

Psychological and Pedagogical Conditions for Developing Professional Competency in Future Social Workers Using the Global Network Internet

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Abstract: *The enhancement of social workers' information activity directly influences the development of their world outlook and information competency, which defines both the level of knowledge, abilities, skills, thought patterns, and the student's motivational sphere. The paper aims to analyse the importance of using Internet resources in developing professional competency, enhancing information activity in future social workers. The experimental work has made it possible to determine specific forms, means and methods of teaching that allow one to enhance information activity of social workers. The experimental training involved students in Years 1-4. The process of studying the courses of practical training in social work enabled the assessment of professional competency at the level of determining the quality of students' acquired knowledge and at the level of their professionally relevant qualities and skills defined in the educational qualification characteristics and qualification characteristics of specialists. A comparative assessment of applying innovative and profession-oriented teaching methods based on the means of information and communication technologies (ICT), traditional forms and methods has amounted to 0.08 points (3.6%) in the experimental group (EG) versus 0.16 points (7.2%) in the control group (CG). Conclusions. Professional training of future social workers can be more effective if students familiarize themselves with solving real practical problems and learn new methods and means of working for this particular purpose. It has improved the learning process and provided students with the opportunity to learn information technologies with the prospect of using them in future professional activities and develop information activity.*

Keywords: *activity-related approach; motivational sphere; thinking activity; information activity; computerization; information and communication technologies.*

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1. Introduction

In the modern world, the trends in social development are characterized by the rapid expansion of international relations in different spheres of human activity; the need for operational communication between individuals, groups or communities of people; the growing importance of intellectual work, focused on the use of information resources of a global scale. Given this, there is a demand for professional competency of social workers as members of the information society.

At the present stage, of society and education development, the main goal of education informatization is to prepare learners for an active and productive life in the information society, improve the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of education, create educational conditions for the wider population so that they can engage in lifelong learning due to the introduction of methods and means of ICT and computer-based technologies for supporting people's activities into the educational practice (Bykov, 2010).

The activities of social workers as competitive specialists require new approaches to developing professional skills and abilities, creative skills, values-based orientations, gaining experience and, thus, increasing the level of professional competency in those specialists who conduct the educational process. ICTs act as an important tool in developing professional competency in modern specialists since they enable the exchange of information of any size and type, ensure the interactivity and efficiency of feedback and provide access to various sources of information (Harasim, 1993; Sheremet et al., 2019).

Under present conditions, one of the productive ways of disseminating information, the environment for cooperation and communication between people is Internet resources which allow one to use them in education (distance learning courses, distance competitions and contests, libraries, text repositories, interactive encyclopedias and dictionaries, translators, virtual museums and exhibitions), which is important in preparing future specialists. The Internet provides the opportunity to use simple tools, including electronic dictionaries, manuals, texts, as well as more complex interactive systems, computer models, virtual learning environment. Internet technologies enable one to use information placed on educational and scientific websites, present educational institutions, create websites devoted to studying the content of courses and place personal websites of teachers and students.

The Internet network is also used for the efficient collection of information; an independent organization of students' learning and cognitive activities; the use of modern ICT in teaching and learning (multimedia, virtual reality); the diagnostics of students' educational attainment; the management of learning activities under the level of knowledge, abilities, skills; the creation of conditions for independent study of students.

The peculiarities of using Internet resources serve as a powerful tool in developing professional competency in future social workers.

Such modern scholars as V. Bykov (2010) and O. Spirin (2009; 2013) largely justify theoretical principles of using Internet resources in an educational environment and conduct a comprehensive analysis of their conditional groups and highlight the methods of their use.

