

PROFESSIONAL ROLES AS THE STRUCTURAL COMPONENT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS IN SAMPLES OF RIGA AND SMOLENSK

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Abstract. The strengthening of professional identity (PI) of teachers of higher education institutions (HEI) is one of the ways to improve the quality of educational process. Performance of professional role(s) can be identified as the key component of PI. The contemporary university teacher performs many professional roles: she/he is a lecturer, researcher, supervisor of students' research works, expert, and so on. Multi-role activity of a teacher is considered as a characteristic feature of the profession by the colleagues in Latvia, Russia and other countries. This research is based on the data obtained during the implementation of the Project 'Professional Identity of Contemporary Pedagogue' in 2014–2016 by the researchers from Riga (Latvia) and Smolensk (Russia). In the realization of the project, the six-component structural model of the content of HEI teacher's PI was created and the survey was carried out using the questionnaire 'HEI Teachers' Professional Identity' developed by the project participants. Overall, a total of 198 teachers were surveyed in Riga and Smolensk. The aim of this article was to analyze and compare the data obtained for the PI component 'Professional Roles' in the samples of HEI teachers of both the countries. The data were analysed using statistical methods. The results showed that teachers of both the countries perform their professional roles at a high level. Overall, the answers of teachers of the two countries were well agreed. However, some peculiarities in the data of Riga and Smolensk were observed, and some problems of PI of HEI teachers were identified, which require attention of executives of the education reform and teachers.

Keywords: professional identity (PI); teacher of higher education institution (HEI); professional roles.

JEL Classification: I23

Introduction

The strengthening of professional identity (PI) of teachers of higher education institutions (HEI) is one of the ways to improve the quality of educational process. In the scientific literature on problems of PI, there is still no precise definition of this concept. As it was shortly formulated by H. R. Woo, PI is a state of mind that categorizes an individual as a member of a selected profession and develops over time (Woo 2013, 30). In general, PI refers to a core set of beliefs, values, and assumptions about the distinctive characteristics of an individual's chosen profession that distinguishes it from other professions (Weinrach *et al.* 2001) as well as to the corresponding knowledge, abilities and skills that allow carrying out professional activities (Красникова 2013). PI helps the teachers to orient themselves in the world of professions and realize their personal professional potential. To achieve a certain level of PI identity is one of the most important tasks of personal development (*ibid*).

Clarification of the content of the teacher's PI was one of the main objectives of the Latvian-Russian project 'Professional Identity of Contemporary Pedagogue'. The project was implemented in 2014–2016 by the researchers of the Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy (Latvia) and the Smolensk State University (Russia), including the authors of this paper. This article continues a series of studies of teachers' PI based on the data obtained in the course of the project realization.

In the framework of the project, a hypothetical model of the content of HEI teacher's PI was created based on the works by C. H. Emerson (2010), D. Beijjaard *et al.* (2004), A. C. Healey & D. G. Hays (2011), and H. R. Woo (2013). The model includes six major structural components of the content of

PI: Philosophy of the Profession, Professional Knowledge, Professional Roles, Professional Attitude to Work, Cooperation with Colleagues, and Professional Engagement Behaviours (Spona *et al.* 2015).

The aim of this article is to analyse and compare the data obtained for the HEI teachers' PI component 'Professional Roles' in the samples of Riga and Smolensk.

The results of the study have shown that the teachers of both the countries perform their professional roles at a high level. According to the Mann-Whitney coefficient, the differences of indicators for the PI component 'Professional Roles' between the two samples of respondents are not statistically significant. This confirms the relevance of the proposed model of teachers' PI and indicates that it reflects the essential and stable characteristics of the professional identity of HEI teachers. However, there are some peculiarities in the data of Riga and Smolensk samples. In the Riga sample, there are much stronger correlations between the indicators of Professional Roles and the other components than in Smolensk. This demonstrates the key role of component in the structure of the Riga teachers' PI and a certain disorientation of the Smolensk teachers in this issue.

The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained allows one to conclude that in the pedagogical systems of both countries, there is a lack of feedback between educational reformers and practitioners. To improve the educational process, executives of the reform and teachers should pay due attention to this problem.

