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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL IMAGE AND PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract:

This study explores the relationship between professional image and pedagogical competence in the context of teacher education. The professional image of a teacher is considered a significant factor influencing not only students' perceptions but also the overall effectiveness of the educational process. In modern educational environments, pedagogical competence encompasses a range of skills, including subject knowledge, communication abilities, ethical behavior, and reflective practice.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the development of a positive professional image contributes to the enhancement of pedagogical competence among future teachers. The study employs a combination of theoretical and empirical methods, including the analysis of scientific literature, surveys, and observational techniques.

The findings indicate that there is a strong correlation between a well-formed professional image and a high level of pedagogical competence. Teachers who demonstrate a positive professional image tend to exhibit higher levels of confidence, communication effectiveness, and classroom management skills. Moreover, the integration of professional ethics and self-reflection plays a crucial role in shaping both image and competence.

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The results of the study can be used to improve teacher education programs by incorporating targeted strategies aimed at developing both professional image and pedagogical competence in a holistic manner.

Keywords: Professional image, pedagogical competence, teacher education, future teachers, professional development, teaching effectiveness, communication skills, professional ethics, reflective practice, educational environment.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has been implementing large-scale reforms aimed at improving the quality of higher education and enhancing the professional training of future teachers. In particular, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education” (2020) and the Presidential Decree No. PF-5847 “On Approval of the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System until 2030” have defined priority directions for modernizing the education system, ensuring the training of competitive and highly qualified pedagogical personnel.

In this context, special attention is given to the development of both pedagogical competence and the professional image of teachers. The Presidential Decree No. PF-6108 “On Measures for the Further Development of the Education System” emphasizes the importance of improving the quality of teacher training, introducing innovative pedagogical technologies, and forming professional skills based on international standards.

The professional image of a teacher is understood as a complex socio-professional phenomenon that includes ethical behavior, communication culture, appearance, pedagogical mastery, and personal qualities. At the same time, pedagogical competence reflects the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for effective teaching activity.

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The relationship between professional image and pedagogical competence is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of educational reforms in Uzbekistan. Modern educational policy highlights the need for teachers who not only possess deep subject knowledge but also demonstrate high levels of professional culture and personal responsibility in their pedagogical activity. Therefore, studying the interdependence between professional image and pedagogical competence is of significant scientific and practical importance. This research is aimed at analyzing how these two components influence each other in the process of preparing future teachers and how they can be effectively developed within higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between professional image and pedagogical competence has been widely discussed in both international and national pedagogical research. Scholars emphasize that the professional image of a teacher is not limited to external appearance, but represents a complex integration of personal qualities, ethical standards, communication culture, and pedagogical mastery.

International researchers such as A. Bandura highlight the role of social learning theory in the formation of professional identity and behavior, indicating that individuals develop professional characteristics through observation, imitation, and experience. Similarly, D. G. Dowling argues that professional image is closely connected with institutional reputation and individual performance in professional environments.

In pedagogical studies, E. H. Erikson's theory of identity development provides a psychological foundation for understanding how professional identity and image are formed during different stages of personal and professional growth. This theory is particularly relevant in teacher education, where future educators undergo continuous identity formation.

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Modern researchers in education stress the importance of pedagogical competence as a key component of effective teaching. Pedagogical competence includes subject knowledge, methodological skills, communication abilities, classroom management, and reflective practice. According to A. A. Verbitsky, competency-based education ensures the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical skills, which directly influences the professional development of teachers.

In the context of Uzbekistan, recent reforms in the education system have significantly contributed to the development of teacher training standards. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education” (2020) and Presidential Decree No. PF-5847 on the development of higher education emphasize the necessity of preparing highly qualified, ethically responsible, and professionally competent teachers. These policy documents also highlight the importance of forming a modern professional image that meets international educational standards.

Local researchers have also focused on the issue of professional competence and teacher image. Studies conducted in pedagogical universities of Uzbekistan indicate that there is a strong interdependence between a teacher’s professional image and pedagogical competence. A positive professional image enhances students’ trust, motivation, and learning outcomes, while pedagogical competence ensures effective knowledge transfer and classroom management.

However, despite the growing number of studies, there is still a need for deeper analysis of the interrelationship between these two concepts, especially in the context of modern educational reforms and digital transformation. This research gap highlights the necessity of further investigation into how professional image and pedagogical competence mutually influence each other in the process of training future teachers.

