ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY VALIDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL WORKERS
(leveraging international experience for Ukraine)

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Abstract: *The exchange of knowledge and experiences between nations has become imperative for sustainable development and progress today. Ukraine nowadays seeks to enhance the validation process for professional competencies of educational workers. Drawing upon the practical experiences of countries like China, various European nations, the United States, can offer invaluable insights and strategies to optimise Ukraine's educational system. The article aims to present the experience of different countries that by adopting it for education workers` professional competency validation equips Ukraine with a comprehensive toolkit to address the challenges. In particular, the validation of PR China`s (known for its emphasis on rigorous educational standards and competency validation processes), EU`s (diverse educational systems of UR countries offer a rich tapestry of approaches to competency validation), US (accreditation processes and performance-based assessments), Baltic Countries (progressive education policies and commitment to quality assurance) experience, can not only enhances the quality and innovation within Ukraine's educational system but also positions Ukrainian professionals on the global stage. The article as well pays attention not only to benefits that this or that abroad professional validation systems adoption can give Ukraine nowadays, but also makes prognoses as to its practical possibility and possible difficulties.*

Keywords: *cross-cultural learning, educational workers, international experience, professional competency, validation*

Introduction

In the field of education, ensuring that educational workers possess the requisite competencies is essential for cultivating effective teaching and learning environments. Professional competency validation serves as a systematic process aimed at assessing, acknowledging, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of educational professionals and serves various purposes aimed at

enhancing the quality of education (Sukadari, 2019). Against the backdrop of globalisation and rapid transformations in the educational landscape, Ukraine finds itself at a critical juncture in its pursuit of educational excellence. Enriching professional competency validation for educational workers is imperative to meet the evolving needs of the education sector and ensure the quality of teaching and learning experiences. The aim of the article is to outline the issue of validating the professional competencies of educators in a broad context, highlighting its significance for contemporary Ukraine. Additionally, it aims to examine the approaches and practices employed in other nations, including EU countries, the USA, and the PRC, with a view to identifying tools and methodologies applicable to Ukraine's context. In crafting this article, the authors used the research methods commonly found in compelling works within the realms of comparative pedagogy and educational organisational theory: literature review (to analyse the exemplary practices, obstacles, and gaps in the realm of validating educators' professional qualifications as a scientific category and a practical issue), examples analysing (to understand which abroad qualification validation practices fit Ukraine today), examination of institutional documents (to see the possibilities and potential of abroad practices to be implemented into the educational practice of Ukraine). Furthermore, given that all authors of the article are actively employed within universities and possess experience in both domestic and international educational settings, as well as in collaborating with students and colleagues from abroad within Ukraine, the method of personal experience was also employed to help in assessing the plausibility and validity of approaches and provisions found in contemporary scientific and normative literature, particularly within Ukraine, concerning the validation of professional achievements, particularly among educators. This combination facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the identified issue, thereby positioning the article as a springboard for more extensive investigations into the efficacy of various components of foreign practices in validating professional competencies of educational workers in contemporary and post-conflict Ukraine.

Literature review

In crafting this study, the authors drew upon a variety of literature sources, encompassing scientific articles, online media publications, and data from official national and regional government websites. The scientific research referenced includes works by esteemed authors such as R. Thilakaratne, T. Kvan (2006), Sukadari (2019), M. Strong, G. Burkholder, E. Solberg, A. Stellmack, W. Presson, J. Seitz (2020), N. Schaper (2017), W. Fan, Y. Gao, N. Zhao, Y. Tong (2021), S. Amani, Z. Dolatabadi, T. Bardsiri, M. Nouri, J. Saraji, M. Poursadeqiyan, B. Khedri, A. Mohammadzadehaghdam, Z. Zamani, M. Karimzadeh (2022), along with official guidelines such as "The Guidance and Validation Practitioners'

Competence Profile" (2022) [GVPCP], "The Validation of Competences: The Guidance Process" (2022) [VCGP], and contributions by N. Kiilakosk, T. Basarab (2022), as well as "EU competency framework for the management and implementation of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund: user guidelines for the EU competence framework and self-assessment tool" (2017) [EUCFMI]. This literature was instrumental in providing a comprehensive overview of the issue, detailing the various methods employed in validating the professional competencies of pedagogical workers, which are prevalent across European countries, the United States, and the People's Republic of China. Additionally, insights specific to certain countries' validation practices were gleaned from publications in online media, such as those authored by A. Diaz (2023) for the USA and R. Xu, Y. Yang (2022) for China. Furthermore, valuable data and procedural insights were extracted from official government websites, including the Official site of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science of Ireland [DFHERISI], the Official site of the International Affairs Office U.S. Department of Education [IAOUSDE], the Official site of the People's Government of Shandong Province of the PR China, and the Official site of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States [EPRCUS]. These sources shed light on country-specific validation procedures and governmental approaches to these processes.

