

Developing future specialists' competencies through a digital reflective learning model at the university

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the development of a reflexive ICT-based system aimed at improving the professional education of bachelor students in the natural sciences, with a focus on strengthening methodological training and digital competence. Modern higher education faces growing demands for innovation, technological readiness, and quality improvement in health sciences, which requires students to work confidently with digital tools, analyze their own learning processes, and make independent pedagogical and professional decisions. The proposed reflexive system is based on principles of self-regulation, reflective analysis, and active student engagement within an integrated information and educational environment. It includes electronic learning resources, blended learning, AR and VR tools, project work, and systematic development of reflective skills. A three-year experiment with bachelor students showed that the implementation of this system improved methodological competence, knowledge retention, digital literacy, motivation for professional activity, and the ability to organize and regulate learning. The results confirm that a reflexive ICT-supported approach increases the quality of training in fields where digital competencies and laboratory readiness are essential, including chemistry, biomedical sciences, and health sciences. By strengthening reflective thinking and the effective use of digital technologies, the system prepares students for current educational standards and supports the transition to flexible, competence-oriented models of professional education.

Keywords: Reflexive learning, ICT, Digital competence, Professional education, Methodological competence, Health sciences education

Introduction

In the global context, the rapid digitalization [1] of science and education, the expansion of technology-intensive domains, and the growing need for specialists capable of working in complex laboratory and information environments have intensified the demand for new models of professional training [2, 3]. Higher education institutions are expected to prepare graduates who

possess strong digital competencies, methodological flexibility, and the ability to apply reflective thinking in decision-making [4]. These requirements are especially acute in the natural and health sciences, where the quality of professional preparation directly influences laboratory safety, the accuracy of scientific procedures, and the effectiveness of educational and clinical practices [5].

The ongoing transformation of Kazakhstani society reinforces these global challenges and underscores the need to modernize the multi-level system of higher pedagogical education so that it aligns with current national and international requirements for professional training [6]. In this context, the present study addresses the task of improving the methodological preparation of future specialists by developing and implementing a reflexive ICT-based system of professional education [7, 8].

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The implementation of a learner-centered educational paradigm under such circumstances presupposes that educational activities must create conditions for, and support, innovations that enhance the role of the Student as an active subject in designing an individual educational trajectory [9]. Innovative approaches help overcome the traditional separation of students' personal educational meanings from formalized knowledge and externally imposed components of the educational process.

At present, new and more stringent requirements are being articulated regarding the professional and pedagogical preparation of future chemistry teachers [10]. These requirements include readiness for change, the ability to employ non-standard methods and forms of teaching, as well as responsibility and independence in pedagogical decision-making [11-13].

Accordingly, at the current stage, the principal objective of professional chemistry education at the university level is to enhance the quality of methodological training by aligning the content and organization of the educational process with national educational standards [14-16]. This is to be achieved by developing methodological competence among future chemistry teachers.

However, our findings demonstrate that bachelor-level programs in Kazakhstani universities remain largely dominated by approaches that primarily lead to the formal assimilation of knowledge in the process of learning chemistry teaching methods. Among the problems identified are insufficient use of information and communication technologies (ICT), low levels of student motivation, inadequate attention to the development of creative activity, critical thinking, and pedagogical reflection, as well as shortcomings in the methodological support of the educational process [13, 16-21].

In the context of the contemporary information society, it is evident that the professional training of future chemistry teachers must be improved by systematically integrating ICT tools into the educational process [22, 23]. In order to meet current standards, there is an urgent need to develop a conceptual framework for innovative professional education for future chemistry teachers, as well as to design a subject-specific, ICT-based environment for teaching chemistry methodology [24].

An especially significant component of bachelor-level chemistry teacher education, oriented toward work in modern Kazakhstani schools [25], is the organization of reflexive learning [26], which activates mechanisms of professional self-determination and self-development [27]. The value of reflection in the process of mastering chemistry teaching methods lies in its action-oriented, socially and personally directed character [28].

