



STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION AND CREATIVE THINKING

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the stages of development of students' professional orientation and creative thinking in the educational process. Particular attention is paid to the formation of professional interests, motivation, independent thinking, problem-solving skills, and creative approaches to future professional activities. The study highlights the importance of creating an educational environment that supports students' initiative, critical thinking, self-development, and professional self-determination. The main stages of developing professional orientation and creative thinking are described, including motivation, cognitive development, practical application, reflection, and independent creative activity.

Introduction

In modern higher education, it is no longer sufficient for students to possess only theoretical knowledge. The changing demands of the labor market and professional activity require students to make independent decisions, adapt to new situations, find non-standard solutions to professional problems, and continuously develop their potential. Therefore, the development of students' professional orientation and creative thinking is one of the important tasks of higher education. Professional orientation reflects students' interest in their chosen profession, motivation, professional goals, values, and conscious attitude toward their future career. The



formation of professional identity may facilitate students' adaptation to a future professional community and support their transition from education to employment [1].

Creative thinking, in turn, is not merely the reproduction of existing knowledge. It includes the ability to generate new ideas, view a problem from different perspectives, develop alternative solutions, and evaluate them. According to OECD research, creative thinking involves generating diverse ideas, producing original solutions, and evaluating and improving existing ideas [2].

Therefore, the integrated development of professional orientation and creative thinking is an important pedagogical condition for increasing students' readiness for future professional activity.

Literature Review

The study of professional development, professional identity, creativity, and educational psychology provides an important theoretical basis for this topic.

One of the significant sources is John W. Santrock's book Educational Psychology. The author emphasizes the role of motivation, independent learning, problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity in the educational process. According to this approach, students' independent and creative thinking develops more effectively when they participate actively in the process of constructing knowledge [3].

Another important source is the work of Robert J. Sternberg and Todd I. Lubart on creativity. Their theory presents creativity not simply as an inborn ability, but as the result of interaction among knowledge, thinking styles, motivation, personality characteristics, and the social environment [4]. This approach indicates that students' creative thinking can be purposefully developed through appropriate pedagogical methods. Recent studies have also shown a relationship between creative thinking and professional identity. Margaliot and Magid found that learning activities based on creative thinking can positively influence the development of professional identity among future teachers [5]. In addition, systematic research on career interventions for university students shows that such programs can positively affect career decision-making, professional awareness, and the development of career-related skills [6].

Methodology

The study used theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, generalization, and pedagogical observation methods. The process of developing students' professional orientation and creative thinking was analyzed as a sequence of interconnected stages. Three main criteria were considered: the level of professional motivation, the ability to solve problems independently and creatively, and the ability to reflect on and evaluate one's own activity. The study also examined the potential of creative tasks, problem-based learning, project-based learning, teamwork, and professional situation modeling.

From a methodological point of view, professional orientation was considered not as a one-time result, but as a continuous developmental process that takes place throughout the period of



study. Creative thinking was viewed as an active component of this process that helps students approach professional tasks in new and flexible ways.

Analysis and Results

The analysis suggests that the development of students' professional orientation and creative thinking can be divided into five main stages.

Stage	Development of Professional Orientation	Development of Creative Thinking	Effective Teaching Methods
1. Motivational stage	Interest in the profession begins to develop	Interest in new ideas appears	Motivational discussions, professional situations
2. Cognitive stage	Knowledge about the profession expands	Ability to analyze problems from different perspectives develops	Problem-based learning, case study
3. Practical stage	Professional skills are formed	Students develop non-standard solutions	Projects, practical tasks
4. Reflective stage	Students evaluate their professional abilities	Ability to analyze and improve ideas develops	Reflection, portfolio, self-assessment
5. Independent-creative stage	Professional position becomes more stable	Independent and original decision-making develops	Research, creative projects, professional simulation

At the first, or motivational, stage, students become familiar with the content, social importance, and future prospects of their chosen profession. At this stage, it is important that external motivation gradually develops into internal professional interest.

