FORMATION AND CULTIVATION STRATEGIES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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Article Info:

Abstract:

In the higher education, the construction of students' professional identity faces significant challenges due to the development requirements. Inadequate or absence of professional identity can result in sluggish learning advancement, feeble professional objective orientation, and even psychological distress, including anxiety and mental health disorders. In light of this context, this study initially examines the conceptual and theoretical framework of professional identity, with a particular emphasis on students' precise professional self-positioning. Comprehending the impact of students' self-perception, learning environment, professional practice experience, and curriculum design on their learning process, and gradually comprehending the process by which professional identity is formed. Therefore, it is determined that the cultivation plan for college students' professional identity should prioritise their endeavours in three areas: self-orientation, family upbringing, and social assistance. Hence, the development and nurturing of college students' professional identity is an intricate and multi-faceted procedure that necessitates the collaborative endeavours of several stakeholders to ensure the robust advancement and holistic growth of college students.

Keywords:

University Students; Professional Identity; Formation; Cultivation Strategies

Introduction

As higher education enters the stage of massification, it is receiving increasing attention. Given the bleak employment scenario, the choice of profession becomes crucial for students entering

university. Equally important is the establishment of a sense of professional identity by colleges and universities. Upon completing the stage of acquiring professional knowledge, students will develop a distinct professional identity. Fitzgerald (2020) has noted that the literature on professional identity often lacks clear and consistent definitions. Professional identity is a dynamic state that is influenced by both the individual and the surrounding environment and is not fixed or constant. Furthermore, the absence of a defined professional identity can result in adverse effects on education, a lack of clarity in career goals, and feelings of frustration and mental health issues in both learning and life (Adams et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2020). Thus, this study aims to analyse the factors that influence professional identity based on the conceptual definition and theoretical framework of professional identity. The goal is to understand the process of professional identity formation and propose strategies for cultivating professional identity, in order to assist students in developing a strong professional identity and achieving sustainable growth.

Conceptual And Theoretical Framework Of Professional Identity

Concept Of Professional Identity
An individual's professional identity, which is a significant factor in determining their social roles and self-perception, has a direct impact on how they place themselves in their work and personal life. Consequently, it shapes their attitudes and behaviours (Siebert & Siebert, 2005). Early academics posited that professional identity is a consistent and enduring state characterised by individual qualities, values, motives, and diverse experiences. They further stated that professional identity influences one's self-role orientation (Schein & Schein, 1978). The study of professional identity has advanced and is now understood as an activity inside a professional group. It encompasses attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and abilities that may be communicated with others (Adams et al., 2006). However, many university students are not fully aware of the similarities and contrasts in their future professional duties, which can make it challenging for them to establish a professional identity. Hence, in order to enhance comprehension of students' professional identities, it is imperative to provide more thorough consideration to the elements that influence them.

Theoretical Framework for Professional Identity
The notion of professional identity is recognised as a means for students to align themselves with their professional duties and thereby cultivate a specific degree of professionalism. Identity theory posits that humans perceive their self-identity as a "object" that they introspect upon by delineating, classifying, and comprehending it (Burke & Stets, 2022). Identity is formed through the internal acknowledgement of significance inside oneself and is partially viewed as a symbolic interaction (Stryker, 2001). More precisely, when identity is activated in a certain scenario, the development of self-identity aligns with that situation, resulting in a self-feedback mechanism (Burke & Stets, 2022). Put simply, once students have established their sense of self, they will progressively transition into the professional learning environment and actively participate in self-assessment and introspection along the learning journey. Through a sequential and methodical process of acquiring expertise and honing skills, individuals gradually develop a strong sense of professional identity. The aforementioned information demonstrates that context plays a crucial role in the development of professional identity. Students will only fully embrace and integrate their different identities to produce a cohesive professional identity when they are in an environment that supports professional learning. According to the implications of identity theory, in order to enhance students' learning

experiences in a more efficient and organised manner, it is important to consider the impact of professional identity. This will help prevent the negative effects of unfavourable surroundings.