Reflexive learning in bachelor-level chemistry education also serves as a key mechanism for developing students' metacognitive abilities and professional self-awareness [29]. Through the systematic analysis of their own actions in laboratory activities, lesson planning, and classroom simulations, students learn to identify errors, understand their underlying causes, and select appropriate strategies for improvement [29]. Reflexive practices such as maintaining reflective laboratory journals, engaging in peer and self-assessment, and analyzing critical incidents from

school practice enable future chemistry teachers to relate theoretical knowledge to real educational situations, refine their pedagogical decision-making, and gradually construct a stable professional identity [30]. Thus, reflexive learning becomes not only an instrument for monitoring and assuring the quality of educational outcomes, but also a central means of fostering autonomy, responsibility, and readiness for continuous professional development [31-33].

Through engagement in reflexive learning, bachelor-level chemistry students acquire the capacity to perform diverse professional tasks, regulate their own activity, and master the knowledge and mechanisms necessary for such self-regulation. Within innovative professional education, reflection involves students in setting goals and planning, implementing these plans in practice, conducting diagnostics, and monitoring the processes, conditions, and results of their activities [17, 34, 35]. In the context of innovative educational processes in chemistry methodology, reflection plays a pronounced educational role, contributing directly to the development of professional competence among future chemistry teachers [19, 36-38].

The analysis presented above confirms that the existing problems in the training of bachelor-level chemistry students within the multi-level system of higher pedagogical education are largely attributable to the underdeveloped theoretical and methodological foundations of an innovative professional education system based on self-regulation and reflection. There is a clear need to strengthen the reflexive component of chemistry teaching methodology and to expand opportunities for professional and personal self-expression and self-realization in accordance with the nature of the chemistry teaching profession. Consequently, in this study, reflection has been adopted as the core principle for constructing a reflexive system of professional education for bachelor-level chemistry students, making comprehensive use of the university's information-educational resources [39-47].

The aim of the study is to enhance the quality of professional education for chemistry bachelor students through the implementation of a reflexive system of professional education that integrates information and communication technologies (ICT).

Materials and Methods

The study on the development and evaluation of a reflexive ICT-based system of professional education for future chemistry teachers was carried out using a comprehensive set of theoretical, empirical, and experimental methods. The experiment lasted three years within the multi-level system of higher pedagogical education in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main research site was L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, with additional scientific and methodological support from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur Mubarak.

The sample consisted of existing third-year groups in the Chemistry Department. Two experimental groups (EG-1 and

EG-2), in which the reflexive system was implemented, and one control group, which was studied in a traditional format, were formed; each group included 45 students.

The experimental work was organized in stages:

Stating (diagnostic) stage

At the initial stage, the baseline level of students' professional and methodological competence was examined through tests, questionnaires, self-assessment, expert evaluation, analysis of academic documentation and learning products, and observation of students' behavior in educational situations. The results informed the design of the formative stage.

Formative stage

At this stage, the authors' reflexive system was introduced into the training process. Its key elements were: the use of electronic educational resources and the Moodle platform; integration of AR/VR; intensive use of case studies, web quests, project and portfolio work; blended learning formats combining lectures, seminars, and laboratory work with forums, chats, and video conferences; and the systematic development of self-analysis, self-regulation, and reflective skills. Students in the experimental groups learned in an integrative information-educational environment that supported individual and group work, promoted interactive methods, and allowed for personalized learning pathways. They were gradually involved in planning, diagnosing, evaluating, and reflecting on their pedagogical activities.

Control stage

In the final stage, the initial diagnostics were repeated in order to identify changes that occurred during training. The same tools as at the starting stage were used—tests, surveys, expert assessment, and self-assessment—supplemented by computerized testing and monitoring of the formation of methodological competence in the following areas: reflexive, epistemological, design, instructional, diagnostic, research, and educational.

To ensure the validity of the experiment, four groups of indicators were distinguished, reflecting different aspects of research activity and participant engagement:

- (1) indicators based on the personal characteristics of chemistry students;
- (2) indicators describing the professional skills and pedagogical tact of instructors;
- (3) factors characterizing the learning process and social environment;
- and (4) factors related to the control of learning outcomes. Computer-based testing and online surveys were widely used throughout the experiment.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the reflexive learning system implemented through the innovative educational-methodological complex, a criteria-based assessment framework was developed. It included criteria of effectiveness, developmental impact,

process orientation, and reflexivity, with corresponding indicators. The professional training of future chemistry teachers was viewed as a step-by-step advancement in mastering the subject and in self-regulating this process. Progress in professional competence at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels of pedagogical regulation was monitored using the developed indicators.

