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Place and Role of Master's Degree Programs 'Pedagogic Education', 'Psychological and Pedagogic Education' and 'Psychology' in the System of Continuous Professional Development of Teaching Staff

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Abstract

A new look at the system of training in-service teachers and innovative strategies for the organization of teacher education has led to the need to rethink master's degree programs as one of the most important ways of professional growth of the teacher. The purpose of the article was to determine the place, purpose, and role of master's degree programs. The main research method used for the purposes of this research was an experimental study of the organization of master's degree programs as a point of professional growth of teachers. The analysis was based on the programs' features with regard to the stages of higher education, on the one hand, and, on the other, in relation to the courses of professional development and the centers of continuous professional development of teachers in Russia. The authors proposed and tested the model of organization of teacher training relied on contingent features, specifics of the programs, and organization of educational process. The activity of students was also analyzed with an aim of involving them in scientific understanding of pedagogical realities. A comparative analysis of the results of traditional advanced training courses and the model of master's programs that the authors proposed has shown that students' satisfaction with the learning process, positive perception of the educational process, and a clear vision of their professional growth are stronger at the master's programs, while continuing professional development courses show more risks and do not always meet teachers' expectations.

Keywords: master's degree program, professional development, advanced training courses, Master's degree program peculiarities.

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Introduction

The current system of training and professional development facing modern challenges is unable to meet the increased demands for professional and pedagogic activities on the part of society as a whole, and the pedagogical community, as well as consumers of educational services. This problem is being tackled within the "Teacher of the future" Federal Project, which sets the task to the pedagogical community to implement strategies of continuous improvement of teachers' professional skills. For this purpose, Teachers' Continuous Professional Development Centers are being established throughout the country. In this respect, there is the need for comprehension, detailed consideration of the place and role of pedagogical and psychological education of postgraduate students. This need also stems from a new vision of professional development, implementation of leading trends in the field of teacher education such as digitalization of education, increased mobility of students, focus on individualized learning that requires students to identify their own professional ways of development (Polevaya & Romanova, 2017).

Purpose and objectives of the study

The study aims at substantiating the essence of the Master's degree programs within the framework of the modern strategy of education development in Russia. Master's degree programs are examined through the lens of their place and role in the system of continuous professional development of teachers. Benefits and opportunities for professional development will also be identified. The approaches to the research problem are systematic, structural, and reflexive (Osipova, 2012). These approaches enable analyzing the Master's degree programs in the system of teacher training as one of its most important components. Also, they are conducive of viewing continuous professional development of teachers as a personal process based on independent and critical understanding of professional and pedagogical activities. In addition, postgraduate students are viewed as an essential link in the system of continuous professional development.

Literature review

The problems of pedagogic education are given considerable attention by Bulin-Sokolova, Obukhov, and Semenov (2014) from Moscow State Pedagogical University. The majority of previous studies on the role of Master's degree program in the system of continuous professional development are based on the works by Bolotov (2013). Also, the analysis of foreign and Russian experience in implementing Master's programs and methods of their implementation are presented in the works of Barinova (2017), Baklashova, Sakhieva, and Telegina (2020) and others. The question of training for professional pedagogic activity is considered by many researchers. The innovative organizational structure of Master's programs based on the experience of non-

pedagogical universities such as Kazan Federal University was developed by Sakhieva & Vlasova (2016) and others. Extensive experience and its theoretical and methodological justification based on an innovative approach are presented in the works of researchers of the Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute (Shukshina, Buyanov, Gorshenin, & Neyasova, 2017). In the context of modern education trends and in accordance with the innovative approach to the university environment, the problems of implementing Bachelor's and Master's programs, defining its strategic guidelines according to the competency-based and practice-oriented approaches to structuring the educational process were considered by Buyanova, Prikhodchenko, and Spirenkova (2017), Shukshina et al. (2017), and others. Conceptually, the process and the nature of implementation of Master's programs are presented in the works of Fenenko (2016).

However, reconsidering the mission of pedagogic education and understanding of the purposes of Master's degree programs in the context of continuous professional development centers for teachers has not been examined by the researchers (Robotova, 2017).

Methodology

The study aims at identifying the characteristics of the Master's degree programs, making it possible to assess its place and role in the system of teachers' continuous professional development as well as determine its integrating nature and the organizational conditions necessary for implementing Master's degree programs.

It was hypothesized that compliance with organizational and pedagogic conditions during the implementation of Master's programs, taking into account the programs' features and students' expectations, makes it possible for Master's degree programs to become not only a stage of teacher training, but also the component of teachers' professional and personal growth which are, in turn, necessary to provide students with essential opportunities for their professional development and improvement.

The following research methods were used in this study. First, we administered the survey to establish the attitudes to teaching at Master's degree and advance training courses. Second, we applied modelling to develop the Master's degree program considering its educational process on a fundamentally different basis. Third, we ran the experimental research necessary for an objective evaluation of the proposed model. Finally, we used methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained during the survey and experiment.

