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**ASSESSING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE
IN VOCATIONAL COLLEGES ACROSS EU COUNTRIES:
PROSPECTS FOR UKRAINE**

ABSTRACT

This article examines the assessment of professional competence in vocational education and training (VET) across European Union countries and explores prospects for Ukraine. VET teaching requires not only mastery of instructional methods but also integration of technical expertise, workplace realities, and transversal skills. EU frameworks such as EQAVET, Cedefop guidelines, and DigCompEdu provide structured approaches to competence assessment, emphasising quality assurance, outcome-orientated evaluation, continuous professional development, and digital pedagogy. National practices vary: dual systems in Germany and Austria involve workplace mentors; Nordic countries emphasise peer observation and reflective practice; Southern European countries rely on structured reports, while Central and Eastern European systems are transitioning toward EU-aligned frameworks. Common methods include self-assessment, peer and external observation, professional portfolios, learner and employer feedback, and digital competence evaluation. Challenges such as fragmented standards, resource constraints, digital readiness gaps, and overreliance on compliance-based indicators persist, highlighting the need for context-sensitive adaptation.

It is stated that assessment data should be used for targeted professional development and practical guidance for teachers working under high-stress or disrupted conditions. For Ukraine, adopting multi-method, reflective, and digitally integrated assessment systems can enhance teaching quality, align VET with labour-market needs, and support teacher professionalisation, even under wartime conditions. Practical recommendations include strengthening employer collaboration, embedding digital competence, fostering formative and reflective practices, ensuring flexible assessment tools, and balancing accountability with support. Future research should examine the effectiveness of these approaches and their impact on student outcomes in the Ukrainian context, contributing to evidence-based VET reform and resilience.

Keywords: vocational education, pedagogical competence, teacher assessment, EU frameworks, professional development.



ОЦІНЮВАННЯ РОЗВИТКУ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ ПЕДАГОГІЧНИХ ФАХІВЦІВ ФАХОВИХ КОЛЕДЖІВ У КРАЇНАХ ЄС: ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ДЛЯ УКРАЇНИ

АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті порушено проблему оцінювання розвитку професійної компетентності педагогічних фахівців фахових коледжів у країнах ЄС. Розглянуто перспективи для системи професійної (професійно-технічної) освіти в Україні. Встановлено, що процес викладання у професійній освіті вимагає від педагогів не лише володіння ефективними методами навчання, а й інтеграції технічної експертизи, знання реалій робочого середовища та розвитку наскрізних навичок. Досліджено, що рамки ЄС, такі як EQAVET, керівні настанови Cedefop та DigCompEdu, здебільшого зосереджені на структурованих підходах до оцінювання професійної компетентності педагогів, зокрема забезпеченні якості освіти, безперервному професійному розвитку та цифровій педагогіці. Водночас національні практики суттєво відрізняються: у Німеччині та Австрії дуальні системи освіти передбачають участь наставників на робочому місці; увага країн Північної Європи сфокусована на взаємному спостереженні та рефлексивній практиці; у Південній Європі застосовують структуровані звіти, тоді як у країнах Центральної та Східної Європи системи поступово переходять до рамок, узгоджених із стандартами ЄС. Проаналізовано, що загальноприйняті методи включають у себе самооцінювання, взаємне та зовнішнє спостереження, професійні портфоліо, відгуки учнів і роботодавців, а також оцінювання цифрової компетентності. Визначено, що досі переважають такі виклики, як фрагментація стандартів, обмеженість ресурсів, прогалини у цифровій готовності та надмірна орієнтація на показники відповідності. Підсумовано, що для України впровадження базатометодних, рефлексивних і цифро-інтегрованих систем оцінювання може підвищити якість викладання, узгодити систему професійної освіти із потребами ринку праці та підтримати професіоналізацію педагогів, навіть в умовах війни. Практичні рекомендації включають зміцнення співпраці з роботодавцями, інтеграцію цифрової компетентності, розвиток формульованої та рефлексивної практик, забезпечення гнучких інструментів оцінювання і балансування між відповідальністю та підтримкою. Перспективи подальших досліджень полягають в оцінюванні ефективності цих підходів та їхнього впливу на навчальні результати учнів в українському контексті.

Ключові слова: професійна (професійно-технічна) освіта, педагогічна компетентність, оцінювання професійної діяльності викладача, рамки ЄС, професійний розвиток.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of vocational education and training (VET) is inseparable from the professional competence of its teachers and trainers. Unlike general education, VET requires educators not only to master teaching methods but also to integrate technical expertise, workplace realities, and the development of transversal skills. Across the European Union, improving professional competence has become a central priority in policy agendas, with frameworks such as EQAVET (2024), Cedefop's guidelines (Cedefop, 2023), and DigCompEdu (Redecker, 2017) providing structured approaches for assessment and professional development. These instruments reflect a growing recognition that



effective VET pedagogy is critical to ensuring employability, adaptability, and social inclusion in rapidly changing labour markets.