The professional competence of a chemistry teacher manifests at three levels of regulation of pedagogical activity. At the **strategic level**, the teacher can reasonably integrate ICT and traditional resources, develop electronic and traditional teaching aids, design curricula and elective courses, and select appropriate teaching technologies. At the **tactical level**, the teacher applies modern pedagogical technologies in chemistry, designs objectives, content, methods, and instructional forms, organizes an ICT-supported workplace, and plans lessons and other formats using teaching aids in an integrated way. At the **operational level**, the teacher chooses concrete methods, organizational forms, and tools in accordance with the content and context of a particular lesson, relying on value-oriented and developmental approaches within an information-rich learning environment.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the reflexive learning system for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students in the methodology of teaching biology, a questionnaire was used to distinguish seven types of methodological competencies in a biology teacher: reflexive, gnoseological, design-oriented, instructional, diagnostic, research, and educational.

Analysis and processing of results

For comparison, additional surveys were conducted with student groups who had studied without the reflexive ICT-based system. In the statistical analysis, the Wilcoxon test was used to check the homogeneity of two independent small samples (up to 45 participants) with unknown distributions. If the samples proved homogeneous, they were considered to originate from the same general population and have identical distributions, which in this study would indicate the absence of a pedagogical effect from the reflexive ICT-based system. The hypothesis of sample homogeneity was tested at a 0.95 significance level. To test the equality of population mean values for the key parameters, the Student's t-test was applied. Group comparisons (each group with each other) were carried out using the above-mentioned methodological competencies.

Results and Discussion

The designed reflexive ICT-based system of professional education is represented by five interrelated components: goal-setting, content, operational-activity, regulatory, and reflective. The research results show that the most pronounced increase in indicators was observed at the operational level, which confirms the effectiveness of training organized on the basis of this reflexive system. The dynamics of students' professional competencies at the strategic, tactical, and

operational levels of regulation of pedagogical activity are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

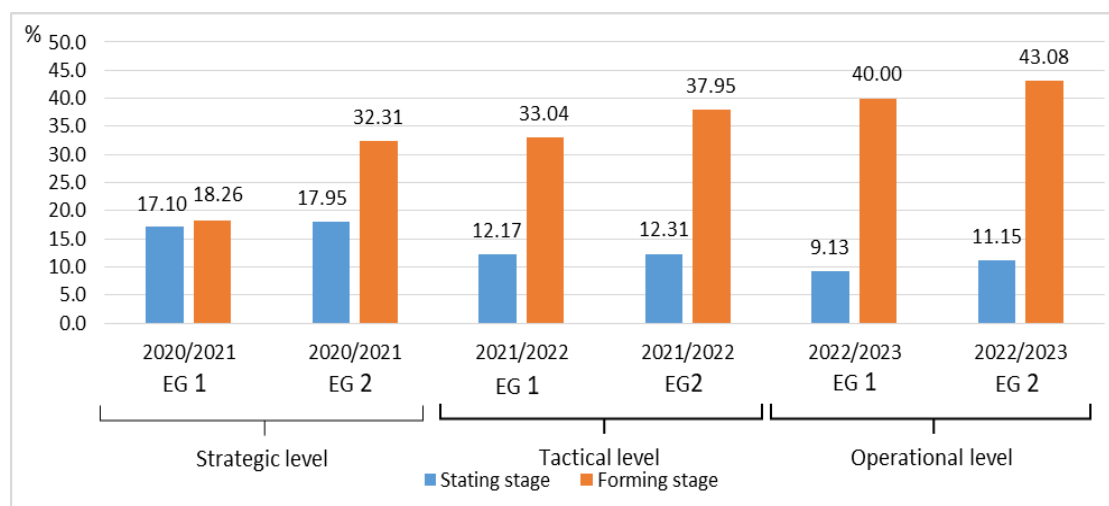


Figure 1. Dynamics of methodological competence in the two experimental groups (EG1 and EG2)

Statistical analysis demonstrated that students in groups 0 and 3, who studied within the proposed reflexive learning system, achieved a higher level of methodological readiness, indicating the greater effectiveness of ICT-supported reflexive professional education. The experimental findings confirmed the initial assumption that the implementation of this system for future chemistry teachers promotes the development of all components of their professional competence. Within the first group of indicators, variables characterizing the personal level of organization were distinguished: successful mastery of methodological–biological knowledge, creative potential, students' capacity for self-development, information culture, and motivation for professional activity.

