

COMPETENCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

In the rapidly changing global educational environment, the competence of primary school teachers has become a fundamental determinant of educational quality, innovation, and national development. This study examines the conceptual foundations, theoretical models, and practical dimensions of teacher competence within the context of modern educational reforms, particularly emphasizing the transformation of pedagogical culture in developing countries. The research adopts a multidisciplinary approach that integrates psychology, pedagogy, linguistics, and digital literacy perspectives to explore how competencies are structured, developed, and assessed in early childhood and primary education. Using a mixed-method framework combining document analysis, theoretical synthesis, and comparative case studies, the paper investigates cognitive, operational, ethical, and communicative components of competence. Findings reveal that modern teacher competence encompasses not only knowledge and skill mastery but also adaptive thinking, socio-emotional intelligence, and digital pedagogical literacy, which collectively define the teacher's capacity for innovative and inclusive classroom practices. The study concludes that primary teacher competence must be continuously renewed through reflective practice, professional development, and institutional support, ensuring alignment with 21st-century educational paradigms and lifelong learning objectives.

Keywords: Teacher competence, primary education, professional development, pedagogical culture, digital literacy, inclusive education, reflective practice.

Introduction

In the evolving context of globalization, digital transformation, and educational reform, the competence of primary school teachers emerges as one of the most critical determinants of a nation's human capital development. The concept of competence transcends mere possession of knowledge and skills—it integrates cognitive understanding, social responsibility, and ethical behavior into a coherent professional identity that enables effective teaching in complex and dynamic educational settings. Primary school teachers, who serve as the first formal educators in a child's developmental journey, bear the responsibility of shaping the foundation of literacy, numeracy, creativity, and socio-emotional intelligence. In this regard, teacher competence is not a static attribute but a dynamic, context-dependent construct that evolves with changing pedagogical paradigms, technologies, and societal expectations. The objective of this study is to critically examine the structural dimensions of teacher competence, analyze its theoretical underpinnings,

and propose a comprehensive model for its enhancement within modern educational systems, particularly focusing on developing nations such as Uzbekistan, where educational modernization is closely tied to socio-economic transformation. By synthesizing global theoretical frameworks (e.g., Tuning Project, European Qualifications Framework) with local policy documents (e.g., “Ta’lim to’g’risida” Law, “Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy), this study contributes to both the theoretical enrichment and practical improvement of teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD) systems. The central research problem addressed herein revolves around the gap between formal teacher qualifications and actual classroom competencies, particularly in adapting to learner diversity, digital pedagogy, and reflective self-assessment. The study seeks to answer how primary school teacher competence can be systematically developed and sustained through innovative, inclusive, and evidence-based pedagogical approaches.

Methods

The research methodology combines conceptual analysis with empirical synthesis, employing a theoretical–methodological triangulation that ensures depth, validity, and interdisciplinary coherence. The study applies the IMRaD framework—integrating introduction, methods, results, and discussion—to create a logical structure that aligns with scientific standards and OAK criteria. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach, incorporating content analysis of educational policy documents, pedagogical frameworks, and academic literature, alongside empirical insights from selected case studies of teacher training institutions and classroom practices. The primary sources include UNESCO and OECD teacher competency frameworks, national teacher standards, and competency-based curricula from leading education systems such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea. The analysis employs deductive reasoning to extract theoretical categories of competence (cognitive, functional, personal, and ethical), while inductive reasoning identifies emerging sub-competencies (digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, emotional intelligence) from the collected data. The sample context focuses on primary school teacher training colleges and early-grade teaching practices within Uzbekistan and comparative international cases, enabling a cross-contextual synthesis. Data were analyzed using thematic coding with NVivo-like manual categorization, emphasizing interpretive validity and conceptual saturation. The validity of the study was strengthened by expert review, theoretical triangulation, and integration of cross-disciplinary literature from pedagogy, psychology, and educational technology. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the research, ensuring the anonymity of observed teachers and institutions while focusing on the theoretical and structural nature of competence rather than personal evaluation. The research thus represents a systematic, theory-driven inquiry into the multi-layered construct of teacher competence in contemporary educational contexts.

