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A review of foreign research on the development of professional identity of students

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Abstract

Context and relevance. Factors facilitating and hindering the development of professional identity are examined, including sociocultural contexts, institutional support, and digital socialization. Recent international research demonstrates a growing tendency to conceptualize professional identity as a dynamic, context-dependent, and socially mediated process. Within this framework, professional identity is understood as the result of continuous interactions among individual, educational, and sociocultural factors reflecting personal adaptation to changing professional and digital environments. The hybrid educational environment — combining traditional face-to-face instruction with digital tools and online platforms — plays a particularly important role in professional identity development. At the same time, the key foundations of sustainable professional identity formation remain a supportive academic environment, structured career guidance systems, and a sense of social inclusion within professional communities. The article presents a review of contemporary international studies on the development of professional identity among university students published between 2022 and 2025. Based on the analysis of sources available in major scientific databases (ResearchGate, Sci-Hub, Scopus, Web of Science, Academia.edu, Google Scholar, and other academic resources), two key research directions are identified: the influence of the educational environment on professional identity formation and the role of digital technologies and social media in this process. **Objective.** To analyze contemporary international research (2022–2025) on professional identity development, identifying key research directions, influencing factors, and conceptual approaches to professional identity formation. **Methods and materials.** The review was conducted using systematic analysis and synthesis of scientific literature and empirical studies. The analysis was based on international publications from 2022–2025 indexed in major academic databases. Inclusion criteria were: English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals; empirical and review studies focused on professional identity formation among higher education students. **Results.** As a result of a systematic analysis of international and Russian-language sources indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and other scholarly book and electronic databases, 51 publications were identified as the most relevant, including 33 empirical studies and 18 theoretical and review papers. The analysis revealed two key research directions: 1) the influence of the educational environment and career counseling, and 2) the role of digital technologies and social media in the process of professional identity formation. **Conclusions.** The review demonstrates that professional identity development among university students

is shaped by the interaction of educational, sociocultural, and digital factors. Supportive educational environments, career counseling programs, and mentoring practices contribute to conscious professional choice and the strengthening of professional self-concept. At the same time, digital technologies — while expanding opportunities for self-presentation and professional expression — also generate risks related to social pressure, unrealistic expectations, and digital vulnerability. The negative effects of digital environments are predominantly examined in relation to general self-perception and psychological well-being, whereas their impact on professional self-determination remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, a promising direction for future research is the comparative analysis of professional identity formation mechanisms in digital and traditional educational environments, which may help to more precisely identify conditions, risks, and mediating factors influencing the integrity and sustainability of professional identity among future specialists. The findings of this review may be applied in student career counseling programs, the development of soft skills courses, and the design of educational strategies aimed at fostering professional identity.

Keywords: professional identity, university students, career counseling, educational environment, digital technologies, social media

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Обзор зарубежных исследований развития профессиональной идентичности студенческой молодежи

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Современные зарубежные исследования демонстрируют тенденции к пониманию профессиональной идентичности как динамического, контекстно-зависимого и социально опосредованного процесса. В рамках этого подхода профессиональная идентичность рассматривается как результат непрерывных взаимодействий между индивидуальными, образовательными и социокультурными факторами, отражающими адаптацию личности к изменяющимся условиям профессиональной и цифровой среды. Особое значение в формировании профессиональной идентичности приобретает гибридная образовательная среда, объединяющая традиционные формы очного обучения с цифровыми инструментами и онлайн-платформами. При этом базовые