The analysis of publications related to an information-related way of life and the penetration of virtual reality into the everyday life of modern people shows that researchers are becoming more and more interested in these issues. Some researchers pay specific attention to personalization variation in the context of modern Internet space (Bakhmat et al., 2019; Tokareva et al., 2017). The study on the problems of developing competency in future specialists proves that competency is considered as an evaluative category characterizing a person as the subject of certain activity and ensures the achievement of progress in it (Gerasymova et al., 2019; Melnyk et al., 2019; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020). However, the following components are evaluated: the structure of knowledge and skills, values-based orientations, an attitude towards activity, its effectiveness and ability to improve it.

To begin with, one should consider the concept of ICTs. They should be understood as a technology for developing information systems and constructing communication networks, which usually involves psycho-pedagogical support for design, development, implementation and support processes, as well as the technology of using such systems and networks for formalizing and solving tasks in any area (Tokareva et al., 2017).

The concept of information and communication technology in teaching and learning cannot be regarded as an established one. Therefore, it should be understood as a didactic technology, which leads to achieving learning objectives as long as information and communication means are used (Spirin, 2013).

In the scientific literature, there are many different authorial positions regarding the types of future specialists' competences (Khutorskoi, 2005). In this study, the authors of the paper follow the methodology proposed by the scholars from Herzen State Pedagogical University of

Russia. According to it, professional competency is considered to be a set of such groups of competences (Kozyrev et al., 2004): key competences, which are necessary for any professional activity associated with professional success in a rapidly changing modern society; basic competences, which are general professional ones, reflecting the specifics of future specialists' professional activity; special competences are primary professional ones, reflecting the specifics of a subject-specific or super-subject area of professional activity.

Key, basic and special competences are interdependent and develop simultaneously. Their unity ensures the development of professional competency as certain integrity, as well as an integrative personal characteristic (Kozyrev et al., 2004). This approach seems to be most suitable, given different levels of higher professional education. The drafts of new state standards foresee consolidating the same set of key competences for one area in education, whereas the sets of basic and special competences for bachelor's and master's degrees should be different in volume: the number of competences increases with the transition to a higher level of education.

Social work is a field of human activity, which focuses on the generation and theoretical systematization of objective knowledge about specific activities of companies or specialists. Such knowledge is aimed at solving social problems of individuals, groups, families, various segments of society, their security, support and assistance, as well as at optimizing the management of various branches of the social sphere (Pavlenok, 2006).

One of the main tasks of developing competences in future social workers is to identify a set of the most significant competences: key, basic and special. Key competences are soft skills, which ensure future specialists' success in a competitive society. There is no single approach to defining a coherent list of key competences among scientists. The following list of future social workers' key competences has been prepared based on the summary of various scholars' approaches and foreign experience:

- personal-and-individual competencies, which are a set of competences reflecting individual qualities of future specialists and determine their behaviour in personal and social life;
- systemic-and-instrumental competences, which reflect systemic cognitive abilities of future specialists determining the success of their activity in personal and social life;
- information competences reflect future specialists' ability to receive and analyze information in all its forms to solve different tasks in professional activity and everyday life;

- competencies of interpersonal and social interaction as a set of competences reflect future specialists' communication and management skills, which determine the success of their existence in society.

In modern methodological literature, there is no unambiguous list of social workers' special and basic competences that should be developed during their professional training in higher education institutions. Their identification should be further developed and involve researchers, educators, employers and graduates in Social Work. In this study, the development of professional competency in future social workers is considered in the framework of studying socio-pedagogical courses which promote the development of professional competency through developing key, basic and special information competences, closely related to other types of key competencies.

The authors of the paper understand social workers' information competence as an integral part of their professional competency, which includes the ability to use the complex of knowledge and skills in the field of ICT; the ability to search for information effectively and structurize it; the ability to adapt the information to characteristics of social work to further implement their professional activities.

The paper also analyzes the main definitions of information activity to understand its concept. It must be noted that most definitions of this very concept refer to the activity associated with the processes of receiving, processing, accumulating and transmitting the information. Any activity includes a system of actions or acts that are the result of particular needs and motives aimed at a specific purpose. Thus, information activity is always associated with a certain need of the subject for something and thus causes his or her search activity (Kurin, & Popov, 2015).

