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REFLECTION AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM FOR THE FORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AMONG SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Анотація

У статті здійснено теоретичний аналіз проблеми рефлексії як умови розвитку професійної ідентичності психологів закладів загальної середньої освіти. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням вимог до професійної діяльності психолога в умовах сучасного освітнього середовища, що характеризується високим рівнем невизначеності, багатофункціональністю ролей та значним емоційним навантаженням. У таких умовах особливого значення набуває здатність фахівця до усвідомлення власної діяльності, що забезпечується розвитком рефлексії.

У роботі проаналізовано основні наукові підходи до розуміння рефлексії як психологічного феномена та професійної ідентичності як динамічної структури особистості. Рефлексія розглядається як багатовимірний процес, що поєднує когнітивні, особистісні та регулятивні компоненти та забезпечує усвідомлення, аналіз і переосмислення професійного досвіду. Професійна ідентичність трактується як інтегративне утворення, що включає систему уявлень про себе як фахівця, професійні цінності, ролі та поведінкові стратегії.

Обґрунтовано, що рефлексія виступає не лише інструментом аналізу діяльності, а системоутворюючим механізмом, який забезпечує інтеграцію різних компонентів професійного становлення у цілісну структуру професійної ідентичності. Визначено, що залежно від рівня розвитку рефлексії професійна діяльність психолога може характеризуватися або розпорошенням у зовнішніх задачах, або надмірною зосередженістю на внутрішніх переживаннях, або здатністю до цілісного структурування власної діяльності.

Окрему увагу приділено аналізу сучасних зарубіжних і українських досліджень, у яких підкреслюється роль рефлексії як чинника професійного розвитку, засобу подолання професійних деформацій та умов формування професійної позиції психолога. Зазначено, що систематична рефлексивна практика сприяє підвищенню ефективності діяльності, розвитку професійної суб'єктності та підтримці психологічного благополуччя фахівця.

Зроблено висновок про те, що рефлексія є необхідною внутрішньою умовою формування професійної ідентичності психолога та визначає якість його професійної діяльності в умовах сучасного освітнього середовища.

Ключові слова: рефлексія, професійна ідентичність, психолог, заклад загальної середньої освіти, професійне становлення, самосвідомість.

Abstract:

This article presents a theoretical analysis of the issue of reflection as a prerequisite for the development of professional identity among psychologists in general secondary education institutions. The relevance of the study stems from the growing demands on the professional activities of psychologists in the modern educational environment, which is characterized by a high level of uncertainty, multifunctional roles, and significant emotional stress. In such conditions, the specialist's ability to reflect on their own activities—which is facilitated by the development of reflection—becomes particularly important.

This paper analyzes the main scientific approaches to understanding reflection as a psychological phenomenon and professional identity as a dynamic structure of the personality. Reflection is viewed as a multidimensional process that combines cognitive, personal, and regulatory components and facilitates the awareness, analysis, and reinterpretation of professional experience. Professional identity is interpreted as an integrative construct that includes a system of self-concepts as a specialist, professional values, roles, and behavioral strategies.

It has been demonstrated that reflection serves not only as a tool for analyzing professional activity but also as a system-forming mechanism that ensures the integration of various components of professional

development into a coherent structure of professional identity. It has been determined that, depending on the level of development of reflection, a psychologist's professional activity may be characterized by either a dispersion of attention on external tasks, an excessive focus on internal experiences, or the ability to holistically structure one's own activity.

Particular attention is paid to an analysis of contemporary foreign and Ukrainian studies that emphasize the role of reflection as a factor in professional development, a means of overcoming professional biases, and a condition for the formation of a psychologist's professional stance. It is noted that systematic reflective practice contributes to increasing the effectiveness of professional activity, developing professional agency, and supporting the psychological well-being of the specialist.

It is concluded that reflection is a necessary internal condition for the formation of a psychologist's professional identity and determines the quality of their professional activity in the context of the modern educational environment.

Keywords: reflection, professional identity, psychologist, secondary school, professional development, self-awareness.

Statement of the Problem

The modern work of a psychologist in general secondary education institutions is characterized by a high degree of complexity, uncertainty, and multidimensionality in professional tasks. Psychologists operate at the intersection of various social expectations—those of administrators, teachers, parents, and children—which often creates situations of role conflict and ambiguity regarding their professional stance. In such conditions, theoretical knowledge and methodologies alone are insufficient: the specialist's ability to be aware of their own actions, analyze experience, and form an internal professional stance becomes crucial.