The research was conducted at Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod (Arzamas branch). The programs that were analyzed are '44.04.01 Pedagogic Education Training Program', '37.04.01 Psychology Training Program', '44.04.02 Psychological and Teacher Education Training Program'. Also, we analyzed

the programs 'Psychological and pedagogic Support of Preschool Education', 'Pedagogy and Psychology of Professional Education Training Program'. The study invited 78 novice teachers aged 22-28, studying at Master's and Bachelor's degree programs and at continuous professional development courses. The pilot study was carried out during 2017-2019 academic years.

Results

Stage 1 included the development of a theoretical and methodologic base of the study, analysis of the state and nature of the Master's degree programs, identification of its features, establishment of necessary organizational conditions for an effective educational process aimed at professional growth, identification of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with Master's degree programs among students and their expectations in terms of the content and education process. At this stage, the survey was conducted.

In this regard, two groups of respondents were identified: Group 1 – young teachers studying at the Master's degree programs (40 participants), Group 2 – young teachers not studying at the Master's degree programs but taking advanced training courses (38 participants). The last group consisted of two subgroups: those who plan to study full-time and those who plan to study part-time.

In the survey, the participants were asked such questions: would they like professional growth, how they imagine it, what new things they would like to learn and/or what to learn, what kind of training they expect, and how they participate in classes. Also, to obtain more reliable and objective result of the study, a three-point Likert-scale of satisfaction/dissatisfaction was used, according to which respondents were asked to evaluate their expectations of the educational process and future professional growth.

According to the analysis of the survey results in Group 1, the percentage ratio was as follows: 70% (28 participants) expected intensive professional development, mastering the innovative ways of educational process organization and management; 69% (27 people) expected to acquire knowledge about the developmental trends in modern education; 60% (24 people) expected to master their skills necessary to conduct science-based evaluation of their professional activities, educational process, pedagogical phenomena, and pedagogical reality. On the expectation scale (satisfaction/dissatisfaction), the high level (3 points) was marked by 17% (7 people), the average level – 2 points by 63% (25 people), the low level by 20% (8 people). Since the students already had pedagogic education and little work experience, the level of expectations was mainly higher, which meant that there were more concerns.

As for the Group 2, the expectations were as follows: intensive professional growth, mastering innovative ways of organizing and managing the educational process (85%, 32 respondents), mastering knowledge

concerning the trends in the development of modern education (83%, 31 respondents); ability to conduct scientifically based assessment of their professional activities and the educational process (60%, 23 respondents). The low percentage of the latter component is due to the fact that practicing teachers are mostly focused on expanding the methodological means due to the assessment as it is more professionally significant and necessary in their teaching activities. According to the expectation scale (satisfaction/dissatisfaction), the high level (3 points) was marked by 26% (10 respondents), the average level of 2 points was shown by 74% (28 respondents). The Group 2 participants did not indicate a low level. These figures are quite logical as the participants had high hopes for the upcoming training because of the change of scenery, a new desire, lack of perception of the courses as the next stage of learning, the vision of its clear connection with professional activities to improve skills, aspiration to new methods, techniques, forms and projects in the field of education.

A comparative analysis of the survey shows that in the both groups, the majority of respondents indicated that they would like intensive professional growth, expanding their understanding concerning the educational process, the conditions necessary for its effective organization, taking into account innovations as well as the ability to research and give reliable assessment. The level of expectation was higher in the second group, which is associated with a wary attitude to the master's program and a positive attitude to the courses in General, regardless of the form of their implementation.

The examination of the Master's degree program revealed a number of its features. After analyzing students who aim at the personal growth, the following types of students were identified: 1) having both Bachelor's and Master's degrees; 2) having Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy and aspiring to further improve their skills. In this regard, several features of the Master's program were identified. In the first case, the program acts as a link between professional activity and improving the level of competencies and skills. It can be considered as one of the points of growth in the educational environment for professional and career development and as an effective element of the system of continuous professional development. In the second case, its role could be to attract attention to Master's degree programs so that they become popular and, therefore, competitive among existing Master's programs. Another feature is the opportunities that open up based on the conditions and ways of enrolling to a Master's program. For instance, after receiving a Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy and having worked for some time in this field, the teacher feels the need for additional knowledge in psychology. Accordingly, there is the need for undertaking the Master's degree program in Psychology. Another example is when a person receives the degree in Physics and Mathematics but understands that his vocation is to be a teacher and educate children. Accordingly, that person can join the "Pedagogic education" Master's program. Thus, Master's programs are open to everyone as they make it possible to make a conscious

smooth transition from one major to another or get additional education. Consequently, this characteristic of a Master's program opens as a stage for personal growth and the basis for creating an individual way of professional development. Thus, students contemplate on their activities, analyze their personal and professional qualities correlating them with each other, outline development paths and create their own professionally and personally significant routes.

Based on the survey and the identified characteristics, we have developed the model of the Master's degree program "Pedagogic Education", "Psychological and Pedagogic Education", and "Psychology". Stage 2 of the experimental activity included implementing the developed model.

Thus, the model was implemented within the framework of the Master's degree program while participants of advanced training courses were trained at traditional courses, i.e. they expanded and deepened their knowledge in the traditional way, most often choosing a particular course topic.