In this paper, "information activity of social workers" is viewed as a set of information processes which involve perceiving, storing, processing, comprehending, evaluating and obtaining the necessary socially-oriented information (Kyrylenko, 2013). This information can solve educational and professional tasks of social workers. It can take place during active interaction between the subjects of educational and professional activities.

It must be noted that the conditions of education informatization and the use of Internet resources in the educational process have made it possible to provide a qualitatively new level of training for specialists in different fields and, consequently, a qualitatively new approach to developing professional competency in future social workers.

A distinctive feature of today's stage of using Internet resources in professional training of future specialists is the interest in rather theoretical

and psycho-pedagogical than a technical justification of information education, didactic development of those or other programmes. However, the technical development of programmes is far ahead of psycho-pedagogical research. Therefore, the current conditions of computer education are characterized by several contradictory trends. On the one hand, there is an increase in the number and quality of Internet resources. On the other hand, one can observe the insufficient theoretical, psycho-pedagogical and didactic elaboration of these problems. Besides, the system of professional training for future social workers in the framework of the above-mentioned study imposes certain contradictions between:

- state requirements for professional training of competitive social workers and a low level of their competence in information and communication;
- the need of future social workers to acquire competence in information and communication and the lack of teaching and methodological support for its development.

An activity-related approach indicates that a person develops his or her creative skills, views, beliefs and world outlook as a result of activity, including information activity (Pasichnyk, 2017). The driving force behind personality development is the contradiction arising as a result of insufficient knowledge, skills and experience of cognitive activity which are necessary to solve specific problems. Therefore, the enhancement of social workers' information activity directly affects the development of their information competence which defines both the level of knowledge, abilities, skills, thought patterns and motivational sphere. It is information activity as a form of student activity which plays a leading role in developing thinking in future social workers during their professional training. This is evidenced by the works devoted to the intellectual development of personality in a virtual educational space (Spirin et al., 2012; Smulson, 2015).

Given this, the paper aims to analyze the importance of using Internet resources in developing professional competency, enhancing information activity in future social workers.

2. Materials & methods

Information activity of future social workers includes both learning activity of students and actions of teachers towards enhancing activities of future social workers.

It is an essential fact that the development of personal interests and positions of students, as well as the enhancement of their information

activity, are only possible provided that their subjective position is updated: 1) stimulating individual achievements of students in the use of information technologies in professional activities; 2) using problematic situations in the process of their training for applying information technologies in professional activity; 3) involving future social workers in activities personally meaningful to them.

Thus, the creation of conditions for enhancing students' information activity can stimulate the development of this activity in them. It, in turn, stimulates their personal professional development.

Information activity can be considered as a goal of the activity, as a means to achieve it and as a result. The following are prerequisites for enhancing information activity in social workers in the process of their learning and practical activities:

- the student's awareness and understanding of his or her successes and achievements in the use of information technologies in professional activities;

- the student's motivation and interest in individual achievements when working with information and information technologies in learning and practical activities;

- practical readiness and real opportunities to conduct active information activity during the learning process;

- the willingness of future social workers to increase the level of their knowledge, skills and abilities.

The enhancement of social workers' information activity in the framework of joint activities of teachers and students in the process of teaching the information block courses is presented in Fig. 1