Methodology

This article sets out to outline the general features of the existing problem, as well as to present the authors' own considerations regarding the specific issue. To accomplish this, a mixture of empirical and theoretical scientific methods, customary in applied research within pedagogical and humanitarian sciences, was utilised. At the heart of this approach lies the *principle of anticipatory reflection*, which underscores the continued relevance of the challenge concerning the validation of professional competence qualifications for pedagogical workers in Ukraine and aids in forecasting its future significance and priority. Conducting a *literature review* spanning both national and international levels provided the authors with valuable insights into exemplary practices, obstacles, and gaps in the realm of validating educators' professional qualifications. *Analysing examples* from other countries regarding their validation methodologies allowed the authors to draw conclusions regarding the feasibility and potential applicability of such practices in Ukraine, while also pinpointing promising avenues and potential hurdles. Moreover, an *examination of institutional documents* within the education sector, such as reports, guidelines, and materials pertaining to competency confirmation, yielded valuable contextual information regarding the models and principles of validating educators' professional competences practiced in selected countries. By employing a combination of these scientific research

methods, the authors acquired a comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with enhancing the validation of professional competence among educational workers.

Research results

Effective professional competency validation serves as a cornerstone for educational quality assurance, ensuring that educational workers possess the requisite skills, knowledge, and abilities to deliver high-quality instruction. By establishing clear standards and assessment criteria, a country can constantly enhance and guarantee the professionalism and effectiveness of its educational workforce (as the product that these people and the system in general produce), ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and national educational attainment. Professional competency validation in different countries encompasses various methods and tools aimed at assessing the proficiency of educational workers in their respective roles. (Schaper, 2017). It some countries it involves evaluating a range of competencies, including pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, classroom management abilities, communication skills, and the capacity to adapt to diverse learning needs. In other countries the validation processes may include self-assessment, peer evaluations, observations, portfolios, standardised assessments, and professional development activities. The issues, the country pays attention to while establishing a validation system, are quite unique for each country though the aim of this process remains intangible all over the word: to guarantee the appropriate level of the educator and to legalise the professional's documents to make him/her sufficient for the educational work in the particular country with the skills and knowledge gained in the other educational system (with the aims, methods and principles that can change a lot from the ones we have here).

The concept of professional competency validation for educational workers traditionally evolves in response to changing educational paradigms and societal demands at the particular territory in a particular historical moment. Historically, teacher certification and licensure served as the primary means of ensuring educators' competence. However, these traditional approaches have gradually expanded to incorporate more comprehensive and dynamic validation processes. (Amani et al., 2022). In the latter half of the 20th century, with the emergence of competency-based education and outcome-based assessment models, there was a shift toward more explicit and measurable standards for educator competence. This led to the development of competency frameworks and assessment tools tailored to the specific needs and contexts of different educational settings.

Today across European countries there are several kinds of educational workers` (in particular) competence validation procedures that are commonly used and their forms are as follow:

Portfolio Assessment: educational workers compile evidence of their skills, knowledge, and achievements in a portfolio. This evidence may include certificates, performance reviews, and examples of work. The portfolio is then assessed against predetermined criteria. Such procedures are traditionally used in Portugal, Germany, Netherlands and each educational institution is to decide by itself whether they are satisfied with this or that professional competence level or not. This kind of procedure is used mainly for the qualifications and education documents gained abroad. (Thilakaratne & Kvan, 2006). In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia such kind of validation is also used through the state authorities which, by its form, closes it to the below mentioned Assessment Centres` activity;

Peer Review: Colleagues assess an educational worker's competence based on observation, feedback, and discussion. This process often involves structured observation sessions and peer feedback sessions. This type of qualification validation is common for United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden for the qualifications and education documents gained abroad and also popular all over the EU countries for the inner country's education stuff rotation or even inner-institution rotation;

