



THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FACULTY AMIDST MODERN CHALLENGES

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Abstract. The article examines the role of the university in creating a supportive environment for the professional and personal development of faculty members amidst modern challenges. The study draws on the experience of Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno in enhancing the professional competencies of its faculty. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study comprises the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) and the university's experience in developing an environment for professional growth. The study employs methods of analysis, generalization, systematization, and synthesis. Particular attention is paid to the potential of non-formal education to support faculty professional development, promote academic freedom, and facilitate the development of individual professional and educational trajectories. Based on the experience of the "University of Educational Innovations" and "Open Learning" projects, the article describes mechanisms for developing modern pedagogical, digital, and transversal competencies among faculty members. The findings demonstrate that the flexibility, accessibility, practical orientation, and adaptability of non-formal education to individual needs create favorable conditions for continuous professional and personal development. The article also highlights the importance of testing and disseminating innovative practices within the university based on the "university-as-laboratory" principle.

Keywords: pedagogical expertise; non-formal education; professional and personal development of faculty; individual learning trajectory; "University of Educational Innovations", "Open Learning".

Introduction

A university is not merely an institution of knowledge; it is also a form of professional life and personal growth for its faculty. It is a unique breed of people who are complex and demanding, accustomed to independent thought, and capable of teaching in step with the times

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and technological advancements. They are individuals who conduct research, assemble teams, launch new projects, and constantly manage complexity. The quality of decisions, the fate of academic schools, the resilience of educational programs, and the ability to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world all depend on the environment in which their professional and personal development takes place.

How does a young faculty member join the team? Do the staff members understand their future trajectory amidst a shifting labor market and evolving technologies for knowledge dissemination? How can academic tradition be preserved in a fluid external environment? How can the university be maintained as a space of long-term memory, intergenerational dialogue, and profound meaning? Faculty members are retained at a university for the long term not only by material conditions – though these are certainly important – but also by the opportunity to grow, belong to a strong professional community, and find purpose in their work.

By its very nature, a university is a space for intellectual development, professional growth, dignity, and socially significant work.

In today's dynamic world, the structure and functions of education are evolving; yet, the non-pragmatic motivation for learning—and the intrinsic value of education itself—are becoming increasingly significant. Knowledge possesses enduring intrinsic value and serves as a cultural asset; therein lies its true meaning. The university's academic environment fosters the development of individuals who are educated in their own right—people prepared to engage with and cultivate an intellectual atmosphere where the concrete challenges facing society can be addressed constructively (Pruzhinin et al., 2018).

It is vital that the university environment empowers the individual. If a university wishes to remain a source of strength, it must provide a robust environment for faculty members, not just for students. A strong university does not simply expect individuals to adapt to complexity and respond to new challenges on their own; instead, it learns to support them as they navigate that complexity.

Materials and methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of this study was the principles of TQM (Total Quality Management), as well as the experience of Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno in developing the environment for the professional and personal development of faculty amidst modern challenges.

The study utilized methods of analysis, generalization, compilation, and synthesis. The object of the study is the system for enhancing and developing the professional expertise of the faculty members.

Results and discussion

Achieving an optimal balance in faculty workload, formulating appropriate responses to external challenges and changes, and fostering emotional resilience and an optimistic outlook require support for faculty learning and development through continuous professional enhancement programs focused on new technologies. In this context, it is crucial to preserve academic freedom – the right to think, explore, and debate, to take intellectual risks, and to choose paths that are not necessarily the easiest. Academic freedom requires a supportive infrastructure that fosters intellectual risk-taking, bold and unconventional hypotheses, and experimentation (Galazhinsky, 2026).

Non-formal education can serve as an alternative to the traditional system of advanced training and professional retraining for university academic staff.

Non-formal education offers a number of significant advantages:

- high relevance of the knowledge acquired;
- flexible learning schedules;
- accessibility of educational programs;
- voluntary participation;
- cost-effectiveness for the university.

A defining characteristic of non-formal education is its openness to anyone and the opportunity for lifelong learning. In the modern university environment, the concept of lifelong learning evolves under the influence of two key factors: the institutional factor, linked to management decisions and strategies for developing continuing education within universities; and the individual factor, which takes into account the specific preferences of the faculty members themselves.