Factors Shaping Professional Identity
The development of professional identity in students is shaped by multiple elements, including practical experience in the field and the process of professional socialisation, both of which have a lasting impact (Ashby et al., 2016). Put simply, the creation of professional identity is a fluid and ongoing process in which individuals determine the type of professional they aspire to become in the future, drawing from their professional background (Noble et al., 2019). Professional identities will continuously deconstruct and reconstruct themselves in response to different events and individuals, using self-assessment and emotional experiences. According to Baum (2004), sociology students may experience negative feelings when confronted with challenging tasks due to conflicts between their personal and professional demands, questions about their professional skills, and contradictions between their personal space and professional obligations. This can be partially attributed to the phenomenon that occurs when students enrol in university, as they independently evaluate and appraise the principles, convictions, and objectives of the field they are pursuing. As students acquire systematic professional knowledge, they gradually incorporate their professional ideas and aims into their professional practice. This process is highly advantageous for the development of their professional identity. Previous studies have shown that an individual's parental education, early schooling, and professional experience might influence the development of their professional identity (Cohen-Scali, 2003). According to Cohen-Scali (2003), the development of professional identity is an intricate and extended process that commences throughout childhood. The family, as the primary social unit for students, can benefit from parental support and assistance, hence enhancing their engagement and involvement in educational endeavours. Upon attending the school, the engagement with fellow students is also beneficial for the development of one's professional identity. Haslam et al. (2005) state that students' engagement contributes to successful social interaction, allowing them to develop a stronger sense of belonging by providing support and assistance to one another, thus improving the learning process.

Furthermore, the construction of students' professional identity is heavily influenced by both course design and their learning experiences (Noble et al., 2014). Noble et al. (2019) elucidate that a key objective of a university curriculum is to assist students in developing a favourable professional identity by providing guidance and reflective education to cultivate their ability to think, behave, and perform in a professional capacity. It is important to consider the professional identity of students in various majors when assisting them in developing their professional identity. A study conducted by Taylor and Harding (2007) showed that the undergraduate programme's curricular and practical experiences had a fundamental role in the development of professional identity among pharmacy students. However, to have a deeper comprehension of students' professional identity, it is crucial to take into account the experiences and interactions among various professions within the realm of higher education. To do this, students can engage in reading and studying literature and academic publications that are relevant to their area of expertise. Additionally, including professional development activities and allowing industry professionals to provide feedback and analysis can further enhance their learning experience (Glaser-Segura et al., 2010). The objective of this programme is to assist students in cultivating a more refined professional image, thereby augmenting their professional identity organically. Given the information provided, it is

reasonable to conclude that the development of professional identity can be impacted by a range of circumstances.

Strategies For The Development Of Professional Identity

To improve their professional identity, students must have a comprehensive understanding of the notion of professional identity, the methods of coordination between various parties, and the ability to acknowledge the influence that different circumstances might have on professional identity. Put simply, individuals must have a clear understanding of the specific activities they need to do and the reasons behind them. Additionally, they should have a positive perception of their own identity, strengths, and shortcomings. This self-awareness will enable them to enhance their learning process in various areas of professional knowledge and attain a wide range of expertise.

Self-Orientation

Precisely situating oneself is crucial for enhancing one's professional identity. The gender disparity between male and female students has a significant impact on the development of their professional identity, as evidenced by previous research. Female students exhibit a greater degree of anxiety than male students when confronted with challenges, which can hinder their ability to engage in professional activities. Put simply, students must possess self-awareness of their interests, strengths, values, and other personal traits in order to engage in self-assessment and pursue enhanced personal growth. Individuals must possess the capacity to autonomously oversee their professional trajectories and accurately discern their strengths and weaknesses (Bridgstock, 2009; Raemdonck et al., 2012). As per the explanation, when students possess a distinct understanding of their strengths and exhibit elevated levels of confidence and aspirations for the future, they will demonstrate greater focus on their academic advancement and are more inclined to successfully accomplish challenging tasks when confronted with them (Bennett, 2012). Students can only utilise their professional knowledge and skills to fulfil their own professional views and values, thereby attaining the development of their professional identity. Identity theory posits that after an individual has established their internal self-positioning, their identity will organically emerge. Hence, it is crucial to cultivate students' professional identity and their tactics for self-orientation development. According to the content of identity theory, once the establishment of an individual's internal self-positioning, their identity will naturally follow. Therefore, it is particularly important to develop students' professional identity and their self-orientation development strategies.