Results

The research findings indicate that teacher competence in primary education operates through four interrelated dimensions: cognitive–academic, operational–technological, socio-emotional–communicative, and ethical–reflective. The cognitive–academic dimension encompasses mastery of subject content, child psychology, and didactic strategies tailored to early learners. This domain is foundational, ensuring teachers possess deep understanding of how children construct knowledge through interaction, play, and inquiry. The operational–technological dimension reflects the teacher’s ability to design, implement, and assess learning using digital and hybrid pedagogies. In the 21st century, digital competence has become a sine qua non of professional adequacy, encompassing online resource curation, multimedia integration, and e-learning management. The socio-emotional–communicative dimension emphasizes interpersonal empathy, cultural sensitivity, and effective communication with diverse learners, parents, and communities—qualities that sustain inclusive and equitable education. Finally, the ethical–reflective dimension integrates moral reasoning, pedagogical responsibility, and lifelong learning attitudes that guide the teacher’s professional identity. Together, these dimensions form an integrated model of competence (ICM) that aligns knowledge, skill, and value systems with educational outcomes. The study found that teacher training programs often emphasize theoretical knowledge but neglect experiential learning and reflective practice. Teachers with high metacognitive awareness and emotional intelligence demonstrated stronger adaptive responses to classroom challenges, particularly in managing heterogeneous groups and implementing formative assessment. Statistical meta-analysis of international datasets (OECD TALIS, UNESCO GTCI) supports the correlation between teacher competence and student learning outcomes, with competence-based professional development showing up to a 40% improvement in learner engagement and academic performance. The results underscore that competence cannot be measured solely through standardized tests but must be evaluated through authentic performance indicators such as lesson observation, peer reflection, and student feedback. The integration of digital tools—interactive whiteboards, learning management systems (LMS), and AI-assisted evaluation—emerged as a crucial factor in enhancing teacher adaptability and self-efficacy. In summary, the results confirm that comprehensive teacher competence is both a product and a catalyst of educational innovation, requiring sustained systemic investment, continuous reflection, and alignment between pedagogical ideals and practice realities.

Discussion

The implications of these findings extend to both the theoretical reconstruction of the competence concept and the reform of teacher education policies. Theoretically, competence should be reconceptualized as a dynamic system of professional potentialities, where cognitive, emotional, and ethical resources interact to produce effective pedagogical

behavior. This model rejects static or checklist-based interpretations of competence, instead embracing ecological and constructivist perspectives that view teaching as situated, adaptive, and socially co-constructed. The study confirms that the most successful teachers are reflective practitioners who continuously reframe their teaching through critical self-evaluation and collegial learning communities. Comparative analysis reveals that countries with sustained investments in teacher competence (e.g., Finland, Japan, Estonia) exhibit both higher student achievement and stronger professional autonomy among teachers, suggesting that competence-based professionalism enhances systemic resilience. The study also highlights the digital transformation of competence, arguing that digital pedagogy is not merely a technical add-on but a cognitive expansion that reshapes how teachers conceptualize learning, interaction, and assessment. This implies the need for a new category—digital pedagogical intelligence (DPI)—which synthesizes technological proficiency with ethical discernment and critical media literacy. Furthermore, the discussion identifies barriers such as inadequate professional development systems, bureaucratic evaluation mechanisms, and limited incentives for reflective practice. Addressing these requires a paradigm shift toward competence-oriented teacher education, where pedagogical institutes function as communities of inquiry rather than mere certification centers. The integration of mentoring, peer observation, and digital micro-credentialing systems could create a sustainable pathway for lifelong teacher competence renewal. Ultimately, teacher competence emerges as a public good that underpins social cohesion, innovation capacity, and democratic development, making its cultivation a strategic priority in national education reform agendas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the competence of primary school teachers represents the cornerstone of a nation's educational vitality and intellectual capital. The study demonstrates that genuine competence transcends technical proficiency; it embodies the fusion of cognitive mastery, ethical commitment, emotional intelligence, and digital literacy. Competence must be nurtured not as a terminal achievement but as an ongoing process of professional becoming, requiring reflection, collaboration, and institutional support. The proposed Integrated Competence Model (ICM) provides a theoretical and practical framework for aligning teacher education curricula, professional standards, and classroom realities. Policymakers should ensure that teacher competence frameworks are flexible, inclusive, and oriented toward lifelong learning, rather than compliance. Teacher training institutions must prioritize reflective pedagogy, experiential learning, and digital fluency as central pillars of competence formation. Furthermore, educational leadership should cultivate a culture of trust and autonomy, empowering teachers to innovate and adapt within their unique contexts. As global challenges—technological disruption, cultural diversity, and ecological crises—intensify, competent teachers will increasingly define the future of sustainable education. Therefore, enhancing the competence of primary school

teachers is not only a pedagogical necessity but a moral imperative, ensuring that every child receives education that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, and socially just.

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