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METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method research design aimed at examining the relationship between professional image and pedagogical competence among future teachers. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon under investigation.

The research was conducted among students of pedagogical higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. The sample included undergraduate students specializing in education-related fields. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that respondents had sufficient academic exposure to pedagogical disciplines.

Several research methods were applied in this study. Firstly, a theoretical analysis of scientific literature was conducted to define the key concepts of “professional image” and “pedagogical competence” and to identify existing theoretical frameworks. Secondly, a questionnaire survey was used to collect empirical data regarding students’ perceptions of their professional image development and competence levels. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions.

In addition, an observational method was applied during pedagogical practice sessions to assess students’ communication skills, classroom behavior, and overall professional presentation. This allowed for a more objective evaluation of how theoretical knowledge is reflected in practical teaching situations.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distribution and comparative analysis. Qualitative responses were categorized thematically to identify common patterns and tendencies in students’ understanding of professional image and pedagogical competence.

The reliability and validity of the research were ensured through the use of multiple data collection methods (triangulation), as well as by aligning the questionnaire design with established pedagogical competence frameworks.

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Ethical considerations were also taken into account, ensuring that all participants provided voluntary consent and that their responses remained confidential. Overall, this methodological approach provides a solid foundation for exploring the interrelationship between professional image and pedagogical competence in teacher education.

RESULTS

The empirical analysis of the collected data demonstrates a statistically and pedagogically significant relationship between professional image and pedagogical competence among future teachers. The results obtained through questionnaire responses, pedagogical observation, and comparative assessment indicate that both constructs are mutually reinforcing and develop in close interdependence.

The descriptive analysis of questionnaire data reveals that respondents demonstrate a relatively high level of theoretical awareness regarding the concept of professional image. A considerable proportion of participants identified professional image as a multidimensional construct encompassing pedagogical communication, ethical conduct, emotional stability, and instructional behavior. However, a smaller proportion of respondents still associated professional image predominantly with external appearance, indicating the presence of partially superficial perceptions among some students.

The observational data collected during teaching practice sessions provide more objective insights into the manifestation of both pedagogical competence and professional image in real instructional settings. Students with higher pedagogical competence levels consistently demonstrated stronger indicators of professional image, including structured lesson delivery, appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication, effective classroom management, and adaptive interaction with learners. In contrast, students with limited pedagogical competence exhibited inconsistencies in instructional delivery, reduced classroom control, and lower

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levels of professional confidence, which negatively influenced their overall professional image.

Correlation analysis of the aggregated data indicates a strong positive relationship between pedagogical competence components (subject-matter knowledge, methodological preparedness, communicative competence, and reflective ability) and professional image indicators (professional behavior, ethical stability, confidence, and pedagogical presentation). This suggests that the development of pedagogical competence directly contributes to the enhancement of professional image formation in future teachers.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the significant role of reflective practice in strengthening both constructs. Students engaged in systematic reflection and feedback analysis showed higher levels of self-regulation, improved pedagogical decision-making, and a more consistent professional identity. Reflective activities were found to serve as a mediating mechanism that bridges theoretical knowledge and practical pedagogical behavior.

Another notable outcome of the study is the influence of the educational environment on both variables. Institutions characterized by supportive mentorship, active pedagogical training, and practice-oriented curricula were associated with higher levels of both pedagogical competence and professional image development among students. This confirms the systemic nature of professional formation in teacher education.

Additionally, the results indicate an emerging significance of digital pedagogical competence in shaping professional image. Students who effectively integrated digital tools into their teaching practice were perceived as more innovative, adaptable, and professionally competent, which positively influenced their overall professional image.

In summary, the empirical findings confirm the existence of a robust and multidimensional interrelationship between professional image and pedagogical

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competence. The results support the hypothesis that these two constructs develop simultaneously and reinforce each other within the process of teacher education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence that professional image and pedagogical competence are closely interconnected constructs in the preparation of future teachers. The results align with competency-based approaches in contemporary pedagogy, which emphasize the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behavior as a unified system of teacher development.

One of the key interpretations of the findings is that pedagogical competence serves as a foundational basis for the formation of a positive professional image. Students who demonstrated strong subject knowledge, methodological preparedness, and communicative skills were consistently evaluated as having a more developed professional image. This suggests that professional image is not an isolated or superficial attribute, but rather a manifestation of underlying pedagogical competencies in real educational contexts.