Analysis of the dynamics of the knowledge-retention coefficient over four academic years shows a generally positive trend in students' mastery of the methodology of teaching chemistry. At the entry assessment stage, the coefficient increased from 0.57 in 2019/2020 to 0.62 in 2021/2022, and then stabilized at 0.58 in 2022/2023. During the ongoing assessment, it ranged from 0.54 in 2019/2020 to 0.61 in 2020/2021, 0.59 in 2021/2022, and 0.60 in 2022/2023. The most pronounced growth was recorded at the final control stage: from 0.55 and 0.57 in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, respectively, the coefficient rose sharply to 0.78 in 2021/2022 and then remained at a relatively high level of 0.64 in 2022/2023. At the same time, the standard deviation and coefficient of variation for this indicator decreased as students progressed through the cycle of methodological disciplines, which indicates a "leveling" of knowledge retention and the relative homogenization of achievement across student groups. This effect may be attributed to the universality of the reflexive ICT-based professional education system, which offers a wide range of digital tools, allows students to construct individual educational trajectories, and supports self-regulation of learning activity.

Changes in students' motivation for professional activity also demonstrate a clear positive dynamic over the three years of experimental work (2020/2021–2022/2023). At the starting

stage, the proportion of students with internal motives remained at about 38–40%, and the share of those guided by external positive motives was around 41–42%, while external negative motives were present in approximately 9–10% of students. By the formative stage, the share of students with internal motives increased to about 50–53% in all three cohorts, and the proportion of those with external positive motives similarly rose to 50–54%. At the same time, the percentage of students with external negative motives decreased to 5–8%. Thus, the implemented reflexive learning system contributed to a shift in the structure of professional motivation toward internal and socially significant motives and to a reduction in the role of negative external factors.

A similar positive dynamic was observed for indicators related to students' personal characteristics, in particular their information culture. In 2020/2021, the proportion of students with a low level of information culture decreased from 28.0% at the starting stage to 12.0% at the formative stage, while the share with a medium level increased from 56.0% to 60.0% and the share with a high level from 16.0% to 28.0%. In 2021/2022, low levels declined from 11.76% to 5.88%, medium levels grew from 73.53% to 76.47%, and high levels from 14.77% to 17.65%. In 2022/2023, the proportion of students with a low level fell from 25.0% to 9.38%, the proportion of students with a medium level rose from 62.5% to 65.63%, and the proportion of students with a high level doubled from 12.5% to 25.0%. These results confirm that the reflexive ICT-rich educational environment not only improves the quality of methodological knowledge but also fosters the development of students' information culture as an important component of their professional and personal growth.

Conclusion

The study substantiated and implemented a concept of a reflexive system of professional education for chemistry bachelor students, grounded in the theory of reflexive learning and in the internal

logic of mastering a cycle of methodological disciplines. This concept brings together fundamental ideas, goals, objectives, patterns, principles, and content characteristics, with the identified patterns forming the conceptual core and reflecting the specific ways in which students engage with methodological training. On this basis, a reflexive system of professional education was designed and realized within an information-educational environment that makes systematic use of innovative ICT tools. The experimental work confirmed the pedagogical effectiveness of this system: the integration of modern ICT and a reflexive, student-centered organization of learning led to higher levels of methodological competence, more stable knowledge retention, and positive shifts in motivation, self-development, creative potential, and information culture among future chemistry teachers.

At the same time, several limitations of the research should be acknowledged, which also outline directions for further work.

The experiment was carried out mainly with third-year chemistry students from a single university, with relatively small experimental and control groups, which narrows the possibilities for generalizing the findings to other institutions, disciplines, and stages of teacher education. The quasi-experimental design, based on pre-existing academic groups, did not allow full randomization, and the assessment of methodological competence partially relied on self-reports and expert judgments, introducing a potential element of subjectivity. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on short- and medium-term learning outcomes and did not systematically trace how the developed competencies are manifested in graduates' subsequent professional practice. Thus, there is a need for broader multi-site and longitudinal studies, including cross-regional and cross-disciplinary comparisons. Future research may also examine the specific contribution of individual components of the information-educational environment and explore institutional conditions that support the sustainable integration of reflexive ICT-based professional education into the wider system of chemistry teacher training.

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Ethics statement: None

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