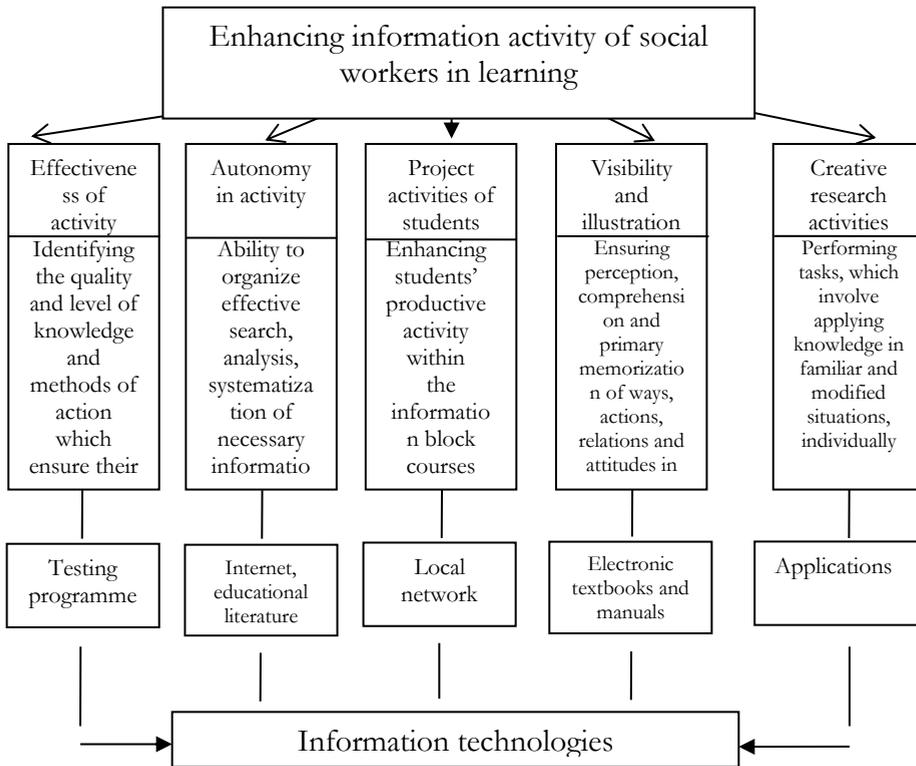


Fig.1. Enhancing information activity of social workers in learning
Systematized by the authors

One can use certain means of computer technologies to activate information activity of future social workers:

- the joint activities of teachers and the students in the context of teaching the information block courses (Internet technologies in the social sphere, informatization and computerization of activities of social services;
- volunteer activities and participation in various programmes to improve computer literacy in the elderly;
- realization of special tasks regarding the use of computer technologies in learning activities (working with documentation, preparing presentations, using tables with personal data, constructing diagrams, employing visualization tools).

The experimental work was conducted at Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University in terms of training students who major in Social Work. The experimenters sought to motivate future social

workers to use information technology when addressing socio-psychological problems in their professional activities.

While working with students, the authors of the paper employed teaching methods incorporating information technologies. It has made it possible to improve the learning process and provide students with the opportunity to learn information technologies with the prospect of using them in future professional activities.

For one, lecture presentations were used during the study. The technical means of presentations allowed expanding the possibilities of the lecturer and transfer part of the information load into the visual sphere. A significant part of preparatory work for such lectures involved analyzing the content of lectures, determining which type of visibility should support lecture comments, creating a kind of “script” of the visual part of lectures. Multimedia support enabled students to demonstrate many interesting facts and phenomena in the lives of children with special needs, which cannot be shown during a traditional lecture (Faux & Black-Hughes, 2000).

Practical classes were conducted either in computer labs at the faculty or in the electronic reading room of the university with Internet access. The use of Internet resources played a very important role in conducting practical classes in the university’s electronic reading room. At the lecture, students got acquainted with the main types of programmes in the social sphere, as well as in different areas of social services. Practical classes were held in the university’s electronic reading room, where students studied reference literature, visited web pages related to social work, namely, promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing various deviations among children with special needs. Due to the Internet, students familiarized themselves with the activities of several children’s and youth social organizations engaged in social work. Particular attention was paid to both consideration and analysis of activities of regional social institutions and services.