Existing practice demonstrates that non-formal education, as part of lifelong professional learning, poses significant competition to traditional forms of training. While advanced training typically entails a mandatory – and often ad hoc – increase in knowledge, tools, and practical application methods, non-formal professional development fosters greater systematicity, adaptability, and effectiveness in the work of faculty members who are motivated to acquire relevant professional competencies.

The non-formal education environment creates conditions for developing individual pathways for the professional and personal growth of faculty members. These pathways are tailored to the specific instructor, aligning their personal interests with the broader strategic plans of the educational institution. The entire pedagogical process – encompassing engagement, learning, and the realization of faculty potential – achieves desired outcomes not through haphazard activity, but through proactive forecasting and the adoption of flexible management decisions.

The shift toward the individual professional and personal development of faculty members at Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno necessitated a significant revision of established norms, traditions, and management decisions. Initially, following a “top-down” change-initiation model, the university’s Educational Innovations Laboratory designed and implemented a professional development program for faculty titled “University of Educational Innovations.”

Over the course of more than ten project cycles, innovative programs aimed at enhancing both professional and transversal skills among the teaching staff were piloted and refined.

The foundation for these professional development programs consisted of the project moderators’ own research, their pedagogical experience, and evidence-based teaching methodologies, all of which served as the basis for developing and implementing the courses’ educational content (Razova and Romanovskiy, 2021). Participants explored topics such as the theory, methodology, and practice of modern education; the project-based approach in educational activities; distance learning technologies; the organization and methodological support of the educational process using information and communication technologies; digital resources and platforms for learning; and the specifics of digital didactics and the assessment of learning outcomes. The following topics and formats of interaction were implemented:

- A hybrid (in-person and remote) activity-based course: “Methodology of teaching through discovery: how to teach everyone differently yet equally”
- Online professional development courses for faculty in the field of creative education (in collaboration with Belarusian State University)
 - Fundamentals of heuristic learning in higher education
 - Pedagogical Excellence Week (master classes)
 - Pedagogical Innovation Festival
 - Theory, methodology, and practice of modern education
 - The project-based method in educational activities
 - The project-based method for final assessment

- Distance learning technologies
- Organization and technical support of the educational process using information and communication technologies
- Innovative teaching methods
- Intensive course for early-career faculty
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning
- Technology for developing digital educational and methodological packages
- Digital didactics and assessment of learning outcomes

The “University of Educational Innovations” project underwent international validation through professional development courses titled “Technologies for Improving the Quality of University Teaching and Learning,” organized for faculty at the Mukimi Kokand State Pedagogical Institute (Uzbekistan). The training program serves as a successful example of Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno’s rapid response to external educational demands. We not only create our own educational environment but are also ready to share our experience. The project was implemented through the collaborative efforts of the Laboratory for Educational Innovations, faculty members, staff from the University History Museum, the Scientific Library, and the Technology Park. Educators from Uzbekistan piloted the results through online interactions with students from the Mukimi Kokand State Pedagogical University. For us, it was an opportunity to reflect on the role of the “ethnic component” in professional training.

The approach developed confirmed an obvious fact: a university of educational innovations embodies the strategic principle of a “university-as-laboratory” – one that constantly and productively experiments, implements innovations, develops new forms of professional communication, and seeks out new practices as well as new disciplinary and interdisciplinary configurations which align with modern technological trends influencing the quality of education (Serditova and Belotserkovsky, 2020).

Ideas for enhancing teaching excellence through individualized learning paths were most fully realized during the development and implementation of the “Open Learning” educational project—an initiative that originated “from the bottom up,” driven by the faculty members themselves. This new learning format is notable for fostering a community of university education leaders capable of effectively responding to external environmental changes, professionally addressing the challenges of a dynamic labor market, purposefully honing their own competencies, and actively engaging with colleagues’ requests and proposals.

“Open Learning” addressed several key objectives:

- faculty staff self-improvement based on the principles of lifelong learning and individualized learning paths;
- creating an environment for a “club-style” learning format, characterized by open and informal interaction among colleagues united by shared professional goals, ideas, and visions;
- mastering in-demand professional competencies that ensure modern educators are prepared to deliver high-quality, practice-oriented, and high-tech student training.
- “Open Learning” is based on:
 - individualized learning paths achieved by selecting activities based on personal interests;
 - a role-based learning model (where the instructor chooses their role as moderator, participant, or both simultaneously);
 - the formulation of relevant topics for discussion and debate (Kalatsei and Kaliaha, 2025).