ми элементами устойчивого развития профессиональной идентичности остаются поддерживающая академическая среда, наличие системы карьерного сопровождения и чувство социальной включенности в профессиональное сообщество. В статье представлен обзор современных зарубежных исследований, посвященных развитию профессиональной идентичности студенческой молодежи, опубликованных в 2022–2025 годах в «ResearchGate», «Sci-Hub», «Scopus», «Web of Science», «Academia.edu», «Google Scholar» и других научных источниках. **Цель.** Выделить ключевые направления, факторы и подходы развития профессиональной идентичности в современных зарубежных исследованиях. **Методы и материалы.** Для проведения обзора были использованы методы систематического анализа и синтеза научной литературы и эмпирических статей. Исследование основано на изучении отечественных и зарубежных публикаций за 2022–2025 годы, доступных в научных базах данных. Критерии включения: статьи, опубликованные в рецензируемых журналах, эмпирические и обзорные исследования, посвященные формированию профессиональной идентичности студентов учебных заведений. **Результаты.** В ходе систематического анализа зарубежных и отечественных источников, представленных в базах данных «Scopus», «Web of Science», «ResearchGate», «Google Scholar», «Academia.edu» и других научных книжных и электронных источниках, выделена 51 наиболее релевантная публикация, из которых 33 — эмпирические исследования, 18 — теоретико-обзорные работы. Определены два ключевых направления изучения: влияние образовательной среды и карьерного консультирования, а также роль цифровых технологий и социальных сетей в процессе формирования профессиональной идентичности. **Выводы.** Анализ современных зарубежных исследований показывает, что развитие профессиональной идентичности студенческой молодежи обусловлено взаимодействием образовательных, социокультурных и цифровых факторов. Поддерживающая образовательная среда, программы карьерного консультирования и менторства способствуют осознанному профессиональному выбору и укреплению профессионального «Я», тогда как цифровые технологии, расширяя возможности самопрезентации и профессионального самовыражения, одновременно создают риски социального давления, нереалистичных ожиданий и цифровой уязвимости. Установлено, что негативные эффекты цифровой среды преимущественно рассматриваются в контексте общего самовосприятия и психологического благополучия, в то время как их влияние на процессы профессионального самоопределения обучающихся остается недостаточно изученным. В этой связи перспективным направлением дальнейших исследований является сравнительный анализ механизмов формирования профессиональной идентичности в цифровой и традиционной образовательной среде, что позволит более точно выявить условия, риски и медиаторы, определяющие целостность и устойчивость профессиональной идентичности будущих специалистов. Результаты данного обзора могут быть использованы в программах профессионального консультирования студентов, при разработке курсов «soft skills» и формировании образовательных стратегий, направленных на развитие профессиональной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: профессиональная идентичность, студенческая молодежь, карьерное консультирование, образовательная среда, цифровые технологии, социальные сети

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Introduction

The development of professional identity is an important aspect of the psychosocial development of university students, particularly during the transition from higher education to professional practice. E. Erikson emphasized that identity develops through crises and their resolution (Erikson, 1968), while the sociocultural environment adds a new layer to these crises (Andreeva, 2011; Kholmogorova, Lepeshcheva, 2015; Sokolova, 2015; Soldatova, 2024; Belinskaya, 2024), including crises associated with virtual self-expression, social comparison, instability of professional roles, and labor-market uncertainty.

Professional identity developed during higher education helps students define life orientations and strengthens confidence in the future, whereas uncertainty about professional identity may intensify anxiety. As a component of overall identity, it develops through awareness of professional goals, values, and social roles (Leontiev, 2000; Marcia, 1980).

Among the classical approaches to identity research is J. Marcia's model of stages of personal development (Marcia, 1980), which emphasizes the processes of exploration and commitment that are particularly important for students choosing a professional path. Professional identity is considered part of social identity, based on membership in professional groups and involvement in their value-normative space. The social identity theory of H. Tajfel and J. Turner (Tajfel, Turner, 1979) emphasizes group membership as a source of self-categorization, the

development of a positive self-image, and identification with group norms and values within the structure of identity.

Under conditions of globalization, organizational change, remote forms of employment, and digitalization, identification with educational and professional contexts becomes increasingly important as a resource for adaptation. At the same time, the digital environment is becoming a significant space for the development of students' professional identity, influencing self-presentation, social comparison, and professional self-determination (Van Dick, 2004; Lexis, Weaver, Julien, 2023; Song, 2023).

In recent years, international research has focused on professional identity formation in a range of educational and professional contexts, including medical, engineering, and technology-oriented programs, as well as on factors of students' professional socialization: practical experience, mentoring, reflection, acquisition of professional roles, and involvement in professional communities (Panagiotou et al., 2025; Young, Dawes, Senadji, 2022).

F. Oguz's study shows that the professional identity of library and information science professionals is assessed through knowledge of the profession, professional values, roles, attitudes toward the profession, and perceptions of it; these components are important for analyzing the professional development of students and recent graduates in educational settings (Oguz, 2025).