Competency-based Interview: educational workers in Ireland, Spain, France are to participate in interviews where they demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to their role. Interview questions are designed to assess specific competencies required for the job. Usually such interviews are organised by the authorised certification centres which later recommend this or that worker to a particular educational institution for the further job. Such Centres as well have the attorney to certify all the qualification in the sphere of education gained abroad with the analogues typical for the local grade system (DFHERISI, 2022);

Assessment Centres, which are typical for Belgium, Italy, Poland, engage educational workers in a series of tasks, simulations, and exercises designed to assess their competencies in various areas. These may include role-plays, case studies, and group discussions. this procedure, accompanied with the legalised documents from the abroad education institution, gives such Centres an opportunity to provide the candidate with the local documents equal to the qualification gained abroad (Kiilakosk & Basarab, 2022);

Work-Based Assessment: in Denmark, Austria, Greece the professional competence of the candidate is assessed through direct observation of the educational worker's performance in their workplace. This may involve supervisors or mentors evaluating the worker's skills in real-world settings. Thus the professional internship for a candidate gained education or professional skills abroad is completely equal with the local job seekers (VCGP, 2022). This internship is valid for the particular education institute and is not countable while the educator changes the working place. The only difference is in the time needs for the institution to make its decision over the candidate: it can be just 1 presentation lesson or a half year internship. (Strong et al., 2020).

These procedures may vary in their specific implementation and emphasis across different countries in Europe, but they all serve the common goal of ensuring that educational workers possess the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively perform their roles. In recent years, advancements in technology have also influenced the validation of professional competencies, with the integration of digital portfolios, online assessments, and data analytics to streamline the validation process and provide more timely and personalised feedback to educators (EUCFMI, 2017). Quite an interesting form of such a digital validation system for educational workers can be seen in Estonia on the example of Estonian Education Information System (EHIS). For initial validation of qualifications (including those obtained abroad), the candidate must upload a specified package of documents to the system and receive a Certificate, which will give him/her the right to apply to other structures and directly to educational institutions to obtain a job. Usually this Certificate is enough for the education practice in Estonia. However, under certain conditions (for example, the specialty specified in the diploma does not fully correspond to the content of pedagogical activity), the educational institution may assign the candidate additional validation procedures from a separate aspect (competency-based interview or work-based assessment) or contact the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) for further guidance (GVPCP, 2022).

In the United States, professional competence validation procedures for educational workers vary by state and are often overseen by state education departments or specific professional organisations. In California, New York, Texas educational workers must pass standardised exams covering subject matter knowledge and teaching skills. These exams are administered by state education departments or testing agencies (such as California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, New York State Education Department, Texas Education Agency etc.). (Lucas, 2020). Continuing Education and Professional Development programs are seen as a part of professional competence validation system and are compulsory for educators in such states as Ohio (administered by the Ohio Department of Education) and North Carolina (administered by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction). There educational workers are to participate in ongoing professional development activities, workshops, and courses to maintain and enhance their teaching skills and knowledge (IAOUSDE, 2024). Usually the abroad gained qualification educators need (if they want start their educational practice in the US not as a "visiting professor", but as a part of the team) after the educational documents` legalising procedure (a legal procedure goes under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of America) needs to pass both above mentioned procedures to be seen as a qualified professional in the sphere of education in the US. (EPRCUS, 2023). In Georgia and Michigan educational workers are to demonstrate their teaching skills and knowledge to state educational authorities through performance-based

assessments, which may include creating and delivering lesson plans, analysing student data, and reflecting on teaching practice (institutions in charge are Georgia Professional Standards Commission and Michigan Department of Education). Also such validation activities as Practicum or Student Teaching (similar to the EU pedagogical internship or work assess approach), Professional Portfolios and Performance Assessments are widely used all over the US. All the above mentioned procedures and approaches are mainly used for inner country rotation or a part of job seeking for the educators that gained their qualifications and skills abroad (especially in the educational institutions with private form of ownership). (Diaz, 2023)

