacher. The professional roles of a teacher are increasingly complemented by the roles of a diagnostician, mediator, consultant, child rights advocate, researcher, organizer, and others. The roles are superimposed on one another, manifesting themselves depending on the pedagogical situation and the social circumstances as a whole. Some of them are well-established and their development is well known in pedagogical education. Some of them relatively recently entered the arsenal of pedagogical activity and still need to be "embedded" into pedagogical practice (Contreras Domingo, 2010; Savotina, 2019), taking into account the historically established practice of teaching educators (Fendler, 2003; Usoltseva, 2018), existing teachers' ideas about their profession (Levin, 2015; Prokofieva, Akimova, & Karapunarly, 2020).

The diversity of social roles that a modern teacher has to fulfil increases the requirements for teachers' reflection, that is, the ability to critically assess themselves, the results of their thinking and activities. Reflection is seen as an urgent trend in teacher pedagogical development, which needs to be given more attention in teacher training programs (Duffy, 2005; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Ward, & McCotter, 2004). In our work, we focused on the contribution to the development of the teachers' reflection of professional interactions with other subjects of education, that is, interprofessional interaction, and their participation in cultural and educational projects (Antokhina, Prokofeva., Ryashina, etc., 2020).

The practice of interprofessional interaction, based on shared understanding and coordination in actions for a common goal, performs a vital part in the modernization of system of education. To carry out a full-fledged educational process becomes beyond the power of the only teacher of any kind of educational institution. The implementation of significant functions of education in a dynamically changing, contradictory and risky modern society is also beyond the power of a team consisting of representatives of only one profession.

To guarantee the positive development of the child in modern education, it turns out that the participation of various pedagogical professionals is necessary: psychologists, social educators, speech therapists, and the administrative corps of educational organizations. The need to harmonize their goals and working methods during interprofessional interactions gives teachers a unique opportunity for the professional understanding of their goals and working methods. Unfortunately, the development of reflection is not the focus of training programs for teachers, which leads to difficulties at the beginning of their careers.

However, in their work, du Plessisa and Sundeb (2017) record that this teacher's career stage does not depend on an educational policy, the system of teacher's training and is defined by different countries' researchers. Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey (2015) dispute that the different school characteristics can additionally influence the evolution of novice teachers, which was noted for urban schools in economically disadvantageous regions. It is in these schools that teachers often lack the personal and cultural experience to build trusting relationships with their students who differ in age, culture, racial and other characteristics (Schauer, 2018; Sinagatullin & Kalashnikova, 2018).

The significance of the subject considered in the article is due to the fact that many researchers understand the numerous oppositions between the content of teacher education and the actualities of the schools in which novice teachers begin to work which are presented in the works of Ayala Arancibia (2014), Kolesnikova (2016), Parcerisa and Verger (2016). We examined the process of a teacher beginning their work at a school and totally agree with its description in the literature as a professional crisis (Danilov & Schustova, 2018), which is followed by the rise of an attrition (Clandinin et al., 2015; Kelchtermans, 2017), improper early career conclusions (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012) and can spread teachers to leave the job (Tricarico, Jacobs, & YendolHoppey, 2015). Educational reforms assign beginner teachers in tough situations (Martin, Mccaughtry, Hodges-Kulinna, & Cothran, 2007; Parcerisa & Verger, 2016), demanding the development of new paradigms of teacher's training (Ruffinelli, 2014; Choi & Walker, 2018; Laptev, Pisareva, & Tryapitsina, 2019).

A significant number of authors highlights the dilemma and expresses the teacher's adjustment to school as a "shock" (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, & Aberasturi-Apraiz, 2015; Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015). It is hard to agree with this idea, taking into statement the continuance of the practice at the school while prospective teachers are studying at the university (Laptev et al., 2019), the mentoring of more qualified teachers during the beginning years (Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, Buchanan, & Prescott, 2015; Prokofieva, Akimova, & Karapurnarly,2020).), specialised counselling centres (Tricarico et al., 2015; Danilov & Schustova, 2018) and other actions helping teachers and limiting their escape from school in many countries.