One of the ways to integrate the Internet in professional training of future specialists is to create a list with addresses of websites that should be visited for a more complete consideration of the topic. This type of practical work saves students time by allowing them to search for the necessary information on the Internet. In this regard, the authors of the paper have developed “The Internet Navigator” on social work with different vulnerable categories of the population. It includes web pages that contain information about the institutions and organizations involved in social work. The choice of websites’ data depends on several factors: firstly, the developed navigator reflects the positive experience of using information

technology in various social services; secondly, it consists of thematic sections on various social problems.

The results of classroom classes, as well as independent work of students within the optional course “Social Work in Various Spheres of Social Practice”, included presentations on various topics. The final class was held in the form of a round-table discussion on the results of the work performed. Students presented their projects on individual topics using multimedia.

In this case, the training process was less focused on the teacher as the only source of information along with the book, whereas students became more responsible for their knowledge and the process of obtaining it: they organized their time, decided what materials could be used to complete the assignment, in what form to present their point of view. Thus, the teacher acted as an assistant or mentor, directing the student to effectively master the skills, as well as self-study skills and knowledge in the professional field. The student became the subject of the educational process.

While developing “The Internet Navigator”, the authors of the paper also analyzed websites on various areas of social and pedagogical work: medical and social health problems; social problems of employment; social work with customers; family as an object of social work; social protection of customers.

When conducting classes of the course “Social Pedagogy”, the authors of the paper used another way of integrating the Internet into the content and methodology of conducting practical classes, that is Scrapbook (Spivakovska, 2013). During practical classes, students searched for and collected photos, pictures, texts, sound and video files on an individual topic on various websites. The findings were subsequently used by students to prepare their presentations for the chosen topic. There are many boarding schools, orphanages, social rehabilitation centres, social dormitories. However, the financial capability of these institutions is too low to afford to have their website on the Internet. Therefore, only some boarding schools present their work and raise their problems on webpages.

The next type of assignment was used to develop relevant knowledge in students (Harasim, 1993; Maksymchuk et al., 2018; Wernet, & Olliges, 2000). It was necessary to select 10-15 links on the topic and ask questions to each information block. At the end of the work, one needed to ask questions to the whole topic to reach a logical conclusion and ensure a broad understanding of the topic. Students were also encouraged to participate in the forums on these topics.

When covering the topic “Childhood with Special Needs: History, Theory and Modern Problems”, the authors of the paper took into account the fact that the issues of social work with children with special needs were highlighted in a broad and detailed way on the Internet. A large number of abstracts, diplomas and term papers on the given problem are offered. Students visited the official websites of universities paying attention to this topic and also participated in discussing this problem at various forums. Students gathered much information from media sites.

Materials of these websites were used to conduct classes on the course “The Technology of Social and Pedagogical Work”. When conducting practical classes on the topic “The Technology of Activities of Social Workers with Special Needs”, the authors of the paper used the working groups method. Students were divided into micro-groups, 3-4 persons each. An individual task was compiled for each group. Students were encouraged to select relevant material on this topic not only in paper format but also in the form of web pages. Individual themes were chosen: the method of working with persons with muscle-skeleton disorders; the method of working with children with vision disorders; the method of working with community associations of persons with special needs. Micro-groups of students performed mini projects on the chosen theme. The results of the projects were the student’s presentations on the given topics, which include a brief description of the chosen area, its historical aspects, the main areas of work, a description of the methodology for working with it and a developed methodology (the plan of measures) for working with this technology. This form of work allowed developing an active component of a humane attitude in students since the methods of social work with children with special needs were considered.

The next form of student training with the help of information technologies was to compile a set of links allowing students to read certain information independently. The teacher pre-selected several addresses of web pages reflecting a particular problem. After that, students needed to express their point of view, justifying it based on the material they read or personal experience. This study also presents a methodology for conducting a practical class on the topic “Children with Special Needs: History, Theory and Modern Problems”. The class was conducted in a computer lab using Internet access. Students studied the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, analyzed the papers on this topic and discussed learning material.