Recognising the pivotal role of highly qualified teachers in advancing the Chinese state and society, the leadership of the modern People's Republic of China (PRC) has implemented stricter procedures for validating the qualifications of pedagogical workers obtained from foreign educational institutions over the past five years. Notably, only education and qualification documents acquired from state educational institutions are eligible for validation. Documents issued by institutions under different ownership structures, such as private, municipal, or communal, are not considered and are not recognised within the country. This policy extends to educational institutions not included in the Official List of Cooperation Educational Institutions approved by the Ministry of Education of China. (Fan et al., 2021). Educational workers with foreign qualifications must undergo a qualification recognition process to ensure alignment with Chinese standards. This process is primarily managed by the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC) or the China Higher Education Student Information and Career Center (CHESICC). Since 2022, the mandatory document submission package to these bodies includes professionally translated versions into Chinese of 1-3 scientific articles authored by the candidate for the defence of a scientific dissertation abroad. Candidates holding a PhD in pedagogy or educational management may face additional requirements, including the presentation of academic achievements for each semester of study in specialised subjects at the graduate school. This procedure typically involves submitting an official application to the university where the candidate obtained their qualifications, from CHESICC and the foreign university are given a strict three-day window to provide formal responses; failure to do so results in disregarding the application. In cases where doubts persist after initial validation attempts, candidates may be requested to submit a translated portion of their dissertation research for anonymous analysis by leading Chinese experts in the field. These submissions are reviewed anonymously by the scientific committee of a prominent pedagogical university in the People's Republic of China, further ensuring the rigour and integrity of the validation process. (PGSPPRC, 2024).

Educational workers may need to pass teacher certification exams to demonstrate their subject matter knowledge and teaching skills. These exams,

known as Teacher Certification Exams, are commonly administered by provincial or municipal education authorities, such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) or the Provincial Department of Education. This procedure also applies to educators seeking to advance their qualification levels. Interviews and Assessments are typical verification procedures wherein candidates undergo evaluations of their teaching abilities and competencies. These assessments may be conducted by educational institutions, government agencies, or professional organisations. Similarly, Continuing Professional Development programs, organised by educational institutions, government agencies, or professional associations, are undertaken every five years to maintain the educators` proficiency. The Portfolio Review approach, familiar in the EU and US, has evolved into Work Experience Verification in China. Candidates are required to provide evidence of their work experience as educators, including reference letters, employment contracts, and teaching evaluations. (Xu & Yang, 2022). This verification process is typically overseen by educational institutions or government agencies at regional and local levels.

Given recent developments in Ukraine's education sector, particularly the increasing involvement of professionals from diverse backgrounds, there is a pressing need to adapt competency validation mechanisms that are practical, coherent, and equitable. The expanding pool of educational workers mandates robust validation processes to ensure that all individuals engaged in the educational sphere possess the requisite pedagogical skills and competencies. Furthermore, reconciling foreign qualifications, as well as knowledge and skills acquired through online education, non-formal education, and self-education (both within Ukraine and globally), with Ukrainian state standards highlights the importance of establishing transparent and fair validation procedures. By acknowledging and accrediting these qualifications in alignment with Ukrainian standards, Ukraine can capitalise on the expertise and experiences of a new generation of professionals, thus enhancing its education system.

Additionally, coordinating validation procedures for professional and educational qualifications between Ukraine and EU countries, the USA, and other nations will facilitate the integration of specialists, including Ukrainian refugees who currently reside abroad and plan to return to Ukraine after the war with Russia (which began in February 2022) concludes. Many of these individuals acquire education and professional qualifications according to local programs, which may not always align seamlessly with Ukrainian standards. Furthermore, by positioning itself as an international educational hub, Ukraine extends educational services to citizens worldwide. Harmonising norms and standards regarding qualifications obtained in Ukraine, including additional qualifications and those from non-formal education, including within Ukrainian private educational institutions, will greatly simplify validation procedures for such documents and qualifications in students' home countries or elsewhere globally.

This alignment will undoubtedly enhance Ukraine's reputation and increase recognition of its scientific and pedagogical potential on the global stage.

Conclusions

Professional competency validation for educational workers is a multifaceted process aimed at evaluating, acknowledging, and refining the skills and knowledge of educators. It ensures that educators adhere to established standards, facilitating continuous professional development, and upholding accountability and transparency. This validation is instrumental in enhancing the overall quality of education. As educational paradigms evolve, so too must the approaches to professional competency validation, adapting to meet the dynamic needs of learners and society. Enriching professional competency validation for educational workers in Ukraine is paramount for fostering educational excellence and addressing the diverse needs of its evolving education landscape. By leveraging the positive examples set by EU countries, China, and the USA, Ukraine can implement tailored validation mechanisms. Embracing professionals from varied backgrounds and reconciling foreign qualifications will fortify Ukraine's education system, ensuring a brighter future for its students and society at large.

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