The relevance of the topic is also associated with growing difficulties in profes-

sional adaptation, which makes it necessary to analyze factors that support a stable identity among young people. Young adulthood is an important stage of professional identity formation and is characterized by increased sensitivity to the process of professional self-determination. This process is significantly influenced by educational level, socioeconomic conditions, characteristics of the immediate social environment, and the degree of involvement in meaningful professional activity. Because of these age-related characteristics, professional identity in young people requires analysis as a distinct phenomenon rather than being treated in the same way as in other age groups (Bryzgalin, Aleksandrova, Pryazhnikov, 2024).

Educational environment and career counseling in professional identity development

The problem of professional identity was addressed in the work of leading Russian specialists of the twentieth century. In particular, E.A. Klimov viewed professional self-determination as a long-term process of personal development associated with an individual's integration into professional and social space. According to E.A. Klimov, this process shapes attitudes toward work, ideas about the profession and one's own capabilities, and a system of professional preferences. Professional self-determination includes both changes in the individual's consciousness and self-awareness and actual changes in social status (Klimov, 1996).

In contemporary research, professional identity is understood in terms of an individual's developing conception of the self as a professional, which makes it possible to "think, act, and feel" in accordance with professional norms and to experience competence and satisfaction in performing professional tasks (Caza, Creary, 2016;

Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, Regehr, 2012). A well-developed professional identity helps students form a meaningful professional self-perception that facilitates the transition to professional practice and supports stability within it (Reissner, Armitage-Chan, 2024).

Professional identity has been linked to motivation, self-efficacy, professional commitment, and students' readiness to move from education into professional practice (Canrinus et al., 2012; Jackson, 2016; Jensen, Jetten, 2016).

An empirical study by E.N. Korchagin and A.V. Lobanova shows that among students in psychological and pedagogical programs, the level of professional identity increases at later stages of study and is associated with academic motivation, involvement in educational and professional activities, and practical experience (Korchagin, Lobanova, 2025).

Professional identity is a dynamic process that develops over time through the reinterpretation of experience. This reinterpretation may be conscious or unconscious, influencing behavior and determining whether identity formation is explicit or implicit (Sternszus et al., 2024). Within this process, education represents a foundational phase of development in which students begin to form a conception of the profession that is gradually integrated into the structure of professional identity. The internalization of professional values and ethics helps professionals consistently follow the principles and responsibilities of their profession and justify their actions and decisions in ways that benefit society and "advance" the profession (Pierson, Goulding, Campbell-Meier, 2020). The educational environment creates conditions for professional development; however, the development of a stable professional identity also depends on how students make sense of their own experience, professional goals, and future role.

Narrative approach and reflective skills in the educational environment

Within the narrative approach, identity is viewed as a meaningful story about the self that connects past experience, the present, and representations of the future (McAdams, 2001). In educational settings, the narrative approach supports reflection on professional experience and the development of students' professional identity through engagement with practitioners' stories and reflection on professional roles, required skills, and one's own place in the chosen profession (Tomori, Ogunseiju, 2024).

Russian studies interpret professional identity as the result of active professional self-determination associated with reflection, value- and meaning-based interpretation of one's professional path, and readiness to assume a professional role (Avdovina, 2017; Pryazhnikov, 2019), as well as an integral personal evaluation of one's own process of professional self-development (Kucherenko, 2021).

Important resources for professional identity formation include reflection, adaptability, professional mobility, and the ability to build social and professional connections that support professional development and job satisfaction (Bryzgalin, Aleksandrova, Pryazhnikov, 2024). Narrative interpretation of professional experience allows students to relate their own ideas about a profession to its values, requirements, professional role, and their place in the professional community; however, this process does not develop in isolation but through interaction with teachers, mentors, and the professional environment.

Social support and mentoring in the educational environment

Social representations of professions, their social significance, and career pros-

pects play an important role in professional self-determination. E.A. Klimov emphasized that occupational activity is associated with a person's social status and that the spontaneous devaluation of some professions and promotion of others can hinder career guidance for young people (Klimov, 2004).