At the second stage, professional knowledge becomes more systematic. Students not only receive ready-made information but also learn to analyze, compare, and apply it in problematic situations. Creative thinking becomes more active when students are encouraged to consider one problem from several different perspectives.



The third stage is characterized by practical activity. Students apply their knowledge through professional tasks, real or simulated situations, teamwork, and decision-making activities.

At the fourth stage, reflection becomes especially important. Students identify their strengths and weaknesses, analyze the results of their work, and determine directions for future development. Modern higher education increasingly emphasizes student agency, where learners actively influence their own educational and professional development [7].

At the fifth stage, professional orientation becomes more stable. Students are able to think independently in unfamiliar situations, generate original solutions to professional problems, and consciously improve their own performance. The results show that creative thinking should not be developed only through a separate course or occasional activity. It should be integrated into various subjects, practical assignments, projects, and research activities. Such integration can strengthen students' professional readiness, flexibility, and problem-solving ability.

Results

The analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects of students' professional orientation and creative thinking showed that these two components develop in close interrelation. Students who have a clear understanding of their future profession tend to demonstrate higher motivation, greater independence in learning, and a stronger willingness to participate in creative tasks. At the same time, the development of creative thinking supports professional orientation by helping students analyze professional situations, generate alternative solutions, and make more independent decisions. The results indicate that the development process can be divided into several consecutive stages. At the initial motivational stage, students mainly focus on understanding the importance and social value of their chosen profession. Their creative activity is usually limited, and they often rely on ready-made examples and teacher guidance. However, when students are exposed to problem-based tasks, professional discussions, and real-life situations, their interest in the profession becomes more stable. At the cognitive stage, students begin to acquire deeper professional knowledge and connect theoretical information with practical situations. The analysis showed that case studies, open-ended questions, brainstorming, and problem-solving tasks are particularly effective at this stage. These activities encourage students to compare different viewpoints and develop flexible thinking.

The practical stage demonstrated a noticeable increase in students' independence and creativity. When learners participated in project work, simulations, and professional tasks, they showed a greater ability to apply knowledge in new situations. They also became more active in suggesting original ideas and evaluating different solutions. This suggests that practical experience plays an important role in transforming theoretical knowledge into professional competence.

The reflective stage was also found to be important. Students who regularly analyzed their own performance, identified mistakes, and assessed their strengths and weaknesses showed



more conscious professional development. Reflection helped them not only improve their academic performance but also better understand their professional interests and future goals.

At the final independent-creative stage, students demonstrated the ability to solve professional problems with less teacher support. They were more confident in making decisions, presenting their own ideas, and selecting appropriate strategies for unfamiliar situations. This stage can be considered an indicator of a higher level of professional maturity and creative independence.

The comparative analysis also showed that interactive and student-centered methods are more effective than traditional teacher-centered instruction for developing both professional orientation and creative thinking. Problem-based learning, project-based learning, case studies, group discussions, research assignments, and reflective activities created more opportunities for students to demonstrate initiative and originality.

Overall, the results confirm that professional orientation and creative thinking should be developed systematically throughout the educational process. Their development is most effective when theoretical learning is combined with practical experience, reflection, independent activity, and creative problem-solving. Such an approach helps students become more prepared for future professional challenges and supports the formation of competent, flexible, and innovative specialists.

Conclusion

The development of students' professional orientation and creative thinking is a continuous and gradual pedagogical process. Professional motivation, professional knowledge, practical activity, reflection, and independent creative activity are closely connected with one another.

The systematic use of problem-based learning, project work, case studies, professional simulations, reflective tasks, and independent research is particularly effective in higher education. Such an educational environment supports not only professional knowledge and skills but also initiative, adaptability, creativity, and professional responsibility. Thus, the integrated development of professional orientation and creative thinking can be considered one of the important conditions for preparing competent and competitive future specialists.

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