The authors of the paper organized several studies conducted in the process of studying the courses of practical training in social work, namely, “Social Work in Various Spheres of Social Practice”, “Social Pedagogy”,

“The Technology of Social and Pedagogical Work. The experimental training involved students in Years 1-4 and 10 teachers. The main efforts in the experimental work were aimed at identifying opportunities to improve the quality of professional training for future social workers using ICT, as well as at developing a given level of professional competency. The process of studying the courses of practical training in social work enabled the assessment of professional competency at the level of determining the quality of students’ acquired knowledge and at the level of their professionally relevant qualities and skills defined in the educational qualification characteristics and qualification characteristics of specialists.

3. Results

The results on the assessment of the first criterion (the quality of knowledge acquired during professional theoretical and practical training) indicate that the level of professional knowledge quality in most EG students is equal to 80% (see Table 1). The assessment did not record a low level of such quality.

Consequently, the process of studying practical courses on social work using the advanced ICT-based learning within the framework of a specific methodological system and learning technology is more effective in the context of didactic. The method used in the study allows assessing only the “knowledge-related” side of the educational process. The “active” component can only be defined based on the use of expert assessment. Therefore, special questionnaires were elaborated to determine the level of professionally significant qualities and professional skills in graduates that characterize them as future specialists in social work. These questionnaires were completed by the members of the Bachelor Dissertations and State Examination Board in the form of final reports at the final stage of the study.

Table 1. Development levels of professional competency at the beginning and the end of the comparative pedagogical experiment (the cognitive component)

Levels of professional competency		CG		EG	
		The number of students	Percentage (%)	The number of students	Percentage (%)
high (creative)	before	5	20	7	28
	after	7	28	10	40
average (active search)	before	10	40	10	40
	after	10	40	12	48

sufficient (imitative)	before	7	28	7	28
	after	7	28	3	12
low (passive)	v	3	12	1	4
	after	1	4	0	0.00
Total		25	100	25	100

Systematized by the authors

The results from the expert assessment of levels of students' professionally significant qualities and professional skills were analyzed in three stages: at the first stage – educational competency (knowledge, skills and abilities of future social workers to identify, raise and solve professional on the level of technological or professional standards); at the second stage – subjective-personal competency (the levels of blocks of future social workers' professionally significant qualities such as special, communicative and adaptive ones); at the third stage – the levels of students' motivational (professional) orientations and their professional qualities in the following areas: a type of motivation orientation; the assessment of adaptive capabilities (neuro-psychological stability, communicative ability, moral normality, personal adaptive potential); the identification of readiness for risk.

The obtained results characterize the levels of professional skills and professionally significant qualities in students who defended the bachelor dissertation and passed the state examination. The introduction of ICTs in the educational process allows developing a necessary level of professional competency in future social workers. This is evidenced by the subjective assessment of the students themselves. As an argument in favour of this conclusion, one can consider the fact that the level of students' professionally significant qualities and professional skills was not lower than the indicators laid down in the qualification characteristics of specialists in social work. Consequently, an important indicator of the experimental training should be a guaranteed achievement of didactic goals formulated when designing an innovative learning system based on the use of ICT tools.

The results of a month delayed testing conducted to determine the residual knowledge, skills and abilities acquired by students during the experimental training have confirmed the preservation of knowledge, skills and abilities. A comparative assessment of applying innovative and profession-oriented teaching methods based on the means of information and communication technologies (ICT), traditional forms and methods has amounted to 0.08 points (3.6%) in EG versus 0.16 points (7.2%) in CG.

The observations on the dynamics of students' progress in EG and

CG during the formative experiment show that their cognitive and learning activity, autonomy and logical thinking have considerably increased. Their interest in the future profession has grown. Acquired knowledge and skills have enhanced.