Fairly important, according to the literature, is the growth of the psychological flexibility of teachers in the early years of their work at school (Johnson et al., 2016; Kaur & Singh, 2019).

As we see in the study, understanding professional educational training is nearly associated with the idea of the process of compliance of beginner teachers and factors influencing this behaviour (Henissen, Beckers, & Moerkerke, 2017; Savotina, 2019). Enhancing the quality of training and professional activities of teachers is hard to convey without investigating the main obstacles, as well as the resources to defeat them, which exist at the beginning steps of the pedagogical work. Knowing these characteristics of starting a pedagogical career, teacher's educators can improve the willingness of prospective teachers to commence their service at school by compensating potential difficulties and highlighting factors that will support teachers coping with complicated problems and obstacles.

There are multiple approaches and tools for gathering and interpreting data to study teacher acclimatisation. One of the efficient and trustworthy methods in the scientific literature is the reflexive evaluation by teachers of their admission into the school. Interviews, focus groups, surveys, the recordings of stories and other forms (Kelchtermans, 1993; Fleming, 2014; Burke et al., 2015; Danilov & Schustova, 2018; Il'ina & Loginova, 2019) are employed for this objective.

Reflecting teachers' own practices early in their works at school, we can better comprehend the connection between objective and subjective determinants in the process of adjustment to the pedagogical profession. The challenges teachers face at the start of their careers are very various. Hence, not all challenges at the beginning of a pedagogical career should lead to a change in teacher's training; only the essence, the most significant of them should be highlighted. Teachers' observation of their early background provides us with the opportunity of select such key complexity in the knowledge of transforming sociocultural circumstances.

Clearly, an investigation of the retrospective evaluation of the beginning steps of their professional actions by teachers who have remained in the service does not show unconquerable challenges. All the barriers have been overcome nevertheless, but what precisely has promoted the teachers to cope? Research implies that both school administration support (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013) and mentoring (Burke et al., 2015) are essential in defeating the teacher's crisis of adaptation.

Summing the foregoing studies, we can assume that an investigation of the resources that support coping with the initial career's difficulties that teachers confirm in self-reports is of prominent importance in terms of improving the format and content of teacher's education.

Methodology

For the purposes of the study, the authors of the article developed a questionnaire "Reflection of early pedagogical experience". The questionnaire consists of closed questions with multiple choices. Respondents should prefer no more than three alternatives for each subject. Options to the questions were generated through reviewing the current research on the problem and then were tested through an expert survey in which both scholars and educational practitioners took part (10 experts).

The survey was conducted anonymously. The study involved students of pedagogical areas (52 people, an average age of 21.1 years, 1 man and 52 women) and already working teachers (48 people, an average age of 23.4 years, 3 men and 45 women) with the length of working experience less than 3 years.

We compared data using the Mann-Whitney U-test in the program Statistica 8.0.

Results

Comparing the opinion of a student-teacher who does not work at school with teachers who already have such experience on an ongoing basis is quite justified. In the process of pedagogical training, students undergo practical training at school, which allows them to create their own opinion about what awaits them at school. By being mature enough and having some experience of self-reflection, students pursuing a teaching degree can predictably reliably assess their strengths to cope with stress and challenges early in their careers.

A number of peculiarities of work at school are not perceived by future teachers as difficulties (the statistically significant differences obtained are in the range from 0.01 to 0.04). Students underestimate the reporting workload at school. Only 23.1% of future teachers indicated this difficulty in teaching, while almost half of working teachers (47.9%) see this as a problem of adaptation to school. 3.9% of prospective teachers perceive high requirements in preparing schoolchildren for passing exams as obstacles, but 6.3% of working teachers assess the "drilling" of students for tests as a problem for self-realization in school. The tense nature of relations with colleagues had to be experienced by 4.2% of teachers, and half as many future teachers expect them to arise (1.9%).