The project aims to enhance various aspects of professional development for instructors who share a common educational context, strong intrinsic motivation, and a desire to engage in productive dialogue with fellow participants and create an active learning environment—one where current teaching and learning issues are analyzed, diverse opinions are voiced, and solutions are either proposed or devised through collaborative activity. The exchange of practical, firsthand experience is the project’s core value.

A key feature of “Open Learning” is its high level of adaptability to the specific needs of individual instructors. This is achieved through a flexible program structure, allowing instructors to decide for themselves which activities are important, useful, and engaging—and therefore mandatory to attend. Each project season consists of a comprehensive module comprising individual educational events united by a common theme. These take place twice a month throughout the academic semester according to a pre-approved schedule. The list and content of these modules are shaped by instructor requests, openly discussed, and finally approved by specialists from the Educational Innovations Laboratory. “Open Learning” materials (presentations, video recordings, and study aids) are available 24/7 to anyone interested on the website of the electronic scientific and methodological journal “University of Educational Innovations” (University of Educational Innovations Journal, 2026).

The project’s primary event formats include educational seminars, master classes, and training sessions. Examples of popular event topics include:

- Active learning methods for practical classes
- Personalized learning using digital tools
- Micro-learning technology
- Organizing and conducting educational courses for adults and children
- Developing students’ intercultural competencies
- Characteristics of a modern lecture
- Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies: prompting, reverse dialogue, AI tutor, AI assistant, and interactive AI projects.

Particular attention is paid to the design and implementation of active learning technologies – considering their capabilities, scope of application, and impact – as well as to mastering methods for integrating information and communication technologies into the educational process, given their widespread adoption within the modern university ecosystem.

Active learning serves as a key component in the strategy to transform the higher education system. The classification of active learning methods is examined—covering functions such as interactive introductions, active material presentation, methods to stimulate cognitive activity, discussion-based approaches for developing communication skills, and reflection—along with practical examples of their use.

Faculty members are actively engaged in mastering information and communication technology tools that are in high demand in modern education. This includes learning management systems, educational video and audio content, multimedia presentations, online whiteboards, wiki resources, virtual laboratories and simulators, as well as polling and testing platforms.

The digital transformation of education is viewed as a process of reshaping its goals, underlying purposes, content, and technologies, alongside the search for solutions to the associated challenges. Pedagogical innovations are primary in their own right, while information technologies play a supporting role by providing the technological foundation for the creation and implementation of new pedagogical practices (Kalatsei, 2024; Korol and Vorotnitsky, 2022).

The development of creative education – specifically “education” rather than mere “instruction” – is grounded in participation in master classes, seminars, and webinars. In this context, the educator moves beyond the role of a passive listener to become an active participant and a creator of their own content, a process oriented toward diverse purposes and learning trajectories (Korol and Shchedrina, 2022).

Training sessions for faculty are organized around an active learning model that encourages independent comprehension of the material, the creation of original educational products, and the achievement of personally meaningful outcomes through individual and collective reflective practices. During practical sessions, participants master new teaching methods by working individually, in pairs, or in groups. This active format fosters productive activity and allows for the analysis of professional growth and the development of transversal competencies – such as

rapid response to environmental changes, high-quality information interpretation, accurate and swift situational assessment, dynamism, a constant drive for self-improvement, flexibility, and creativity. Active methods are piloted through simulation exercises, followed by an analysis and discussion of the results.

The process of mastering information and communication technology tools unfolds in several stages: the demonstration of the technologies' educational capabilities by course moderators; Participants develop core skills by completing individual or group assignments, presenting their results, and engaging in a final reflection. Classes are held in a computer lab, while a remote learning format is used for completing assessments on each of the designated topics. Moderators and participants share access to the course platform, which hosts learning materials, instructions, useful links, and demonstration videos. The platform facilitates communication among participants, enabling the exchange of relevant information via chats and forums.

Performance within the course is evaluated based on the development of a lesson plan utilizing active learning methods, as well as the creation of an educational video and an educational podcast.

Following the formal training, instructors receive informal support through consultations with specialists from the Educational Innovations Laboratory. Formal education represents an increase—often situational and without alternative—in the volume of knowledge, the number of professional tools, and the methods for applying them in practice. Non-formal education, by contrast, fosters greater systematicity, adaptability, and effectiveness in the work of instructors who are keen to acquire relevant professional competencies.