At the same time, in the practice of training and work, psychologists often find themselves in a situation where they formally adopt a professional role without deeply reflecting on their own identity. This leads to blurred professional boundaries, dependence on external evaluations, and risks of professional burnout.

In this context, the study of reflection as a mechanism that ensures not only the analysis of one's activities but also the formation of a holistic professional "self" becomes particularly relevant.

An analysis of recent studies and publications

The issue of reflection and professional identity is examined within the framework of various academic approaches.

In the classical sense, reflection is associated with making sense of experience and thinking about one's own actions [2]. This idea was further developed in the concept of reflective practice [11], where reflection is viewed as the ability to analyze actions both during the course of an activity and after its completion.

In the theory of transformational learning [7], reflection serves as a mechanism for revising one's own beliefs and forming new meanings. In contemporary research, it is also viewed as a multi-level process encompassing descriptive, analytical, and critical levels [7].

Professional identity in psychology is interpreted as a dynamic structure comprising one's self-concept as a specialist, professional values, roles, and the boundaries of one's practice. In the works of Erik Erikson, identity is viewed as a central element of personality development, while contemporary approaches emphasize its narrative nature and connection to the social context.

Domestic studies also analyze the characteristics of the organization of reflection in the work of psychologists in general secondary education institutions, particularly in terms of professional development and awareness of one's own activities [9].

In contemporary international research, reflection is regarded as a key competency in the professional development of allied health professionals. In particular, within the concept of reflective practice [11], it is emphasized that an effective professional is capable not only of applying knowledge but also of rethinking their own actions during the course of their work (reflection-in-action) and after its completion (reflection-on-action).

In the works [8], reflection is viewed as a multi-level process ranging from a superficial description of experience to its deep re-evaluation, which includes a change in attitudes and modes of action. This allows reflection to be viewed not as a one-time action, but as a systematic process of cognitive development.

In the context of transformational learning theory [7], reflection serves as a mechanism for critically reviewing one's own beliefs, which contributes to the formation of new meanings and professional orientations. Critical reflection is of particular importance here, as it allows one to go beyond established professional notions.

Furthermore, research devotes significant attention to the connection between reflection and metacognitive processes [4], which include awareness of one's own thinking, as well as the ability to self-regulate one's activities [13]. In this context, reflection is viewed as a component of a broader system of self-regulation of professional activity.

Thus, contemporary approaches allow us to view reflection as a complex, multidimensional process that combines cognitive, personal, and regulatory components.

In recent years, the issue of reflection as a factor in the professional development of professionals in support roles—particularly psychologists and educators—has become particularly relevant. This is linked to the increasing complexity of professional tasks, the need to work under conditions of uncertainty, and rising demands for the specialist's personal engagement in professional activities.

Contemporary international research views reflection as a key metacompetence that enables self-regulation, adaptation, and professional growth. In particular, recent studies emphasize that reflection serves not only as a tool for analyzing experience but also as a mechanism for forming professional identity through the process of comprehending one's own role and position in professional practice.

A separate area of contemporary research focuses on the study of reflection in the context of the training and practice of teachers and school psychologists. These studies emphasize that reflective practice fosters the ability to make informed decisions, enhances mental flexibility, and enables more effective work in situations of uncertainty.

Significant attention is also paid to the connection between reflection and professional identity during the early stages of professional development. Research shows that it is precisely reflective activity that allows for the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience, forming a holistic view of oneself as a professional.

In the context of contemporary approaches, reflection is also viewed as a component of self-regulated learning and metacognitive processes. This allows it to be interpreted as a mechanism that enables conscious management of one's own professional activities and development.

Thus, contemporary research confirms that reflection is a key factor in professional development and the formation of professional identity, particularly in the context of a complex and dynamic educational environment.

In the Ukrainian academic community, the issue of reflection and its role in the professional development of specialists, particularly psychologists, is actively studied in the context of professional development and personal self-actualization.

Recent domestic research emphasizes that reflection serves as a key mechanism for professional growth, as it fosters awareness of one's own experience and contributes to the development of professional competence. In particular, the works of Ukrainian scholars highlight the role of supervision as a form of organizing reflection that contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of psychologists' professional activities and their professional development [5].

An important area of research is the study of professional identity as a factor in personal self-actualization. These studies emphasize that professional identity is formed as a result of the integration of personal experience, professional values, and activities, which is directly linked to reflective processes [6].