Methodology

The methodological base of the empirical research was developed using the Professional Identity Scale in Counselling by H. Woo, which was proposed for the profession of psychologist-counsellor (Woo 2013). This technique was modified to investigate the contents of HEI teachers' PI. As a result, a questionnaire 'HEI Teachers' Professional Identity' was created by A. Shpona, M. Vidnere, and J. Jermolajeva (Сенченков, Шпона 2016, 191), and a survey of university teachers was carried out. Each of the 6 blocks of the questionnaire consisted of 10 statements. In total, 198 teachers were surveyed in Riga and Smolensk. In Riga, 118 teachers from Riga Teacher Training and Education Management Academy, Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Latvian Academy of Music, and Riga Technical University participated in the survey; 80 respondents from Smolensk State University, Smolensk State Medical University, Smolensk State Agricultural Academy, and Smolensk Academy of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism in Smolensk were tested in Smolensk. The survey was anonymous. By Cronbach's alpha method, the indicator of reliability of the questionnaire was 0.84, which implies that the questionnaire can be recognized as reliable.

The data obtained in the survey allows one to analyse and interpret the indicators for all the 6 components of PI and examine the relationship between them. This article is devoted to the PI component 'Professional roles'. Performance of professional role can be identified as the key feature of professionalism. The contemporary university teacher performs many professional roles. He gives lectures and, at the same time, he may be a researcher, tutor, supervisor of students' research works, expert, administrator (the head of the department, faculty or other structural subdivision), and so on. Multi-role activity of a teacher is considered by the colleagues in Latvia, Russia and other countries as a characteristic feature of the profession. In the implementation of many roles carried out by a teacher, there are positive and negative aspects. The comprehensive, all-round and harmonious development of teacher (and, consequently, of students he teaches) is one of the most important positive aspects of multi-role activities of lecturer. Superficial attitude to some activities and lack of time for full and conscious immersion in the subject taught can be mentioned as one of the negative aspects.

Statistical methods have been used in the research to analyse the data. For all the components of PI, mean rates, dispersion, standard deviation, statistical mode, and coefficient of variation (CoV) were calculated for both the samples. The hypothesis testing method (the Mann-Whitney U test) was used to compare the two groups of respondents.. The Spearman rank correlation analysis was used to reveal the relationship between parameters within the block 'Professional Roles', and between them and the indicators in the other blocks.

Results

The general data obtained for the component 'Professional Roles' are presented in Table 1. There are small differences between the samples of PI component 'Professional Roles'. The average value is close to 5 in both the samples; the mode in Riga is 6 (the highest possible score) and in Smolensk, it is 5. These figures show that the teachers of both the samples perform their professional roles at a high level.

Table 1. General statistical indicators for the PI component 'Professional Roles' in the samples of Riga and Smolensk

Samples	Mean value	Dispersion	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation (%)	Mode
Riga	4.93	1.34	1.16	23.46	6
Smolensk	4.87	1.30	1.14	23.45	5

When answering questions in this block, at first the respondents had to indicate their professional roles by selecting them from the list: lecturer, researcher, tutor, curator of students' group, supervisor of students' research works, expert, administrator (the head of department, faculty or other structural subdivision); and/or by specifying a different role. Then they evaluated the following statements by using the appropriate rating from strong disagreement (1 point) to complete agreement (6 points):

- L1. My professional role(s) is (are) important in the functioning of the university.
- L2. A professional teacher wants the students to be consciously and positively involved in the learning process.
- L3. I perform two or more professional roles at the university.
- L4. I am convinced that my work at the university has a positive impact on society.
- L5. I realize the need to improve the performance of my professional role(s).
- L6. I constantly assess the results and achievements of my work.
- L7. In the university teacher profession, the definition of priorities is crucial.
- L8. I always fulfil my professional duties on time.
- L9. I have the necessary diplomas and certificates that give me the right to fulfil my professional role(s).
- L10. My professional self-esteem is not affected by individual negative evaluations of colleagues and students.

The data obtained in the survey for each statement of the PI component 'Professional Roles' are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Data for the items of PI component 'Professional Roles'

		Number of item									
		L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10
Riga	Mean rate	4.72	5.13	4.83	4.58	5.27	5.28	4.97	4.96	5.28	4.31
	Mode	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5
	Coefficient of variation (%)	22.82	17.95	32.85	30.69	16.58	14.63	21.21	16.97	18.01	32.32

Smolensk	Mean rate	4.45	5.28	4.69	4.58	5.29	5.01	4.59	5.00	5.59	4.20
	Mode	5	6	6	5	6	5	4	5	6	5
	Coefficient of variation (%)	25.26	13.14	34.55	25.02	21.53	15.71	21.85	14.93	11.63	32.46

The results of the two samples are very similar to each other (Fig. 1.). In response to the questions of the block ‘Professional Roles’, the maximum approval of both the samples is reached at items L2, L5 and L9. Despite the fact that the teachers have diplomas and certificates confirming their qualifications, they strive to improve the performance of their professional roles; here, their main aim is the development of the subject-subject pedagogical process.