At the same time, the study confirms that professional image also functions as a reinforcing factor in the development of pedagogical competence. Students who exhibited confidence, ethical stability, and effective communication tended to engage more actively in teaching practice and showed higher levels of instructional performance. This reciprocal relationship indicates a dynamic feedback loop, where competence strengthens image, and a well-formed professional image further enhances pedagogical effectiveness.

The results are consistent with social learning and identity formation theories, which emphasize the role of experience, reflection, and social interaction in professional development. Reflective practice, in particular, emerged as a critical mediating mechanism. Students who systematically analyzed their teaching experiences demonstrated greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses,

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leading to continuous improvement in both pedagogical competence and professional self-presentation.

The influence of the educational environment also plays a significant role in shaping both constructs. Supportive institutional conditions, including mentoring systems, practical training opportunities, and student-centered learning environments, were found to enhance both pedagogical competence and professional image formation. This highlights the importance of creating a holistic educational ecosystem in teacher training institutions.

Furthermore, the study identifies the growing importance of digital competence as an emerging component of professional image. In modern education systems, the ability to integrate digital tools effectively contributes not only to teaching efficiency but also to the perception of teachers as innovative and professionally competent. This reflects the ongoing transformation of the teaching profession in response to digitalization and global educational trends.

Despite these positive findings, the study also reveals certain challenges. A portion of students still demonstrates a fragmented understanding of professional image, often limiting it to external appearance rather than viewing it as a complex professional construct. This indicates a need for more structured educational interventions aimed at deepening conceptual understanding and integrating professional identity formation into teacher education curricula.

Overall, the discussion confirms that professional image and pedagogical competence are mutually reinforcing and context-dependent phenomena. Their development requires an integrated pedagogical approach that combines theoretical instruction, practical experience, reflective activities, and institutional support. Strengthening this interrelationship can significantly enhance the quality of teacher education and improve the preparedness of future educators for professional practice.

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CONCLUSION

This study investigated the interdependence between professional image and pedagogical competence among future teachers in higher education institutions. The theoretical and empirical analysis conducted within the framework of this research confirms that both constructs represent integral and mutually reinforcing components of teacher professional development.

The results demonstrate that pedagogical competence—comprising subject-matter knowledge, methodological readiness, communicative skills, and reflective ability—serves as a fundamental determinant of professional image formation. At the same time, a well-established professional image, expressed through pedagogical behavior, ethical responsibility, confidence, and communication culture, significantly contributes to the effectiveness and stability of pedagogical performance. This bidirectional relationship indicates that neither construct can be fully developed in isolation.

The study also confirms the mediating role of reflective practice in strengthening the connection between competence and image. Systematic self-analysis and feedback interpretation enable future teachers to transform theoretical knowledge into stable professional behavior, thereby ensuring consistency between internal competence and external professional representation.

In addition, the findings highlight the influence of the educational environment on the formation of both constructs. Institutions that provide structured pedagogical practice, mentoring support, and student-centered learning conditions create favorable environments for the simultaneous development of professional image and pedagogical competence. This emphasizes the systemic nature of teacher preparation processes.

Another significant outcome of the study is the increasing role of digital pedagogical competence in shaping professional image in contemporary education. The ability to effectively integrate digital tools into instructional

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practice enhances both pedagogical efficiency and the perceived professionalism of future teachers.

However, the research also identifies certain developmental gaps. A segment of respondents demonstrated an incomplete understanding of professional image, often reducing it to external appearance rather than recognizing its multidimensional professional, ethical, and behavioral nature. This suggests the need for more targeted pedagogical strategies within teacher education programs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Teacher education curricula should explicitly integrate modules aimed at developing both pedagogical competence and professional image in a unified framework.
2. Reflective practice should be systematically implemented through portfolios, self-assessment tools, and guided feedback sessions to strengthen professional self-awareness.
3. Educational institutions should enhance mentoring systems to support the gradual formation of professional identity among students.
4. Greater emphasis should be placed on digital pedagogy to align teacher training with modern educational requirements.
5. Workshops and training sessions should be organized to deepen students' understanding of professional image as a complex and multidimensional construct.

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