In addition, contemporary research examines the relationship between personal characteristics and the psychological well-being of professionals in complex socio-economic conditions. In this context, the significance of internal resources is emphasized, including the capacity for reflection, which ensures adaptation to change and supports professional resilience [10].

Thus, the results of contemporary Ukrainian studies confirm that reflection is an important factor in a psychologist's professional development and also plays a key role in shaping their professional identity within the educational environment.

Despite a significant body of research, contemporary studies still exhibit a fragmented understanding of the relationship between reflection and professional identity, particularly in the context of the work of school psychologists in general secondary education settings. Insufficient attention is paid to considering reflection as an integrative mechanism that ensures the integrity of professional development.

Therefore, the relationship between reflection and the professional identity of a psychologist, particularly in the school environment, requires further theoretical exploration.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical justification for the role of reflection as a psychological mechanism in the formation of the professional identity of a psychologist in a general secondary education institution.

Presentation of the main material

Reflection in a psychologist's professional practice can be defined as the ability to recognize, analyze, and reevaluate one's own actions, experiences, attitudes, and the outcomes of interactions with clients, encompassing all participants in the educational process, including the children's parents.

Unlike a simple analysis of activities, reflection includes:

- awareness of one's own position;
- understanding of the influence of personal factors on professional decisions;
- the ability to change behavior based on experience gained.

Thus, reflection is not only a cognitive but also a personal process that ensures the development of professional agency.

Reflection takes on particular significance in the work of a psychologist, which is reflective by nature. A psychologist not only analyzes the behavior and experiences of others but also constantly engages with their own reactions, attitudes, and emotional states.

In the psychologist's work, reflection serves a dual function: on the one hand, it is aimed at analyzing professional interaction with the client, and on the other, at becoming aware of one's own position within this interaction. This creates an additional burden, as the psychologist is forced to simultaneously maintain focus on both the external and internal levels of activity.

In the context of working in general secondary education institutions, this characteristic is accentuated by the multifunctional nature of the psychologist's role. The need to interact with various stakeholders in the educational process requires a constant reevaluation of one's professional stance, making reflection not merely desirable but a necessary condition for effective practice.

2. Professional Identity as a Dynamic Structure

A psychologist's professional identity is formed through the integration of several components:

- cognitive (knowledge of the profession);
- value-based (professional beliefs);
- behavioral (work style);
- emotional (attitude toward the professional role).

It is not static but constantly changes under the influence of experience, interaction with others, and professional challenges.

This is particularly evident in the school environment, where the psychologist is forced to simultaneously fulfill various roles—consultant, mediator, diagnostician—which complicates the process of forming a coherent identity.

In contemporary research, professional identity is viewed not only as a characteristic of professional development but also as an important factor in personal self-actualization. In particular, it is emphasized that a well-formed professional identity ensures internal coherence in professional activity, promotes a sense of wholeness, and facilitates the realization of the specialist's personal potential [6].

In this context, a psychologist's professional identity is not only the result of professional development but also a prerequisite for the effective performance of professional duties, which is directly linked to the level of reflective development.

3. Reflection as a Mechanism for the Formation of Professional Identity

Reflection facilitates the key processes necessary for the formation of professional identity:

3.1. Awareness of experience The psychologist analyzes their own actions and their consequences, which allows for the formation of a more accurate understanding of their professional role.

3.2. Integration of professional roles Through reflection, various aspects of activity are harmonized into a unified system.

3.3. Establishing professional boundaries Reflection helps determine where the psychologist's area of responsibility ends.

3.4. Adjusting professional behavior Analyzing mistakes and successes contributes to the development of more effective strategies for action.

Thus, reflection serves not only as a mechanism for analyzing activity but also as a system-forming factor that ensures the integration of professional experience, external influences, and internal attitudes into a coherent structure of professional identity.

What is important is not only the mere fact of reflection but also its qualitative characteristics, particularly its capacity for regulation, which determines whether it contributes to professional development or, conversely, becomes a factor in the disorganization of activity.

4. Levels of reflection in professional activity

In the professional practice of a psychologist, several levels of reflection can be identified:

- **Situational level** — analysis of a specific interaction (e.g., a counseling session);
- **Processual level** — awareness of one's own actions during the course of work;
- **Deep level** — reflection on oneself as a professional, one's values, and beliefs.

It is the deep level that is decisive for the formation of professional identity.