For Ukraine, which is currently reforming its VET system under conditions of crisis and European integration, the question of how to assess and enhance professional competence is particularly urgent. Ukrainian vocational colleges face the dual challenge of meeting immediate labour-market needs while aligning with European quality standards and preparing learners for long-term economic recovery. Understanding how EU countries design, implement, and refine mechanisms for assessing VET teachers' pedagogical skills offers valuable insights. It highlights both the opportunities and the pitfalls in building a sustainable, evidence-based approach to teacher assessment and professional growth.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This article examines EU-level frameworks and national practices for assessing professional competence in vocational colleges, identifies common methods and persistent challenges, and outlines realistic prospects for Ukraine. By linking European experiences with the specific context of Ukrainian VET reform, the article argues that systematic, outcome-orientated approaches to teacher competence assessment can play a transformative role in strengthening vocational education and supporting the country's integration into the European educational space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

The assessment of professional competence in vocational education and training (VET) is grounded in broader theories of professional competence, quality assurance in education, and lifelong learning. These frameworks provide a conceptual lens for understanding how competence is defined, measured, and enhanced across educational systems.

Professional competence as a multidimensional concept. Professional competence in VET is understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates subject-specific expertise, didactic knowledge, and the ability to adapt teaching to diverse learner needs and workplace contexts. Shulman's notion (1987) of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) underscores that effective teaching arises from blending content mastery with appropriate instructional strategies. In VET, this is further expanded by the dual demands of technical-practical skills and pedagogical flexibility, requiring teachers to act as both educators and workplace mentors (Siliņa-Jasjukeviča et al., 2025).

Competence assessment in the European policy context. At the EU level, competence assessment has been shaped by policies promoting transparency, comparability, and quality assurance across member states (Europass, 2023). The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) defines competence as a learning outcome encompassing knowledge, skills, and responsibility (Council of the European Union, 2017). Based on this, the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) framework sets reference indicators for monitoring and evaluating VET quality, with teacher competence positioned as a critical dimension of institutional effectiveness (EQAVET, 2024). Similarly, Cedefop's analyses emphasise the role of systematic competence development and assessment in supporting professionalisation of VET staff (Cedefop, 2023). These instruments reflect a shift from input-based to outcome-orientated perspectives, where the effectiveness of teaching is evaluated through learner achievement and labour-market relevance.

Lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Another theoretical foundation lies in the lifelong learning paradigm, which positions teacher competence not as a static attribute but as a dynamic process requiring continuous professional development



(CPD) (Merino et al., 2025). Adult learning theories, particularly Knowles' andragogy (1980), highlight the importance of self-assessment, reflection, and experiential learning in professional growth. In the VET context, assessment practices such as portfolios, peer observation, and self-evaluation align with this paradigm, as they promote reflective practice and sustained competence development (Messina Dahlberg & Gustavsson, 2024).

Digitalisation and competence frameworks. The growing importance of digital pedagogy adds another theoretical layer. The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) conceptualises digital competence as integral to effective teaching and learning, especially in blended and work-based environments (Redecker, 2017). Its emphasis on instructional design, digital assessment, and learner engagement highlights how competence assessment must evolve to include digital literacy and innovative pedagogical strategies.

Relevance for Ukraine. For Ukraine, currently aligning its VET system with European standards, these theoretical underpinnings are particularly relevant (Leu-Severynenko, 2022). By embedding competence assessment within quality assurance mechanisms, adopting lifelong learning principles, and recognising digital pedagogy as a core element of competence, Ukraine can design sustainable, outcome-orientated approaches. Such alignment not only ensures compliance with European policy trends but also strengthens the resilience and responsiveness of its VET system in times of economic and social transformation.

Research methods are theoretical and comparative analyses, coupled with induction, deduction, summarisation, and generalisation techniques.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of EU-level frameworks and national practices revealed that the assessment of professional competence in vocational colleges is shaped by both common European reference points and nationally specific approaches. At the EU level, frameworks such as EQAVET (2024), Cedefop's guidelines (2023), and DigCompEdu (Redecker, 2017) provide a shared vocabulary and orientation for evaluating teachers' pedagogical skills. These instruments emphasise quality assurance, continuous professional development, and the integration of digital pedagogy, encouraging countries to move towards more outcome-orientated models of teacher evaluation. For Ukraine, aligning its VET system with these frameworks could provide a coherent reference point for reform while allowing adaptation to local institutional and labour-market conditions.