The conducted psychological experiment shows that the factors in the sustainable development of professional competency in future social workers are: the realization of the developed needs for learning activity; a positive attitude towards the activity being performed; the manifestation of autonomy, self-organization and self-education in learning activity; the integral enhancement of students' professional readiness using learning and cognitive activity; the content of the overwhelming motivation towards activity and its orientation; the systematicity, depth and consolidation of the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities required to understand social processes of functioning of graduates' special activities, their creative use in the process of performing functional duties; a high level of professional activity caused by the availability of appropriate training.

4. Discussion

The scientific value of the research is as follows:

- *for the first time*, socio-psychological conditions for developing professional competency in social workers using the Internet have been *determined and justified*: creating a positive motivational sphere and the need for self-study, self-education, self-development and self-improvement; introducing a system of lectures and practical classes aimed at developing professional competency in future social workers into the content of their professional training; applying specific forms, means and methods of teaching enhancing information activity of future social workers in higher education institutions;

- the basic concept of "social worker's professional competency" has been *defined* as a complex individual quality, covering perfect theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as personal professional qualities of future social workers developed during information activity;

- the features of enhancing future social workers' information activity which directly develops world outlook and professional competency and determines a level of knowledge, abilities, skills, thought patterns and motivational sphere have been *disclosed and justified*; diagnostic tools for studying the level of future social workers' professional competency based on certain components, criteria and indicators at low (passive), sufficient (imitative), medium (active search), high (creative) levels have been analyzed.

The practical value of the research lies in developing and implementing “The Internet Navigator” on social work with different vulnerable categories of the population as a resource enhancing the quality of future social workers’ professional training using ICT and developing a required level of professional competency. The obtained results can be used when developing professional competency in future social workers. Also, they can be useful for university teachers in elaborating curricula, guidelines, manuals, preparing training courses on social work theories, the psychology of social work, technologies social work.

The obtained results prove that a traditional system of education increases students’ level of professional competency. However, this process seems to take more time and be less effective. Instead, the use of ICT in professional training of future social workers involves two-way interaction with students, actively responds to their actions and builds personalized relationships. Moreover, it provides students with free access to unlimited information on educational portals, engages them in its analytical processing and cultivates their information culture demonstrating significant dynamics of growth in the level of professional competency.

The introduction of information technologies and training tools intended for future social workers in higher education institutions has contributed to autonomy in the acquisition of professional knowledge and ability to make professional decisions and implement them in practice.

This study is designed to shape a subjective evaluation of information and can be used in the analysis of various situations. Social workers who constantly work with people with different deviations regularly analyze and assist in solving various situations, including conflicts. Such type of activity allows one to develop the student’s ability to analyze different situations, solve difficult situations and be tolerant to others. It, in turn, forms active information activity in future social workers.

It is impossible to review all the information presented on the Internet. Therefore, this paper had considered only some of the resources used in practical classes within professional training of social workers.

5. Conclusions

Thus, one can conclude that the enhancement of social workers’ information activity directly influences the development of their world outlook and professional competency, which determines the level of knowledge, skills, thought patterns, as well as the motivational sphere of the student’s personality. It is information activity as a form of students’ activity

that plays a leading role in developing thinking in future social workers during their professional training.

The process of studying courses focused on the use of ICT helps to develop students' knowledge about information processing, understanding of the ICT's role in the development of modern society, the fundamentals of information culture, skills in the conscious and rational use of information technologies and computers to solve practical problems. Consequently, this very process makes it possible to develop professional competency in students majoring in Social Work.

Therefore, professional competency of social workers is not only a set of knowledge and skills developed during the learning process due to modern ICT. It is also the ability to navigate in the modern information flow; readiness to select adequate media and engage in socio-psychological activities under the changed conditions of education and society with the help of ICT elements.

This particular problem requires that one should conduct further research on theoretical and practical aspects of using ICT in the work of social workers with different customers, at the premises of different institutions, through different types of interaction in the information environment.

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