Both in Riga and Smolensk, the ratings on the statements L1, L4 and L10 are among the lowest scores. In general, the survey participants react quite sensitively to ‘individual negative evaluations of colleagues and students’. They do not really believe in the importance of their contribution to the functioning of not only the society as a whole, but even their own university, despite more or less declarative recognition of the importance of their profession, which is demonstrated by the data from the block ‘Philosophy of the profession’ (see the paper by J. Jermolajeva and T. Bogdanova in this book). Thus, in the minds of contemporary teachers of the two countries, a cognitive dissonance is identified. Teachers fully realize their professional mission, but since the leadership of the state and the education institutions do not pay due attention to them and their initiatives, they feel that their position is basic, but the lowest in the hierarchy of educational system, without the possibility of influencing this system. It can be said that there is no feedback between the education reformers and the team realizing the reforms.

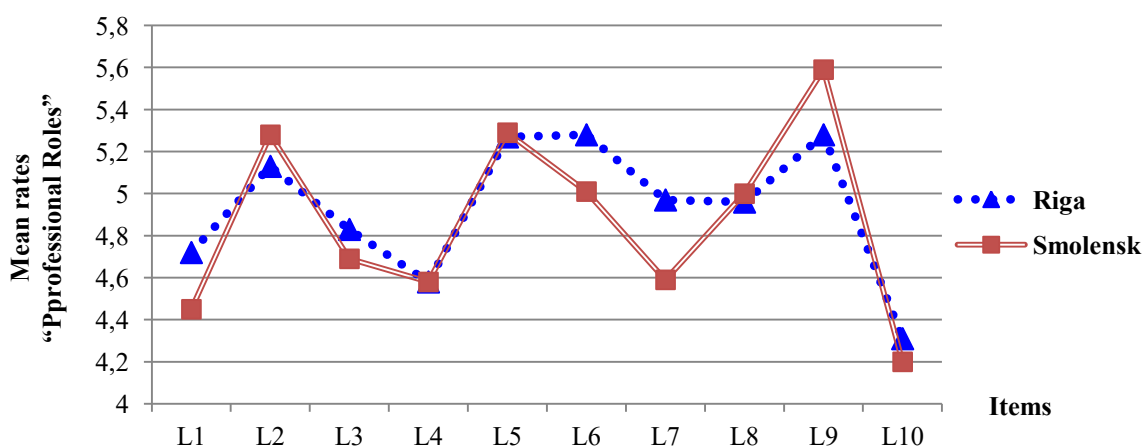


Fig. 1. Mean rates of the statements of the component ‘Professional Roles’

The greatest disagreement between the responses in the two samples is found in items L6, L7 and L9. The teachers from Riga pay more attention to the professional reflection and the definition of priorities than the teachers from Smolensk. In Smolensk, more teachers feel safe in the profession because they have corresponding diplomas of high quality, which gives them the right to work at HEI (see the mean rate and CoV of item L9 in the Smolensk sample). Therefore, it can be concluded that professional disorientation of the Smolensk teachers does not come from their personal inadequate preparedness to work, but is due to the fact that the system of higher education in contemporary Russia does not give clear guidelines on the hierarchy of professional roles and makes conflicting demands on teachers, which does not allow professionals to determine priorities in their work consistently. The same is largely true for the Latvian educational system.

Disorientation of the Smolensk teachers in the issues of professional roles and their priority is indirectly reflected in the absence of strong and moderately strong correlations of the items of the block 'Professional Roles' with the other components of PI. Numerous professional roles performed by the Smolensk respondents do not correlate with their perception of the professional attitude towards work, the professional engagement behaviours, and so on.

This is especially surprising in comparison with the great number of correlations in the answers of the Riga sample: 28. There are 14 correlations with the PI component 'Professional Attitude to Work', 11 correlations with the component 'Professional engagement behaviours', 2 correlations with the component 'Philosophy of the profession', 1 correlation with the component 'Cooperation with Colleagues'. By the number of rank correlations with the other PI components, the key items are L4 and L5 (Table 3).