Artificial intelligence has become an integral part of our reality today. Its use in education facilitates many processes, acting as a helpful tool. However, this necessitates a transformation of the meaning, methods, goals, and content of education. Failure to do so risks diminishing our capacity to learn and think. We have seen the advent of the calculator, the computer, and the video projector; now, we have artificial intelligence. All of these are educational tools. AI prompts a rethinking of how classes are organized and how its technologies are integrated into the learning process. Yet, it is crucial to avoid becoming dependent on it and to remember education's fundamental goal: to unlock the individual and their potential.

To foster an educational environment of advanced professional development within the university – grounded in practice-oriented and student-centered learning - the “Yanka Kupala University Innovative Educator” professional excellence contest has been established. The contest aims to enhance the professional expertise and methodological proficiency of the university's teaching staff regarding innovation, create opportunities for the professional and personal self-realization of innovative educators, and build a community of instructors who employ and promote modern educational resources, information and communication technologies, and up-to-date pedagogical methods to ensure high student learning outcomes.

The contest is integrated with the “Open Learning” project and serves as a component of the system for the continuous professional and personal development of faculty members. The project is moderated by university educators who have volunteered to share their pedagogical expertise through instructional sessions. Contest participants undertake the following challenges: “Pedagogical Workshop” (conducting an instructional session); “Innovative Solution” (publication of a research-based methodological article or a methodological plan for a class session in the electronic journal “University of Educational Innovations”); and “Educator's Dialogue” (recording of a video interview).

The goal of the “Pedagogical Workshop” competition stage is to demonstrate professional mastery in presenting and sharing innovative pedagogical practices within a professional interaction setting. This stage takes the form of a master class, open lesson, presentation, seminar, or training session. Evaluation is based on six criteria: relevance of the presented experience;

innovative solutions; quality of information delivery and communication skills; creative approach to the presentation; capacity for reflection; and professional competence.

The “Innovative Solution” stage takes place over the course of the calendar year, and it aims to demonstrate the ability to propose evidence-based solutions to priority challenges in higher education, as well as to design, organize, conduct, and analyze classes using innovative teaching methods. Participation involves submitting a research-based methodological article or a methodological plan for a class session to the journal. Research-based articles are evaluated according to four criteria: relevance; scientific novelty; practical value of the research; and validity of conclusions. Methodological plans for class sessions are evaluated based on four criteria: definition of the lesson objective; student engagement in the learning process; application of innovative teaching forms and methods; and provision of feedback. Evaluation is conducted using electronic checklists on the journal’s website.

The goal of the “Educator’s Dialogue” stage is to demonstrate the level of pedagogical culture, professional and personal competencies in teaching and student development, and specific pedagogical insights that have led to new educational outcomes. This stage takes the form of a video interview—a conversation with a host in a studio setting. Evaluation is based on five criteria: presence and justification of the author’s stance; knowledge and understanding of professional development topics; and originality, flexibility, thinking skills; the ability to engage in productive dialogue; and adherence to standards of speech etiquette. Evaluation is conducted using electronic checklists available on the journal’s website, alongside the contestants’ video interviews.

The competitive events are evaluated by a standing expert panel and by project participants who attend the events to enhance their professional skills and who have reviewed the published materials and video interviews.

When the results are tallied, a winner is determined based on performance across all competitive events as well as in individual categories. A large number of university faculty members participate in the contest, creating a unique pedagogical environment for communication, the exchange of experience, and professional and personal development. Each participant is free to choose their format of involvement and to chart an individual path for professional growth.

Conclusion

The modern world is open, dynamic, and diverse. In this era of new technologies, we must seek answers to complex and challenging questions. How do we define meaning amidst new life circumstances? How do we cultivate openness to innovation, a sense of initiative, and creative engagement? How do we preserve our personal cultural space, national identity, and historical memory? Responding to the challenges of the times, the modern educator does not stand still; they learn to embrace change quickly, confidently, and positively, while constantly developing professionally and actively employing new technologies and educational strategies. Consequently, the student who is already adapted to the realities of the digital world encounters not merely a transmitter of pre-packaged knowledge, but a motivator, a navigator, and an expert in personal and professional growth.

Seeking effective courses of action, piloting and disseminating new practices, and critically reflecting on and applying innovations in teaching and learning constitute an inevitable, ongoing process.

The teacher must personally go through all the stages of self-determination and the creation of their own knowledge. Only such a teacher is capable of captivating the learner and helping them unfold their potential. Without personal practice, there can be no true education.