Future teachers are optimistic about the knowledge they receive in the process of studying at the university. Only 15.4% of them believe that at the initial stage of their careers they will experience a lack of knowledge, and a third of working teachers (33.3%) will face its insufficient or outdated character. Students have a positive attitude to their wages in the early years of school, which is not entirely true. Low salaries of teachers as an educational problem for young teachers were indicated by 44.2% of students and 60.4% of already working teachers.

26.9% of students believe that they will not face problems at the beginning of work in school, while only 8.3% of working teachers have this experience of a trouble-free career start.

There are difficulties that future teachers predict considerably fine (differences between answers both groups do not reach the level of statistical significance). These include misunderstanding on the part of the administration (5.8% of students and 6.3% of working teachers remarked this complexity), its conservatism and unwillingness to be innovative (7.7% and 6.3%, respectively). For 18.8% of working teachers, misunderstanding on the part of parents is one of the problems in their work. These difficulties are foreseen by 13.5% of future teachers. The rivalry of colleagues is also objectively evaluated by students (1.9% of students and 2.1% of teachers).

Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom were noted by 21.2% of students and 18.8% of working teachers, and 5.8% of students and 2.1% of teachers indicated the necessity of using information technology in the educational process.

The negative influence of their own fatigue on the pedagogical process was recorded by a slightly larger number of students compared to novice teachers (30.8% and 22.9%, respectively), although the differences do not reach the level of statistical significance. Similar data were obtained in estimating their self-organization (7.7% of students and 6.3% of teachers). The understanding that they have illusions about their careers was noted by an approximately equal number of prospective and working teachers (15.4% and 14.6%, respectively).

Our research has shown that students overestimate many of the difficulties of starting a career (statistically significant differences obtained are in the range from 0.01 to 0.03). Difficulties of schoolchildren in mastering the program are predicted by 15.4% of future teachers, and only 8.3% of novice teachers have faced this negative experience. Uncertainty in their digital competence is experienced by 11.5% of future teachers, while in the educational process this is perceived as a problem of the professional activity of a smaller number of teachers (6.3%).

In addition, concerns about the psychological climate at school are predicted by 11.5% of students, but this has become a problem for 4.2% of teachers with up to 3 years of work experience. The fear of children blocks the creative activity of 30.8% of students and only 12.5% of teachers. Half of the students (51.9%) expect disrespect from their parents, while 39.6% of novice teachers face this in school life. The negative impact on the professional activity of the lack of life experience, naivety in judgments and actions was remarked by 7.7% of future teachers, and in school practice, only 4.2% of teachers encountered them.

In assessing their resources, students turn out to be closer to the opinion of already working teachers. Almost the same as with teachers with experience up to 3 years (the differences do not reach the level of statistical significance), prospective teachers recognise the source of overcoming difficulties in love for children (they were indicated by 57.6% of students and 62.5% of teachers), knowledge gained during pedagogy training (they were indicated by 42.3% of students and 39.6% of teachers), in a creative approach to the school practice (38.4% and 41.7%). The latter finding is consistent with data obtained in other studies (Kinay & Suer, 2020).

At the same time, future teachers overestimate some of the sources of successful adaptation in the early years at school. These include self-education (53.9% and 45.8% of students and teachers, respectively), assistance from a methodologist (21.2% and 16.7%, respectively), help from parents (19.2% and 16.7%) and support from a psychologist (11.5% and 4.2%). Almost twice as many students of the pedagogical university are pessimistic about the lack of resources in order to cope with challenges at school, compared with teachers who have worked at school for 1 to 3 years (9.6% and 4.2%).

The study revealed an underestimation made by future teachers of such a resource of professional development in the first years of work at school as the support of colleagues. About a third of students gaining their pedagogical degree (32.7%) count on it, while almost half of working teachers (47.9%) received it. The differences are statistically significant (p -level = 0.043). At the trend level (p -level = 0.06), students underestimate the support of the school administration (25.0%), although for almost a third of working teachers (29.2%) it served as a source of overcoming the adaptation crisis.

The information on working teachers' practices are compatible with research data showing the value of school administration support (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013) and mentoring (Burke et al, 2015) in defeating the teacher crisis of adaptation. However, we see that students are unfamiliar with this information and do not count on the help of the administration and their colleagues in overcoming the difficulties of starting a career.

