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## *Professional Competence of Preschool Teachers in the Works of Ukrainian Scholars*

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Profesjonalne kompetencje nauczycieli edukacji przedszkolnej w ujęciu ukraińskich badaczy

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### ABSTRACT

The article explores the essence of the concepts of competence, expertise, and professional competence of a preschool teacher which remains multifaceted and ambiguous. The formation of a future preschool teacher's professional competence is a priority task of higher pedagogical education. Scholars believe that professional competence of a teacher is a prerequisite for improving the quality of the educational process in preschools. The major structural components of professional competence are motivation, professional practical, personal-professional. The article covers stages of formation of a preschool teacher's professional competence during university study (adaptation-orientation, content-reflection, practical-transformative). Particular attention is paid to the importance of teaching motives in the formation of professional competence. The author's definition of the concept "professional competence of a preschool teacher" is proposed.

**Keywords:** pedagogical education; teacher; competence; professional competence of a preschool teacher

### INTRODUCTION

Training specialists in preschool education in Ukraine as well as in European countries requires a change in the goals and objectives of higher education. Changes that occur in all educational settings, especially in preschool education, in the childhood world, make us reconsider the conceptual principles of training preschool specialists. Preschools are mostly attended by outgoing children already

possessing certain knowledge. However, not every child is ready to communicate with peers before school starts. This is primarily due to the implementation of the competence-based approach in higher education, which implies changes in expertise as an expected outcome. The topicality of the problem is confirmed by Ukraine's legislation, in particular legal acts such as: law on Education, law on Preschool Education, law on Higher Education, Concept of Development of Pedagogical Education in Ukraine and Its Integration into the European Educational Space for 2012–2021.

In order to designate, correlate, recognize, plan and develop qualifications higher education institutions in Ukraine use the National Qualifications Framework which is “based on European and national standards and principles of education quality assurance, takes into account the labour market requirements for the employee competencies and is introduced in order to harmonize legislation in all fields of education, coordinate social and labour relations, promote national and international recognition of the qualifications obtained in Ukraine, establish effective education and labour market interaction” (Pro zatverdzhennia..., 2013). Regarded as one of the key concepts, competence is defined as a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, ways of thinking, attitudes, values and other personal qualities, which determine the ability of a person to successfully socialise, pursue professional and/or further educational activities (Pro zatverdzhennia..., 2011). According to the decree “On approval of the qualification profile of professions (positions) of academic staff in educational institutions” of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine academic staff competence components are professional, informative, communicative and legal (Pro zatverdzhennia..., 2013).

The Higher Education Standard of Ukraine for bachelor's degree in preschool education adopted in November 2019 provides a list of graduate student competencies including integral, general and special (professional) ones.

#### DEFINITIONS OF COMPETENCE, EXPERTISE, PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

In the modern context of science and education the competence-based approach is applicable to the development of both personality and the educational process. Vocational training of preschool teachers and formation of their professional competence are topical issues of the present-day preschool education and Ukrainian society.

The discussion is caused by the concepts of competence, expertise, professional competence. Ovcharuk (2004) considers competence as a result of training, education, personality development and future professional prospects. Competence encompasses knowledge, skills, abilities, values, personal attitudes, responsibility for autonomous actions (Bykov, 2010). Analysing the experience of European countries in the implementation of the competence-based approach in education,

Pometun (2007) states that in one way or another the competence-based approach is implemented in this area. Competence is interpreted as “a specially structured set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes acquired in the process of learning” (Ovcharuk, 2004, p. 8). Competence allows specialist to solve problems specific to particular activity.

The Encyclopaedia of Education defines competence in learning as

a range of issues which a person is an expert on, acquiring the knowledge not only by learning a subject, but also through non-formal education in the setting. (...) A personal quality, an integrated capacity of an individual, which encompasses not only knowledge, skills, abilities, but also previous experience, values, attitudes that can only be fully realized in a particular learning situation. (Kremen, 2008, p. 982)

Melnyk (2016a) makes distinction between notions of competence and expertise, analysing historical roots of their origins. The concept of competence gives rise to a theoretical search, promoting innovation in the educational process. However, the educational theory and practice still lack a single and consistent interpretation.

Expertise is interpreted as a precondition for educational training, determining the field of activity and responsibilities, potential capabilities of a specialist, the level of compliance of the achieved learning outcomes with the requirements of the standard and the educational programme. The pedagogical literature distinguishes personal, emotional, informational, communicative, social, managerial and other types of expertise (Kremen, 2008). Each of the same importance. Personal expertise equals professional development characterised by willingness to constantly improve one’s educational level, the need to actualise and realise one’s personal potential, ability for self-improvement, self-development.