The proposed model took into account such features as the distance learning mode, the potential for deepening existing concepts of the basic education, the possibility to change the major. In this regard, it was determined that Master's degree programs should be open and include a certain proportion of personal and professional methods, technologies, teaching and research strategies that will provide students with reflexive skills, tools for building professional and personal routes. The nature of training is proposed to be research-led. Undergraduates are expected to participate in conferences of different levels (international, national, regional) as well as symposiums, seminars and other scientific events. Also, it is necessary to include the research component in the internship programs prioritizing independent research activities (creating and testing various programs depending on the direction of training, analyzing the educational process of various levels and nature, studying modern methods and technologies, analyzing trends in education). Implementation of practice in the framework of a Master's degree program which allows students to be inside the educational process but at the same time, to observe and/or participate in it from the position of a scientist, an active researcher should also be taken into account.

The proposed model was piloted during a year and a half. The participants of the experiment were the students of '44.04.01 Pedagogic Education' training program, 'Education and Training Quality Monitoring' Master's degree program, '37.04.01 Psychology' training program, 'Developmental Psychology' Master's degree program, and '44.04.02 Psychological and Pedagogic Education' training program as well as 'Psychological and Pedagogic Support of Preschool Education' and 'Pedagogy and Psychology of Professional Education' training programs. Such sequence of programs is an important component ensuring continuous development of professional skills.

At the third stage, a repeated survey was administered to the both groups of trained teachers engaged in their professional growth. The key issue was also the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction (at the first stage – expectations) with their training.

In the group of teachers who have passed advanced training courses, dissatisfaction with the forms of teaching was prevailing; attention was paid to structuring disciplines without an overall insight into system trends, the evaluation process, and use of only certain innovations. Decreased percentage for the variable ‘waiting for mastering innovative methods of organization and educational process management’ was found in 80% of responses (30 people); the rate of learning about the trends of development of modern education also became low – 75% (28 people); the variable ‘skills to conduct science-based evaluation of own professional activities and the educational process’ also dropped to 50% (18 people). A comparison of the scale of expectations (satisfaction/dissatisfaction) showed the high level (3 points) in the case of 7 participants (18%), the average level (2 points) – 20 participants (53%), the low level – 11 participants (29%). Respondents from both groups stressed limited content and one-sidedness of the course content defined by the scope of the subjects of the courses that often leads to the insufficiency of the material, failing to give students an array of submission formats and space for their independent activity. A significant decrease in expectations was caused primarily by those who took courses in the distance format (the second subgroup of Group 2).

The participants noted that in some cases, training was purely formal, many risks were associated with the qualifications and professionalism of the teachers involved in the courses; there was the limited ability to record materials and if necessary, return to them as well as the questionable level of reliability of the knowledge provided; technical issues that sometimes affected the ability to access the courses, and/or the quality of teaching. Thus, there was a general decline in the results of this group.

As for the first group, on the contrary, the result of the repeated survey shows positive dynamics. The rate of mastering innovative ways of organizing and managing the educational process increased to 75% (30 people), the rate of mastering knowledge about trends in the development of modern education increased to 79% (32 people), and the indicators have increased in the area of skills connected with conducting scientifically based assessment of own professional activities – to 76% (31 people); the high level (3 points) was marked by 20 people (53%), the average level (2 points) – 10 people (38%), the low level (1 point) – 8 people (34%). It should be noted that this is not a sharp one-time increase, as it may seem at first, but a dynamic movement of responses from a group of low points to the average, from the average to the high indicator. Thus, initially, the expectations for improving the level of professional skills in the Master's program were slightly lower than at continuous professional development courses. After the research

experiment, organized in accordance with the identified features and the specifics of structuring its content and procedure, the degree of trust in it increased, the expectations were either met or were higher than anticipated, and the results among teachers receiving training in Master's degree programs were slightly higher than those of their colleagues from continuous professional development courses. The performance of participants in traditional continuous professional development courses was lower.

Discussions

The extensive literature review shows the absence of special studies devoted to the detailed analysis of the specifics of the educational process at the '44.04.01 Pedagogic Education and Education' and 'Training Quality Monitoring' Master's degree programs, '37.04.01 Psychology' training program, 'Developmental Psychology' Master's degree program, '44.04.02 Psychological and Pedagogic Education' training program, and the understanding of place and role of Master's degree programs (Lukyanova & Filippova, 2005; Chernikov, 2017). Although there are many studies on pedagogic education and educational process concerning Master's degree programs, the conditions of selecting and structuring the content and methodological tools, the specifics of designing and building graduate programs, the peculiarities of its implementation depending on the specialty are not examined.

Conclusion

In this regard, Master's degree programs are extremely important in the system of teachers' professional growth, being one of the stages of training, on the one hand, and a promising motivator and stimulator for personal and professional development, on the other. Understanding its place and purpose in the structure of professional development makes it possible to demonstrate its capabilities as an even more significant and attractive stage in the conditions of changes occurring in the modern educational process, as an important stage in the framework of teachers' professional growth and further improvement. It enables researchers and practitioners to give an objective assessment of its role in the structure of professional growth.

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