Enhancing pedagogical expertise requires the implementation of diverse training programs, including those based on informal approaches and practices. Productive learning outcomes can

be achieved through systems that manage the individual professional development of faculty members in areas of social significance. When a university fosters an open, informal educational environment for professional growth, it enables faculty members to unlock their potential, reflect on their experiences, ideas, and capabilities, and realize that their work is part of something far greater than a mere list of routine tasks: it is part of a university with a grand scale and a mission to unlock the potential of both students and faculty, while recognizing the vital importance of quality in professional training (Kalatsei and Shcherbinin, 2026). Faculty members come to understand that while much is expected of them, they are also afforded significant opportunities: the right to develop and grow, respect for their professional dignity, the prospect of leaving a lasting professional legacy, and a sense of the scope and meaning of their work.

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Kalatsei M.Y. – responsible for all aspects of the work, including conceptual framework, ensuring data reliability and integrity, reviewing and resolving issues, and critical revision of the content.

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М. Я. Колоцей

«Гродно Янка Купала мемлекеттік университеті» білім беру мекемесі

**Университет қазіргі заманғы сын-қатерлер жағдайында мұғалімдердің кәсіби
және жеке дамуына арналған орта ретінде**

Аңдатпа. Мақалада заманауи сын-қатерлер жағдайында университеттің оқытушылардың кәсіби және тұлғалық дамуына қолайлы орта қалыптастырудағы рөлі қарастырылады. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде Янка Купала атындағы Гродно мемлекеттік университетінің оқытушылардың кәсіби құзыреттілігін жетілдіру тәжірибесі алынған. Зерттеудің теориялық-әдіснамалық негізін жалпы сапаны басқару (TQM) қағидаттары және университеттің кәсіби даму ортасын қалыптастыру тәжірибесі құрайды. Зерттеуде талдау, жинақтау, қорыту және синтез әдістері қолданылған. Негізгі назар бейформалды білім берудің оқытушылардың кәсіби дамуын қолдаудағы мүмкіндіктеріне, академиялық еркіндікті қамтамасыз етуге және жеке кәсіби-білім беру траекторияларын қалыптастыруға аударылған. «Білім беру инновациялары университеті» және «Open Learning» жобаларының тәжірибесі негізінде оқытушылардың заманауи педагогикалық, цифрлық және трансверсалды құзыреттерін дамыту тетіктері сипатталады. Зерттеу нәтижелері бейформалды білім берудің икемділігі, қолжетімділігі, практикалық бағыттылығы және жеке қажеттіліктерге бейімделуі оқытушылардың үздіксіз кәсіби және тұлғалық дамуына жағдай жасайтынын көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, университеттің «зертхана-университет» қағидаты негізінде инновациялық тәжірибелерді сынақтан өткізуі мен таратуының маңызы айқындалады.

Түйін сөздер: педагогикалық шеберлік, бейресми білім беру, мұғалімдердің кәсіби және жеке дамуы, жеке оқу траекториялары, «Білім беру инновациялары университеті», «Ашық оқыту».

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**Университет как среда профессионально-личностного развития
преподавателей в условиях современных вызовов**

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается роль университета в создании благоприятной среды для профессионального и личностного развития преподавателей в условиях современных вызовов. В качестве объекта исследования представлен опыт Гродненского государственного университета имени Янки Купалы по совершенствованию профессиональной компетентности преподавателей. Теоретико-методологическую основу исследования составляют принципы всеобщего управления качеством (TQM) и опыт университета в формировании среды профессионального развития. В исследовании использованы методы анализа, обобщения, систематизации и синтеза. Основное внимание уделено возможностям неформального образования в поддержке

профессионального развития преподавателей, обеспечении академической свободы и формировании индивидуальных профессионально-образовательных траекторий. На основе опыта проектов «Университет образовательных инноваций» и «Open Learning» охарактеризованы механизмы развития современных педагогических, цифровых и трансверсальных компетенций преподавателей. Результаты исследования показывают, что гибкость, доступность, практическая направленность и адаптивность неформального образования к индивидуальным потребностям создают условия для непрерывного профессионального и личностного развития преподавателей. Кроме того, раскрывается значение апробации и распространения инновационных практик в университете на основе принципа «университет-лаборатория».

Ключевые слова: педагогическое мастерство, неформальное образование, профессионально-личностное развитие преподавателей, индивидуальная траектория обучения, «Университет образовательных инноваций», «Открытое обучение».

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