Emotional expertise ensures high achievements in future pedagogical activities. Having summarised previous research, Voitovych (2014) states that emotional expertise involves inclusion of emotions into the process of activity, use of feedback, self-control, ability to resolve conflicts and contradictions, as well as absence of helplessness. The scholar distinguishes three stages of emotional expertise formation: initial – adaptive-motivational, main – activity-based, final – diagnostic-effective. The initial stage is related to the adaptation of students to learning environment of a higher education institution, comprehension of new requirements, values, mastering the ability to perform basic educational activities, skills of independent work, manifestation of volitional abilities, ability to independently solve educational needs. The leading tasks of this stage are diagnosis and self-diagnosis, formation of ideas about own emotional expertise, formation of positive attitude to future teaching activities. The main (activity-based) stage involves acquisition of teaching knowledge and skills, getting to know the theory and practice of self-education, getting ready for self-education and self-development. This stage is characterised by individualisation of learning, awareness of one’s

own personal creative opportunities, development of creative activity, flexibility of thinking, emotional self-regulation, etc. The final (diagnostic-effective) stage is marked by intensification of learning process, analysis of one's own abilities and opportunities, desire for self-realisation, manifestation of personal and professional qualities, readiness for constant improvement of one's educational level. Thus, the learning process results in formation of emotional expertise. The effectiveness of its formation depends on purposeful pedagogical assistance.

In pedagogy there are different definitions of professional competence. It can be understood as:

- a set of knowledge and skills necessary for effective professional activity, an ability to analyse, anticipate the consequences of professional activity, utilise information (Honcharenko, Nychkalo, 2000);
- combination of personal qualities and readiness for professional activity (Markhadaev, 2002);
- tools and productive technologies for the fulfilment of professional duties (Zinchenko, Meshcheriakova, 1996);
- mastery of the necessary amount of teaching knowledge and skills, communication of a teacher as a bearer of defined values, ideals and consciousness (Kadzhasparova, 2000).

Of great importance for the study is the interpretation of the concept of professional competence as a professional capacity and ability to perform daily tasks and responsibilities. Its structure includes knowledge, general and professional skills. In the psychological and pedagogical literature, competence is defined as readiness and an ability of the subject to fulfil daily tasks and responsibilities (Prytuliak, 2015).

## PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF FUTURE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

Professional training of future preschool teachers is a process of formation and enrichment of the attitudes, knowledge and skills, needed for the future specialist to adequately fulfil specific educational tasks. This is reflected in the studies of Bieliienka (2006, 2012), Shaparenko (2008), Kidina (2012), Prytuliak (2015). The theoretical and methodological principles of formation of professional competence in future preschool teachers are covered by Klochko (2014), the formation of their health and fitness competence is studied by Zahorodnia and Barsukovska (2013), Levinets (2014) and Kravchuk (2015). Melnyk (2016b) considers preschool teachers' professional training in the context of the competence-based paradigm of Ukrainian education. Savchenko (2013), on the other hand, explains professional competence formation in preschool teachers through studying pedagogical subjects. Petruk (2016), in turn, explores the development of preschool teachers' methodological competence as a pedagogical issue.

Horlenko (2016, p. 157) interprets professional competence as “the subject’s preparedness and ability to fulfil tasks and responsibilities” as well as a necessary condition for improving the quality of the educational process in a preschool institution.

Kidina (2012) interprets professional competence as an integral professional-personal characteristic of a preschool teacher, which covers theoretical and practical readiness and an ability to fulfil oneself in the field of preschool education; also, as subjective personality traits that ensure the effectiveness of preschool educational activities. The researcher identifies three main components in the structure of professional competence: motivational, professional practical, personal-professional.

In the view of Shaparenko, professional competence are

integrative qualities of an individual, manifested in the general ability and readiness for future pedagogical activities, based on knowledge and experience gained in the process of learning and socialization, focused on self-education, self-regulation, self-improvement, ultimate professional development through self-planning, self-modelling, self-design. (Shaparenko, 2008, p. 3)

The result of professional competence is a person with a high level of professional readiness, with a constant desire for achieving most effective interaction with children.

Based on the abovementioned, it can be argued if the professional competence of a future preschool teacher is the result of general and professional education, and if teacher’s adequate level of preparedness makes it possible to predict, plan, design professional self-determination and self-enrichment, helps to find ways to improve personal and professional life.

Bielienka (2006) distinguishes three blocks in the structure of preschool teachers’ professional competence: “(...) professional knowledge, which forms skills and abilities; individualisation and interpretation of knowledge, which serves as a basis for the development of professional abilities; formation of a world outlook, which is a precondition for the development of professional competence”. Professional competence of preschool teachers is determined by their ability to fulfil pedagogical tasks based on psychological and pedagogical knowledge as well as skills, teaching mastery, professionally relevant qualities. Of great importance for a preschool teacher are also love for children, communication, empathy, discipline.