Research on career development tools highlights professional connections as catalysts of professional identity development (Lexis, Weaver, Julien, 2023). Perceived social support contributes to the formation of career expectations among vocational college students. Analysis of data from 1,497 participants showed that social support is a significant factor positively influencing career expectations; self-efficacy and professional identity act as mediators, forming a chain of mediation between social support and career expectations (Sun, Zheng, Chen et al., 2024).

A study conducted in midwifery education emphasizes mentoring and trust from experienced professionals as important factors in students' professional identity development. A "sense of collective strength", described by one participant as the "strength of the maternity ward", developed through trust and an awareness of shared professional responsibility (Panagiotou et al., 2025).

Emotional engagement, including interest and enthusiasm, strengthens professional identification but requires support to overcome confusion (Jiang et al., 2021).

In contrast, "microaggressions" from colleagues can hinder the professional socialization of resident physicians by reducing their sense of belonging to the professional community and increasing doubts about their own competence. Safe channels for discussing such situations and training in constructive response strategies are important for reducing these risks (Boyle et al., 2025).

The educational and social conditions of professional development discussed above are complemented by the influence of the digital environment, which expands opportunities for interaction with professional communities, professional self-presentation, and the acquisition of professional roles.

The role of digital technologies and social media in professional identity development

Social media have radically transformed the context of professional socialization: they have expanded opportunities for public self-presentation and professional interaction, accelerated knowledge exchange, and made digital presence an integral part of everyday life. As a result, educational practice increasingly incorporates models for the responsible integration of social media into learning, including the development of digital literacy, adherence to ethical and privacy standards, and the formation of deliberate strategies for professional self-presentation (Machado et al., 2024).

Russian studies by G.M. Belinskaya and E.V. Frantova show that patterns of social media activity differ substantially by age and reflect the specific characteristics of identity development. These differences in the motives and functions of online interaction shape virtual self-presentation and the ways in which the self-image is constructed (Frantova, Belinskaya, 2017).

Contemporary Russian studies also show that digital practices actively transform identity structures. A comparative analysis of online and offline self-matrices among adolescents and adults found that virtual and real identities interact with and complement one another, forming hybrid models of self-concept (Soldatova, Chigarkova, Ilyukhina, 2022).

Profession-related information flows on social media strengthen professional

belonging and commitment (Li, Guo, Zou, 2022), whereas engagement with social media feeds often leads to lower self-esteem and greater uncertainty, primarily because of upward comparisons with “idealized” examples. This pattern is also supported by a meta-analysis of social media effects (McComb, Vanman, Tobin, 2023) and by research on fear of missing out (FOMO) and related behavioral patterns (Pang, Quan, 2024).

At the same time, the digital environment has a contradictory influence on professional identity development: online platforms expand opportunities for professional interaction, exchange of experience, and stronger community belonging, while also blurring the boundaries between personal and professional images. Cyberaggression, stigmatizing content, and the absence of clear norms for online communication may increase professionals’ vulnerability, distort the public image of a profession, and act as risk factors for professional identity formation. Studies of digital professionalism and online attacks on educators emphasize that such risks complicate the maintenance of professional values, ethical interaction, and self-presentation in digital environments (Guraya, Guraya, Yusoff, 2021; Tomczyk et al., 2025). Alongside educational and social conditions of professional development, digital tools — including social media, e-portfolios, VR simulations, and generative artificial intelligence — are therefore playing an increasingly important role.

Digital tools in professional identity development: social media, e-portfolios, VR simulations, and generative AI

Social media expand opportunities for professional branding and networking (Lexis et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024), while generative artificial intelligence acts as a cross-cut

ting factor influencing reflection, feedback, self-presentation, and the development of professional skills. At the same time, it creates risks to academic integrity associated with the uncritical use of technology (Maxwell, Messaoudi, Dhanaraj, 2025).

Additional components supporting professional identity development include access to educational resources and an emphasis on the long-term updating of profiles, which help students gradually build an effective online professional brand and adapt to the changing demands of the labor market (Lexis, Weaver, Julien, 2023).

Systematic and review studies published in 2024–2025 emphasize that electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) contribute to students' professional identity development by creating a structured environment for reflection, self-presentation, and the integration of professional skills and values (Yang, Wong, 2024; Wei et al., 2025; Baseer, 2024). The use of e-portfolios also supports greater awareness of career trajectories and clearer articulation of competencies.