Family Education

Family support is crucial in shaping a student's professional identity. Parents have the ability to closely observe and perceive their children's psychological shifts, as well as gain a more detailed understanding of their interests, objectives, and desires. By engaging in conversations about the merits and drawbacks of various occupations, parents assist their children in comprehending the attributes of different professions, job prospects, and evolving patterns. Consequently, this enables children to gain awareness of the specific knowledge and skills required in diverse professional domains. By adopting this approach, youngsters can develop more elaborate strategies and concepts regarding their academic pursuits. Consequently, they will be more equipped to confront the challenges and apprehensions that arise during their university education. Leyva (2011) asserts that cultural expectations transmitted by parents are present in home education. Parents who create conducive learning environments for their children, offer suitable learning opportunities and platforms, and consistently motivate their

children to engage in professionally relevant activities will undoubtedly influence their children's future career choices and planning positively. Put simply, effective family education not only allows children to experience the love and support of their families, but also creates a supportive learning environment for their academic pursuits. Moreover, students will exhibit greater resolve and self-assurance when selecting a career path that aligns with their interests, and they will actively cultivate and enhance their professional identity.

Social Support

Working in social practice can significantly accelerate an individual's self-development and professional growth, leading to a substantial enhancement of their professional identity (Moorhead et al., 2019). Before integrating into society, students must successfully fulfil a sequence of professional programmes within the educational institution. Receiving good teaching methods is crucial for the development of students' professional identity. Research has demonstrated that experiential learning, critical reflection on learning, and positive teacher-student connections have a crucial role in shaping students' professional identity (Levy et al., 2014; Pallisera et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2015). Given the information provided, educators must possess enhanced educational abilities to promote the growth of students' critical thinking and facilitate the assessment of their professional identity. Students must be exposed to a variety of social learning activities and interpersonal contacts, in addition to obtaining effective and comprehensive pedagogical instruction, to enhance their professional identity and socialisation abilities before entering the community.

Although the support of education is essential for the formation of a professional identity, the influence and aid offered by social support must not be overlooked. Specifically, the presence of communities of practice is important when students possess a strong professional identity. When students are motivated to become learners within these communities, and when learners have a strong internal drive and goals, they can successfully merge their personal and professional identities (Monrouxe, 2013; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). Students are immersed in a work-socialization role, which enables them to evaluate project completion and their expectations to fulfil their professional practice. Cohen-Scali (2003) argues that the process of developing a professional identity might be influenced more by an individual's self-perceptions and social recognition than by the specific characteristics of the setting. The reason for this is that good social connections provide individuals with a distinct path for professional growth and are more likely to take place in continuous learning endeavours. Hence, the significance of social support in shaping students' professional identity should not be undervalued.

Conclusion

This study examines the development and nurturing techniques of college students' professional identity and concludes that it is influenced by multiple factors. Various elements such as personal self-perception, self-orientation, family upbringing, school curriculum, and other influences will significantly impact one's professional identity. Put simply, the development and nurturing of college students' professional identity is an intricate and multi-faceted undertaking that necessitates collaboration among people, families, educational institutions, and society as a whole. Future research should investigate the mechanism of professional identity formation in various groups and cultures. It should also explore more efficient strategies and methods for fostering professional identity. If feasible, these strategies should be implemented in teaching practice to enhance the healthy growth and comprehensive development of students.

Ackowledgment

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