Each of these levels performs a distinct function in a psychologist's professional practice. The situational level allows for the analysis of specific cases and the adjustment of interactions with clients. The procedural level ensures the ability to self-regulate during practice, which is particularly important in complex or emotionally charged situations.

The deep level of reflection is associated with rethinking one's own professional stance, values, and attitudes. It is at this level that professional experience is integrated and a stable professional identity is formed.

Insufficient development of one of these levels can lead to an imbalance in professional practice, which underscores the need for the comprehensive development of reflective thinking.

5. Qualitative Features of Reflection in the Professional Practice of a Psychologist

- When reflective thinking is underdeveloped, there is a tendency to become distracted by external tasks without properly reflecting on one's own professional stance, which hinders the formation of a coherent professional identity.

- In the case of an imbalance in reflection, there may be an excessive focus on internal experiences ("self-doubt"), which reduces the effectiveness of one's work and complicates professional decision-making.

- At the same time, a sufficient level of reflection ensures the integration of experience, manifested in the ability to build a coherent structure of professional activity and a stable professional identity.

Thus, reflection is the mechanism that "assembles" the disparate elements of professional development into a coherent professional "self."

6. Risks of a Lack of Reflection

The absence or insufficient level of reflection leads to a number of distortions:

- the formation of a superficial, formal identity;
- dependence on external evaluations;
- blurring of professional boundaries;
- increased emotional exhaustion;
- decreased effectiveness of professional activity.

In this case, the psychologist does not act as an agent but merely reflects external expectations.

These distortions can be cumulative in nature and manifest not immediately, but over the course of professional practice. In particular, a prolonged lack of reflection contributes to the formation of stereotypical behavioral patterns, a reduced sensitivity to changes in the professional situation, and a loss of the ability to respond flexibly.

In the long term, this can lead to professional maladjustment and the loss of a sense of professional identity as an internal anchor.

Contemporary Ukrainian research also devotes significant attention to the problem of professional distortions among psychologists, which is directly linked to the level of developed reflection. In particular, it is emphasized that insufficiently developed reflective skills can lead to the entrenchment of ineffective professional strategies, reduced sensitivity to changes in the professional situation, and the formation of stereotypical models of interaction [1].

Within the framework of studies devoted to the postgraduate training of psychologists, the importance of implementing special technologies aimed at developing reflection as a means of overcoming professional distortions is emphasized. In this context, reflective activity is viewed as a mechanism for becoming aware of one's own professional limitations and resources, which contributes to increasing the effectiveness of professional practice [1].

In addition, domestic studies emphasize the role of organized reflection as a prerequisite for a psychologist's professional growth. In particular, it is noted that systematic reflective practice allows not only for the analysis of experience but also for its reinterpretation, which is essential for the formation of a stable professional identity [9].

Studies on the organization of reflection among psychologists in general secondary education institutions emphasize that reflection serves as a prerequisite for understanding one's own professional role and position, and also helps align the demands of the educational environment with the specialist's internal attitudes [9].

Thus, the results of Ukrainian studies confirm that reflection is not only a tool for analyzing one's activities but also an important factor in preventing professional burnout and supporting the professional identity of the psychologist.

Conclusions

Reflection is a key psychological mechanism in the formation of the professional identity of a psychologist in a general secondary education institution. It ensures the integration of professional experience, awareness of one's own role, and the development of professional agency.

Professional identity is formed as a dynamic system that depends on the psychologist's capacity for reflection at various levels. In its absence, the risk of professional deformation and the loss of the integrity of the professional "self" increases.

Reflection is not merely a supplementary element of a psychologist's professional practice; rather, it serves as an intrinsic prerequisite without which the formation of a coherent professional identity is impossible.

Further research could focus on developing integrated models of factors influencing the development of professional identity, taking into account the role of reflection as a system-forming element.

Thus, reflection can be viewed not only as a tool for analyzing professional activity but also as a fundamental mechanism of a psychologist's professional development. It is reflection that facilitates the transition from an externally assigned professional role to an internally accepted professional identity. This further confirms the assertion that reflection serves as a system-forming mechanism of a psychologist's professional development.

In this context, the development of reflection should be viewed as one of the key areas of training and support for psychologists in general secondary education institutions. This opens up prospects for further research aimed at studying the conditions for the development of reflection and its impact on the effectiveness of professional activity.

Thus, reflection serves not only as a prerequisite but also as an internal mechanism of a psychologist's professional development, determining the quality of their professional activity and the stability of their professional identity in conditions of change and uncertainty.

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