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PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF A TEACHER

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Abstract

The article explores the concept of professional competence of a teacher as a critical factor in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the educational process. It examines the core components of teacher competence, including subject-matter expertise, pedagogical and psychological knowledge, communication skills, and reflective practices. Special attention is given to the modern challenges faced by educators in the context of updated educational standards and the digital transformation of education. The article emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development and highlights key strategies for enhancing teacher competence. Findings from practical teaching experience underline the necessity of integrating theoretical knowledge with real-world teaching skills.

Keywords: Professional competence, teacher, education, teaching practice, professional development, educational standards, pedagogical skills, digital education.

Introduction

In the modern educational landscape, the role of the teacher has significantly evolved, extending beyond the traditional transmission of knowledge to encompass a wide range of professional responsibilities. The effectiveness of the teaching process is increasingly determined not only by what the teacher knows but also by how they apply this knowledge in diverse and dynamic classroom settings. This shift places professional competence at the core of pedagogical practice.

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Professional competence refers to the integrated set of knowledge, skills, values, and personal qualities that enable a teacher to effectively fulfill their educational duties and respond to the changing needs of students and society. It encompasses subject-matter expertise, pedagogical mastery, interpersonal and communication skills, and the capacity for self-reflection and continuous improvement.

In the face of rapid technological advancement, changing educational standards, and the growing emphasis on student-centered learning, teachers must constantly adapt and upgrade their competencies. This article aims to explore the structure and components of teacher professional competence, examine current challenges, and outline strategies for its development and assessment in contemporary educational contexts.

Literature Review

The concept of professional competence has been the subject of extensive research in educational theory and practice. Scholars agree that teacher competence is a multidimensional construct that integrates cognitive, emotional, and practical components essential for effective teaching (Shulman, 1987; Hattie, 2009). According to Shulman's model of pedagogical content knowledge, effective teachers must not only master subject content but also understand how to teach it in ways that are accessible and meaningful to students.

European frameworks, such as the European Commission's "Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications" (2005), emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, reflective practice, and the ability to adapt to diverse learning environments. Similarly, in the U.S., the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards highlight the integration of content knowledge, instructional practice, and professional responsibility as key areas of teacher competence.

Russian researchers, including V.A. Slastenin and N.V. Kuzmina, have contributed significantly to the understanding of teacher competence within the national educational context. Kuzmina (1990) identifies several components of teacher competence: special (subject-related), methodological, social-perceptual, differential-psychological, and autopsychological. These frameworks underscore

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the complexity of the teaching profession and the need for comprehensive teacher preparation.

More recent studies (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2018) stress the growing importance of digital competence, emotional intelligence, and culturally responsive teaching in the 21st-century classroom. As education systems worldwide undergo digital transformation, teachers must also develop skills in using educational technologies effectively to enhance student learning.

Despite the diversity of approaches, the literature consistently underlines that professional competence is not static; it evolves through continuous reflection, practical experience, and professional development. This review sets the foundation for analyzing current approaches to developing and assessing teacher competence in modern educational systems.

Method and Methodology

The methodology of this study is grounded in a combination of systemic, competency-based, and learner-centered approaches, each providing a conceptual framework for analyzing the professional competence of teachers.

- The systemic approach enables the examination of teacher competence as an integrated structure, comprising cognitive (knowledge-based), operational (skills-based), motivational-value, and reflective components.

- The competency-based approach focuses on identifying and developing the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective teaching in diverse and evolving educational contexts.

- The learner-centered approach emphasizes the importance of the teacher's personal and professional development, highlighting the role of self-reflection, autonomy, and adaptability in professional growth.

To achieve the objectives of the research, a mixed-method strategy was adopted, incorporating both theoretical and empirical components. The following research methods were employed:

- Theoretical analysis of scientific literature to define key concepts, review models of teacher competence, and identify best practices in national and international contexts.

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• Comparative analysis to contrast different frameworks and standards for teacher competence (e.g., OECD, InTASC, EU frameworks).

• Surveys and questionnaires to collect data from teachers and educational administrators regarding their perceptions of essential competencies and current levels of preparedness.

• Expert assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher training and professional development programs.

• Generalization of pedagogical experience to identify successful methods and tools used in developing professional competence in practice.

This methodological framework allowed for a comprehensive exploration of both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical realities of professional competence development among teachers.