Consideration of educational conditions, social interactions, and processes of making sense of professional experience provides a basis for analyzing practical experience and technological integration as factors that connect students' conceptions of a profession with real professional tasks and modes of activity.

The role of practical experience and technological integration in professional identity development

E.S. Tuzhikova's study showed that the professional activity of young psychologists is based primarily on cognitive motivation and interest in the outcomes of their work. Initiative and an understanding of one's own professional capabilities promote activity and resourcefulness in solving work-related tasks, whereas striving to achieve

difficult goals was less pronounced (Tuzhikova, 2022).

Exposure to diverse field-specific knowledge through guest lectures, workshops, and conferences also contributes substantially to students' professional engagement. By participating in professional groups, students gain access to field-specific knowledge and mentoring programs and can use resources for continuing professional development (Tomori, Ogunseiju, 2025).

The findings of an empirical study by A. Young, L. Dawes, and B. Senadji emphasize the importance of practical experience and the real-world application of skills (Young, Dawes, Senadji, 2022). Direct engagement with technology and the integration of technology into projects play a substantive rather than secondary role in developing a strong connection with the professional field.

A study in the field of digital technologies demonstrated the successful integration of a series of multidisciplinary interactive virtual reality scenarios into undergraduate nursing courses. The results showed substantial improvements in students' knowledge and clinical competence by the end of the semester as they progressively mastered the technology (Bradley et al., 2025).

Virtual simulations organized in small student groups with teacher support provide effective feedback and contribute to the development of soft skills such as communication, decision-making, time management, and critical thinking — skills that are clearly relevant to professional practice (Mork et al., 2024).

Discussion

The analysis of international studies published in 2022–2025 shows that professional identity development among university students is shaped by the educational environment, institutional support, practice-

oriented learning, sociocultural contexts, and digital technologies (Panagiotou et al., 2025; Young, Dawes, Senadji, 2022). Digital technologies and social media expand opportunities for professional identity development (Alharbi, Kuhn, Morphet, 2022) but also create risks of social pressure and unrealistic expectations, which makes it important to teach strategies for critical engagement and reflection (Machado, Hsiao, Vaccaro, Baker, 2024). In the digital environment, the traditional stage-based nature of professional development (Klimov, 2004) may be complicated by symbolically anticipatory self-presentation, in which external markers of professional identity appear before they are supported by sufficient experience and competence.

Despite the growing body of research on digital socialization, forms of digital vulnerability — cyberaggression, negative labeling, social comparison, and symbolic exclusion from professional online communities — remain insufficiently studied in the context of professional identity formation. Their relationship with students' professional self-determination and distancing from the professional community requires further analysis.

A promising direction for future research is a comparative analysis of professional development in digital and traditional educational environments. Such analysis may clarify how differences in identification, feedback, and social support affect the integrity and sustainability of future professionals' professional identity.

The theoretical novelty of this review lies in proposing an integrative analysis of factors in professional identity development among university students that brings together the following directions of contemporary research:

— the influence of the educational environment, career counseling programs, mentoring, and reflective practices;

— the role of digital technologies, social media, e-portfolios, and virtual simulations.

Conclusions

The review identified the key factors in professional identity development among university students: the educational environment, practice-oriented learning, mentoring and career counseling, reflective practices, interaction with professional communities, sociocultural conditions, and digital technologies.

Based on the analysis of international studies published in 2022–2025, an instrument for assessing professional identity was also developed, including integrative indicators, a scoring system, and an overall index with level-based interpretation. The model may be used in further research on the relationships between professional identity, agentic position, psychological well-being, and factors of digital vulnerability. Its validation and psychometric evaluation require a separate empirical study.

Limitations. The formation of professional identity takes place within a specific sociocultural, economic, and institutional context; therefore, findings from international studies cannot be directly transferred to a Russian sample. These differences concern educational systems, labor markets, professional values, mechanisms of digital socialization, and the nature of students' interactions with professional communities in digital environments. In this regard, a promising direction for future research is a cross-cultural comparative study of the mechanisms of professional identity formation in hybrid and traditional educational environments, including an analysis of the role of Russian digital platforms in professional socialization processes in comparison with Western counterparts such as LinkedIn.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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