Discussion

In our previous study (Usoltseva et al, 2020), it was revealed that the most important difficulties faced by working teachers in the early years of their service can be characterized as didactic competence, work requirements ("bureaucratic" difficulties), interaction with other subjects of the educational process and psychological difficulties.

In our current research, prospective and novice teachers similarly assess the difficulties that we have classified as difficulties in interacting with others in educational relationships.

Their opinions about complications with school administration, learners, parents and possible jealousy of colleagues were resembling. This suggests that this group of difficulties is determined not only by the characteristics of relationships at work but also by the general culture of relationships, which both students and working teachers are well aware of.

In addition, the respondents are equally well aware of the group of psychological difficulties, that is, of those features of self-organization and self-regulation that are inherent in them. This similarity can be explained by the identity of the age characteristics of future and working teachers. Since the average age in both samples was 21.1 years for students and 23.4 years for teachers. This conclusion is confirmed by the data we obtained earlier (Usoltseva et al., 2020) when the understanding of their psychological characteristics varied among working teachers of different age groups. At the same time, the data obtained shows that about a third of novice teachers experience difficulties with emotional regulation in a stressful situation what force educators of future teachers to teach them how to manage their emotions.

The fundamental differences between the expectation of complications on the part of students and the experience of real pedagogical work of working teachers are associated with “bureaucratic” and didactic difficulties. Students have little knowledge and therefore are not sufficiently prepared for such types of work at school as document flow, preparing schoolchildren for exams, and the use of information technology. These data raise the question of the necessity to update the content of teacher education, which is also noted in many studies (Biktagirova & Valeeva, 2014; Choi & Walker, 2018; Laptev et al., 2019, etc.).

Conclusion

Turning to teachers' own experience to assess the initial stage of their career at school allows us a larger understanding of the relationship between objective and subjective factors in the process of adaptation to the teaching profession. As we have shown in the literature review above, the range of challenges faced by teachers at the beginning of their careers is extremely extensive. And because of this diversity, not all the difficulties of starting a career can lead to the transformation of teacher education. Particularly the key, most important improvements in teacher education should be highlighted. Precisely, the reflective experience made by teachers, studied in this research, allows us to select such key difficulties, taking into account the changing socio-cultural conditions.

The data obtained indicate that future teachers may not be ready to work in school, since they underestimate the very important difficulties that were identified as the most emotionally significant in the assessment of working teachers.

The current situation has exacerbated the need to expand the methods and forms of teaching future teachers, which is reflected in modern research (Biktagirova & Valeeva, 2014; Fominykh, 2011; Prokofieva et al., 2020; Shadrina, 2020).

The research outcomes can be applied to improve the quality of teacher training through the formation of professional self-awareness of prospective teachers, motivating them to self-knowledge and self-development within the frame of special training and seminars. Without analyzing the principal obstacles, as well as the resources for overcoming them, available at the beginning stage of a teaching job, it is hard to improve the quality of their teaching and professional actions. The results of our research will benefit future teachers cope with the complexities of the initial stage of professional acclimatization.

This data is compatible with the research on the need of developing for novice teachers the psychological proficiency in self-regulation and influencing others for succeeding in the adaptation crisis (Il'ina, & Loginova, 2019; Kaur, & Singh, 2019).

Modern research and educational practice demonstrate the increasing importance of the initial stage of teacher professional development due to the enhanced difficulties and challenges faced by novice teachers. It is obvious that unpreparedness for complications at school not only increases the possibility of a teacher leaving the profession but also reduces his personal and innovative potential, worsens the quality of work with learners. The enrichment of the content and methods of pedagogical teaching aimed at solving this problem should go along the path of the more practical orientation of pedagogical education, greater personalization of teaching future teachers. The research results form the basis for the inclusion in the pedagogical process of active teaching methods, social and psychological training, capable of flexibly adapting to the identified tendencies of underestimating or overestimating the difficulties of starting a career at school made by future teachers.

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