Table 3. Spearman's rank correlations of Professional Roles with the other PI components (Riga sample)

Statements from the block 'Professional Roles'	Correlating statements in the other PI components	No of the PI component*	Correlation coefficient
'My professional role(s) is (are) important in the functioning of the university'	'The teaching profession is unique and valuable for the development of society'	6	0.54
'A professional teacher wants the students to be consciously and positively involved in the learning process'	'I think I have good cooperation with students'	4	0.54
'I am convinced that my work at the university has a positive impact on society'	'Teacher should promote a holistic physical, mental and social development of student's personality'	1	0.53
	'I love my profession and would recommend it to young people'	4	0.66
	'I am satisfied with my work and professional role(s)'	4	0.58
	'I think I have good cooperation with students'	4	0.64
	'I feel comfortable when working with people'	4	0.62
	'I can inspire others with my ideas and set them an example'	4	0.58
	'Even in unexpected situations, I do not have problems in dealing with people'	5	0.50
	'The teaching profession is unique and valuable for the development of society'	6	0.68
	'I try to acquaint the society with interesting novelties and achievements in my profession'	6	0.53
	'I defend my profession in public discussions'	6	0.53
'I realize the need to improve the performance of my professional role(s)'	'Teacher should promote a holistic physical, mental and social development of student's personality'	1	0.51
	'I love my profession and would recommend it to young people'	4	0.58

	'I am satisfied with my work and professional role(s)'	4	0.53
	'I think I have good cooperation with students'	4	0.53
	'I feel comfortable when working with people'	4	0.56
	'I can inspire others with my ideas and set them an example'	4	0.52
	'The teaching profession is unique and valuable for the development of society'	6	0.58
	'I participate in socially significant events: in elections, city and state holidays, etc.'	6	0.51
	'If necessary, I will gladly consult pupils, students and other people who may need my professional help'	6	0.52
	'I defend my profession in public discussions'	6	0.52
	'I believe that the teacher's duty is to make the behaviour of people in the social environment more civilized'	6	0.65
'I constantly assess the results and achievements of my work'	'I love my profession and would recommend it to young people'	4	0.55
	'If necessary, I will gladly consult pupils, students and other people who may need my professional help'	6	0.54
	'I believe that the teacher's duty is to make the behaviour of people in the social environment more civilized'	6	0.54
'I have the necessary diplomas and certificates that give me the right to fulfil my professional role(s)'	'I am satisfied with my work and professional role(s)'	4	0.523
	'My personal life is in balance with my work'	4	0.592

* Numbers of PI components in Table: 1 – Philosophy of the Profession, 2 – Professional Knowledge, 3 – Professional Roles, 4 – Professional Attitude to Work, 5 – Cooperation with Colleagues, 6 – Professional Engagement Behaviours

The professional roles performed by the teachers of Riga are closely intertwined in their minds with the social mission of the teacher, his involvement in the process of positive social changes. The variety of roles not only influences the student's cognitive sphere, but also contributes to the holistic development of the student's personality.. The main tool of the teacher's influence is the pedagogy of cooperation with students, public organizations, and those who need pedagogical assistance and education. The survey data show greater social activity of the Riga teachers.

The data obtained in the study show that the satisfaction with the chosen profession depends, to a large extent, on the number and nature of the professional roles performed. Even the communicative field, satisfaction with the quality of communication, awareness of the balance of personal life and professional activity is connected, to some extent, with satisfaction from the performance of professional roles. The importance of this component in the structure of the Latvian teachers' PI is difficult to overestimate.

Conclusions

The results of the study show that the teachers of both the countries perform their professional roles at a high level.

The differences between the indicators of the component 'Professional Roles' in the two samples of respondents are not statistically significant (by the Mann-Whitney coefficient). This indicates that the proposed model of HEI teachers' PI is relevant and reflects the essential and stable characteristics of teachers' professional identity.

However, there are some peculiarities in the data of Riga and Smolensk samples. In the Riga sample, numerous correlations between the Professional Roles and the other components of the teacher's PI (Philosophy of the Profession, Professional Knowledge, Professional Attitude to Work, Cooperation with Colleagues, Professional Engagement Behaviours) have been revealed (by the Spearman rank correlation analysis). Thus, for the Riga HEI teachers, professional roles are the key component of PI that regulates their professional field and social activity.

Numerous professional roles performed by the Smolensk respondents do not correlate with the indicators in the other PI components (there are no moderately strong and strong correlations). This indicates disorientation of the Smolensk teachers in the issues of professional roles and their priority, which is possibly due to the fact that the system of higher education in contemporary Russia does not give clear guidelines on the hierarchy of professional roles and makes conflicting demands on teachers, which does not allow professionals to determine priorities in their work consistently. To some extent, the same is true for the Latvian educational system.

In the pedagogical systems of both the countries, there is a lack of feedback between educational reformers and practitioners. Higher education teachers are aware of the reforms being implemented and are included in them; however, they have no tools to participate in the assessment, analysis and correction of the reforms. To improve the educational process, executives of the reform and teachers should pay due attention to this problem.

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