

INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A TEACHER IN THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article examines the issue of a teacher’s independent professional development within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept proposed by L. S. Vygotsky. The main purpose of the study is to identify the role of independent learning, self-reflection, and innovative pedagogical approaches in the professional growth of teachers. A qualitative research method was employed, based on the analysis of theoretical pedagogical and psychological sources. The findings indicate that a teacher’s conscious engagement with their own zone of proximal development contributes to the sustainable formation of professional competencies. It is concluded that independent work within the ZPD is a key condition for continuous professional development of teachers and for improving the quality of modern education.

Keywords: teacher, zone of proximal development, independent work, professional development, self-learning.

INTRODUCTION. Pedagogical activity is inherently based on relationships with people and belongs to the group of “human-to-human” professions. Teaching is not limited to the transmission of knowledge; it is a multifaceted process aimed at guiding the cognitive, emotional, and social development of learners. In this context, the continuous professional development of teachers has become one of the key requirements of contemporary education systems.

Rapid changes in the educational sphere make it insufficient for teachers to rely solely on existing knowledge and skills. The revision of traditional teaching approaches, the integration of digital technologies, and the spread of learner-centered models require teachers to constantly update their professional competencies. Consequently, the processes of independent work and self-development of teachers need to be examined on a solid scientific basis.

The aim of this study is to analyze the independent professional development of teachers through the lens of the Zone of Proximal Development and to reveal its pedagogical significance. The article also considers the limitations teachers face in their professional growth and the role of the ZPD in overcoming these limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development was introduced by L. S. Vygotsky and refers to the gap between an individual’s actual level of development and their potential level, which can be achieved through guidance or collaboration. According to Vygotsky, learning acts as a driving force of development.

When applied to the professional activity of teachers, this concept highlights that pedagogical competencies are developed not only through experience but also through conscious learning and guided support. Scholars such as D. B. Elkonin, V. V. Davydov, and P. Ya. Galperin emphasized the decisive role of systematic independent activity in the professional formation of teachers and the renewal of pedagogical technologies.

METHODOLOGY. This study is based on a qualitative research design. Scientific sources in the fields of pedagogy and psychology were analyzed using the document analysis method. The



data collection process included the examination of academic books and journal articles focusing on teachers' professional development, independent work, and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development.

The collected data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, allowing for a conceptual interpretation of the role of independent work in teachers' professional growth. To ensure reliability, the study compared and synthesized ideas from multiple authoritative sources.

RESULTS. The results of the study demonstrate that independent work plays a crucial role in the professional development of teachers. In particular, teachers' awareness of their own professional deficiencies and their deliberate efforts to overcome them facilitate a transition into their zone of proximal development.

The findings also show that teachers' engagement in scientific and methodological activities, the development of reflective skills, and collaboration with colleagues contribute to the formation of stable professional competencies. Furthermore, independent learning processes enhance teachers' pedagogical flexibility and openness to innovation.

DISCUSSION. The results are largely consistent with existing research in the field. Remaining exclusively within a comfort zone may provide short-term emotional stability for teachers; however, in the long term, it leads to professional stagnation. This negatively affects pedagogical creativity and motivation.

In contrast, the zone of proximal development offers teachers a controlled environment for growth. Within this zone, teachers experiment with new pedagogical methods, expand their professional skills, and strengthen their professional identity. A limitation of the present study is its reliance on theoretical sources. Future research should incorporate empirical data to further validate these findings.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, independent professional development becomes more effective and sustainable when examined within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development. While the comfort zone plays an important role in maintaining emotional balance, stepping beyond its boundaries is essential for professional growth.

Teachers who set realistic goals, engage in continuous self-reflection, and remain open to innovation meet the core demands of modern education. The Zone of Proximal Development serves as a significant pedagogical tool that enhances both teachers' professional competence and the overall quality of education.

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