National practices, however, demonstrate considerable diversity in implementation. In Germany and Austria, assessment is embedded in dual systems, with workplace mentors providing formal feedback that links professional competence to practical industry requirements (Abdeen et al., 2025). This approach highlights the importance of integrating labour-market relevance into teacher assessment, a lesson particularly relevant for Ukraine as it seeks to strengthen connections between vocational colleges and employers. Nordic countries, including Finland and Denmark, emphasise peer observation, collaborative reflection, and trust-based evaluation systems (Urban et al., 2023). Assessment here is framed as a tool for professional growth rather than merely accountability, demonstrating the value of formative, reflective practices. Southern European systems such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy rely more heavily on structured evaluation reports and documentation of professional development, illustrating the risk of overemphasising procedural compliance (Kapeller et al., 2019). Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland and Lithuania, are in transition, adopting EU-level frameworks while contending with resource



limitations and varying institutional capacities (Dawson et al., 2025). These examples collectively suggest that while frameworks provide guidance, Ukraine will need to tailor implementation to its own socio-economic and institutional realities.

Several methods are widely used across the EU, and their practical application provides insights for Ukraine. *Self-assessment* and *competency mapping* enable teachers to compare their skills against competence profiles, fostering reflection and identification of professional development needs (Economou et al., 2024). *Peer* and *external observation*, often structured through standardised protocols, focuses on lesson organisation, learner engagement, and the integration of workplace tasks, frequently followed by mentoring conversations to support growth (Zamiri & Esmacili, 2024). *Professional portfolios*, increasingly digital, compile lesson plans, student work, video recordings, and employer feedback, serving as both evidence for evaluation and tools for reflection (Holtzman et al., 2022). *Learner* and *employer surveys* provide feedback on instructional clarity, content relevance, and graduate preparedness, ensuring that teaching quality aligns with real-world outcomes (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2024). *Digital competence assessments*, ranging from self-reported surveys to performance-based tasks, measure teachers' ability to design, deliver, and assess blended or online learning (Schwarz et al., 2024).

The combination of these approaches ensures a multi-perspective evaluation, enhancing validity and supporting both accountability and professional growth. For Ukraine, adopting such multi-method assessment practices would provide a more nuanced understanding of teacher competence than traditional input-based indicators, such as qualifications or training hours, and would encourage continuous professional development.

Despite these advances, persistent challenges remain across Europe, providing cautionary lessons for Ukraine. Fragmentation of standards is evident, as seen in Italy and Spain, where regional governance leads to uneven application of assessment procedures. Limited resources restrict the capacity for external reviews, particularly in Poland and Romania, highlighting the need for careful planning and institutional support when implementing new assessment systems. Digital readiness gaps in Southern Europe, where teachers often report low confidence in using technology for instruction and assessment, underline the importance of combining competence assessment with training and infrastructure development. Furthermore, overreliance on compliance-based indicators, such as counting CPD hours rather than evaluating demonstrated teaching improvements, remains a common limitation, even in well-resourced countries such as Germany (VETprep Project, 2025). For Ukraine, these examples suggest the importance of balancing accountability with professional growth, ensuring that formative assessment, reflective practice, and digital skills are integral parts of any competence evaluation system.

Taken together, the European experience demonstrates that systematic, outcome-orientated approaches to competence assessment can enhance teaching quality, support professional development, and strengthen alignment with labour-market needs. For Ukraine, implementing a multi-method, reflective, and digitally integrated assessment system would not only modernise vocational colleges but also align them with European standards, improve teacher professionalism, and better prepare learners for evolving labour-market demands.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Therefore, the analysis of EU-level frameworks and national practices highlights that assessing professional competence in vocational colleges is crucial for improving teaching quality, fostering professional development, and ensuring alignment with labour-



market needs. Across Europe, successful approaches combine multi-method assessment, formative evaluation, digital competence development, and workplace relevance, while avoiding overreliance on compliance-based indicators. For Ukraine, these insights provide a roadmap for modernising its VET system and aligning it with European standards, even under the extraordinary challenges posed by wartime conditions.

Practical steps for Ukraine include adopting multi-method assessment approaches that combine self-assessment, peer observation, professional portfolios, and feedback from learners and employers. Such a system provides a comprehensive view of teacher competence and encourages reflective professional growth, moving beyond an exclusive focus on formal qualifications or training hours. Integrating labour-market relevance is equally important: vocational colleges should establish stronger links with employers, engaging industry partners in evaluating teaching practice and student skills to ensure pedagogy remains aligned with workplace demands, even during periods of disruption.

Prioritising digital competence is another key measure. Embedding digital skills into teacher evaluation supports online and blended learning modalities, ensuring continuity of education and wider accessibility for students in affected regions. Strengthening formative and reflective practices through peer mentoring, collaborative reflection, and professional learning communities can be implemented even in resource-constrained or disrupted settings, helping teachers maintain high-quality instruction despite operational challenges. To address wartime realities, assessment tools should be scalable and flexible, functioning effectively in remote or hybrid learning environments. Digital portfolios, online observation protocols, and virtual feedback sessions allow systematic competence assessment to continue even when face-to-face instruction is limited.

Finally, balancing accountability with support is essential. Assessment data should be used to inform targeted professional development and provide practical guidance for teachers working under high-stress or disrupted conditions, rather than focusing solely on formal reporting requirements.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of multi-method teacher assessments, digital competence development, and their impact on student outcomes in Ukraine's VET system, especially under wartime conditions.

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