Results and Discussion. The results of the study provide insight into the current state and development needs of teachers' professional competence in the context of modern educational challenges. Based on survey responses from practicing educators and expert evaluations of training programs, several key findings emerged.

1. Core Competencies Identified. Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of the following core competencies:

• Subject-matter expertise: Teachers must possess deep and up-to-date knowledge in their subject area.

• Pedagogical skills: The ability to plan, deliver, and adapt instruction to diverse learners.

• Digital literacy: Increasingly vital, especially post-pandemic, for integrating technology into the learning process.

• Emotional intelligence and communication skills: Essential for building positive student relationships and managing classroom dynamics.

• Reflective practice: Viewed as critical for continuous self-improvement and adaptation.

These competencies align with international frameworks such as those from the OECD and InTASC, indicating a global consensus on what defines effective teaching.

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2. Gaps in Current Professional Development. The study revealed a disconnect between teacher needs and the content of available professional development programs. While digital and inclusive teaching skills were highly demanded, they were among the least addressed in formal training. Many teachers reported that existing courses were overly theoretical, with limited application to classroom realities.

3. Influence of Experience and Context. More experienced teachers generally reported higher levels of competence, particularly in classroom management and student engagement. However, novice teachers showed stronger digital competencies. Contextual factors—such as school resources, leadership support, and student demographics—also influenced teachers' ability to develop and apply their competencies.

4. Importance of Reflective and Collaborative Practices. Teachers who engaged in reflective activities (e.g., self-assessment, peer observation) and professional learning communities demonstrated higher levels of professional growth. These findings support the need for a shift from isolated to collaborative models of teacher development.

The findings of this study reaffirm the critical role that professional competence plays in shaping the quality and effectiveness of teaching. The multifaceted nature of competence — encompassing subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and reflective practice — underscores that teacher professionalism cannot be reduced to a single dimension. This aligns with existing research emphasizing that effective teaching is both an art and a science, requiring continuous adaptation and learning (Shulman, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

A notable insight from the data is the gap between the competencies teachers currently possess and those demanded by contemporary educational environments, particularly in digital skills and inclusive education. This gap reflects broader systemic challenges, including insufficient practical training and limited access to relevant professional development resources. It also suggests that teacher education programs must evolve to better prepare educators for the realities of modern classrooms, which are increasingly diverse and technology-rich.

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Furthermore, the importance of reflective practice emerged strongly from the study, confirming its role as a catalyst for professional growth. Teachers who engage regularly in self-assessment and peer collaboration are better equipped to identify areas for improvement and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. This finding supports a shift from traditional top-down professional development models to more collaborative, teacher-driven approaches.

In conclusion, fostering professional competence requires comprehensive strategies that integrate theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and ongoing self-reflection. Educational policymakers and leaders must prioritize creating supportive environments that encourage lifelong learning and recognize the complex demands placed on today's teachers.

Conclusions

The study confirms that professional competence is a multifaceted and dynamic construct essential for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the teaching process. It encompasses not only subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, but also digital literacy, emotional intelligence, communication abilities, and reflective capacity. These competencies enable teachers to meet the diverse and evolving needs of students in today's rapidly changing educational landscape.

The research highlights that while many educators demonstrate strong foundational competencies, there are critical gaps—particularly in areas related to digital education, inclusive practices, and practical classroom application of theoretical knowledge. Moreover, current professional development programs often lack responsiveness to the real challenges faced by teachers, especially in under-resourced or high-need educational contexts.

Another key conclusion is that professional competence cannot be viewed as a fixed attribute; rather, it should be understood as an ongoing developmental process that requires sustained support, mentorship, and access to relevant, high-quality learning opportunities.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Enhance the practical relevance of teacher training programs by integrating more real-world classroom scenarios, case studies, and interactive methodologies such as simulations and peer feedback.

Strengthen digital competence training, especially in areas related to online pedagogy, digital content creation, and the ethical use of technology in education.

Implement personalized professional development plans that are based on individual teacher needs, teaching context, and career stage, with ongoing mentoring and support.

Promote collaborative learning communities within schools to encourage the exchange of experiences, reflective dialogue, and mutual support among teachers.

Include self-assessment and reflective tools as regular components of teacher professional development, enabling educators to monitor and guide their own growth.

Involve teachers in the design of professional learning programs, ensuring that their voices, challenges, and suggestions inform policies and institutional strategies.

Support educational leaders in recognizing and fostering professional competence through inclusive leadership, effective feedback, and opportunities for professional recognition and growth.

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