Aronova (2014) believes that special (subject) competence in the field of preschool education and methodological competence belongs to the structure of professional competence. The scholar substantiates the stages of professional competence formation: information-theoretical, scientific-methodological, procedural-activity, analytical-corrective, creative, independent (self-education, self-cultivation of personality).

Preschool teachers’ professional competence is formed in the process of education in a higher education institution where an individual gradually acquires special (professional) kinds of expertise. According to Bielienka (2012), the main

stages of a preschool teacher's professional competence formation by means of education are:

- adaptive orientation, which entails awareness and comprehension of the choice of profession, correction of value priorities, achievement of the goal and mastering special skills of teaching;
- content-related reflection, which implies acquisition of knowledge and professional skills, their understanding, disclosure of individual characteristics and thus, development of professionally relevant personality traits;
- practical-transformative stage, which requires integration into the pedagogical environment and creative self-realisation.

In practice, the higher the level of professional competence of teachers, the more effective their direct and indirect impact on pupils, their parents, and the environment in general. Prospective preschool teachers acquire ever more knowledge and experience during pedagogical activities, expand their pedagogical functions and authority.

An important aspect in the formation of professional competence are the motifs of learning. On the basis of the study Bielienska (2012) asserts that students of different forms of education have different sources of motivation: 32.1% of freshmen strive to acquire professional knowledge and skills; 30.2% – to obtain the overall level of culture adequate to the concept of “higher education”; 27.6% – to receive a diploma of higher education; 10.1 % pursue a different goal. It has been found that full-time students are guided by external motives, whereas extramural students by internal ones. The survey conducted by the author of this article among first-year undergraduate students majoring in Preschool Education at the universities of Lviv Region (2019) shows that almost half of them (44%) are professionally oriented toward obtaining specialisation through professional education, acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and abilities, 31% seek higher education, 20% wish to obtain a diploma of higher education, and 5% of freshmen pursue this specialty only because they are not into teaching. 97% of students loves working with pre-schoolers. The data obtained are slightly different from findings of the abovementioned study. This is primarily due to reform of higher education in recent years, adoption of the standard in specialty Preschool Education, which clearly defines the competencies of a graduate student.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis and generalisation of the research carried out by Ukrainian scholars gives grounds to claim that the concept of competence is ambiguous and multicomponent. The definitions of expertise and competence are viewed in light of preschool teachers' professional training. Expertise is interpreted as a predefined requirement for mastering an educational programme (a standard, description of responsibilities, job description, profессиogram) and potential opportunities of an

individual. Competence is professional readiness and the ability for teaching, solving professional tasks. Professional competence of a preschool teacher is a unity of theoretical and practical preparedness for professional activities. In modern social conditions of Ukraine, professional requirements and responsibilities of preschool teachers are defined by their professional competence, which encompasses the cognitive component, culture of professional thinking, consciousness and self-awareness. Therefore, this is vocational training.

Preschool teacher's professional competence, in my opinion, is readiness and ability to accomplish daily tasks and responsibilities in the setting of a preschool institution. Its components are acquired knowledge, skills, values, and social behaviour. Preschool teacher's competence is a basis, interpreted as an ability to realise personal and professional achievements.

In modern conditions professional competence of preschool teachers makes them not only competitive in the labour market, but also respected by colleagues and pupils' parents. Teachers should feel a vocation for teaching, have a constant desire to boost their creativity, develop level of general and professional culture, broaden their outlook, etc. Implementation of the competence-based approach in the preparation of future preschool teachers will allow to base educational process in preschool institutions on humanistic principles (interaction between teacher and children on the basis of human values; creating friendly atmosphere and comfortable emotional environment; moral and psychological support for children, etc.).

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#### ABSTRAKT

W artykule opisano istotę pojęć kompetencji oraz kompetencji zawodowych nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej, które są wielowymiarowe i niejednoznaczne. Kształtowanie kompetencji zawodowych przyszłego nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej jest priorytetowym zadaniem edukacji pedagogicznej. Badacze uważają, że kompetencje zawodowe wychowawcy są warunkiem koniecznym do poprawy jakości procesu edukacyjnego w placówkach przedszkolnych. Głównymi elementami struktury kompetencji zawodowych są: motywacja, aktywność zawodowa i działalność zawodowa. W artykule omówiono etapy kształtowania kompetencji zawodowych nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej na studiach (orientacja adaptacyjna, refleksja merytoryczna, praktyczno-transformacyjna).

Szczególną uwagę zwrócono na znaczenie motywów szkoleniowych w kształtowaniu kompetencji zawodowych. Zaproponowano autorską definicję pojęcia kompetencji zawodowych nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja pedagogiczna; nauczyciel; kompetencje; kompetencje zawodowe nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej