EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGIES ENSURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract. This article examines how contemporary teaching methodologies contribute to the formation and growth of professional competence among students of higher and vocational education institutions. The study proceeds from the view that competence is not a sum of isolated knowledge units but an integrated capacity to act effectively in real professional situations. On the basis of theoretical analysis, comparison of pedagogical approaches and generalisation of teaching practice, the author identifies a group of methods that have the strongest potential for building professional competence: problem-based learning, project-based learning, case study, simulation and role-play, cooperative learning, reflective practice and digitally supported blended learning. The paper proposes a set of pedagogical conditions under which these methods become effective, including alignment of learning outcomes with occupational standards, authenticity of learning tasks, systematic feedback and competence-oriented assessment. The findings may be used by university lecturers, curriculum designers and teacher trainers when modernising academic programmes.

Keywords: professional competence, competence-based approach, active learning methods, problem-based learning, project-based learning, case study, reflective practice, pedagogical conditions, higher education.

Introduction

Rapid technological change, the transformation of labour markets and the growing complexity of professional tasks have shifted the priorities of modern education. Employers increasingly expect graduates not merely to reproduce theoretical knowledge but to solve non-standard problems, make responsible decisions, cooperate in teams and continue learning throughout their careers. Consequently, the quality of education is now judged less by the volume of information transmitted to learners and more by the extent to which graduates are ready to perform professional activity independently and competently.

In response to these demands, many national education systems, including that of the Republic of Uzbekistan, have adopted the competence-based approach as a guiding principle for designing curricula, qualification requirements and assessment procedures. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" (2020) and subsequent reforms in higher and vocational education place particular emphasis on the practical orientation of training and on close links between educational institutions and employers. However, the declared transition to competence-based education does not automatically change classroom practice. Where teaching remains predominantly lecture-centred and assessment focuses on recall, students may accumulate knowledge without developing the ability to apply it.

This gap between policy intentions and teaching reality makes the choice of educational methodology a decisive factor. The methods a lecturer selects determine what students actually do during learning, what kind of thinking they practise and what kind of experience they gain. The aim of this article is therefore to identify and justify those teaching methodologies that most effectively ensure the

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development of professional competence, and to describe the pedagogical conditions required for their successful implementation.

Literature Review

The concept of competence has been interpreted in a variety of ways. J. Raven treated competence as a combination of motivational, cognitive and behavioural components that enable a person to pursue valued goals effectively [1]. L. Spencer and S. Spencer, working from the perspective of organisational psychology, linked competence to underlying personal characteristics that are causally related to superior job performance [2]. F. Weinert emphasised that competence includes not only cognitive abilities but also the motivational, volitional and social readiness to use them in changing situations [3]. In post-Soviet pedagogy, I.A. Zimnyaya and A.V. Khutorskoy distinguished between key, general professional and specialised competences and argued that competence manifests itself only through activity [4; 5].

Despite terminological differences, these authors converge on several points that are important for methodology. First, competence is integrative: it unites knowledge, skills, values and personal qualities. Second, it is contextual: it reveals itself in the solution of real tasks. Third, it is developmental: it grows through experience and reflection rather than through memorisation. It follows that competence cannot be "transmitted" by a teacher; it can only be formed through the learner's own purposeful activity in conditions approximating professional reality.

This conclusion is supported by learning theories that underpin active methods. D. Kolb's experiential learning model describes learning as a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation [6]. D. Schön showed that professionals develop expertise through "reflection-in-action", that is, by thinking critically about what they are doing while doing it [7]. J. Biggs introduced the principle of constructive alignment, according to which intended learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment tasks must be consistent with one another [8]. Research on problem-based learning [9], project-based learning [10] and cooperative learning [11] has accumulated considerable evidence that these approaches foster deeper understanding and transferable skills. A large meta-analysis by S. Freeman and colleagues found that active learning improves student performance compared with traditional lecturing [12]. Nevertheless, the literature pays comparatively less attention to how different methods can be combined into a coherent system aimed specifically at professional competence, which is the focus of the present study.

Methodology

The study is theoretical and analytical in nature. It relies on the analysis and synthesis of pedagogical, psychological and methodological literature; comparison of competence-oriented teaching methods by their purpose, structure and expected outcomes; generalisation of the teaching experience of higher education institutions; and pedagogical modelling of conditions for the effective use of the selected methods. Each method was examined against four criteria: (a) the degree of learner activity and autonomy it requires; (b) the authenticity of tasks, i.e. their closeness to real professional situations; (c) the opportunities it creates for collaboration and communication; and (d) the presence of built-in reflection and feedback. Table 1 summarises the results of this comparison.

Table 1. Comparison of educational methodologies by their contribution to professional competence

Methodology	Core learner activity	Competences primarily developed
Problem-based learning	Analysing an ill-structured problem and searching for	Analytical thinking, self-directed learning, decision-

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	solutions	making
Project-based learning	Planning and producing a real or realistic product over time	Planning, teamwork, responsibility, applied knowledge
Case study	Examining an authentic professional situation and justifying actions	Professional judgement, argumentation, contextual analysis
Simulation and role-play	Acting in a modelled professional environment	Practical skills, communication, behaviour under pressure
Cooperative learning	Working in groups with shared goals and individual accountability	Collaboration, leadership, conflict resolution
Reflective practice (portfolio, journals)	Analysing one's own actions and progress	Self-assessment, professional identity, lifelong learning
Blended and digital learning	Combining online resources with face-to-face practice	Digital literacy, autonomy, information management

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis shows that no single method is sufficient to develop professional competence in all its dimensions. Problem-based learning is particularly strong in cultivating analytical thinking and the habit of independent inquiry, because students encounter a problem before receiving ready-made explanations and must determine for themselves what knowledge they lack. Project-based learning extends this process in time and adds the dimension of responsibility for a final product; it teaches students to plan, distribute roles and meet deadlines, which closely mirrors workplace conditions.

The case study method occupies a special place in professional training because it brings authentic situations from practice into the classroom. When students discuss a real case, they learn to weigh alternatives, take into account the interests of different stakeholders and defend their decisions with arguments. Simulations and role-plays go one step further by allowing learners to act, not only to discuss. In medical, pedagogical, legal and engineering education, simulated environments make it possible to rehearse complex procedures safely and to make mistakes without harmful consequences.

Cooperative learning and reflective practice address the social and personal components of competence that are often neglected in traditional instruction. Group work structured around positive interdependence and individual accountability develops communication and leadership skills, while portfolios, learning journals and guided self-assessment help students become aware of their own progress and gradually form a professional identity. Digital and blended formats, in turn, expand the time and space of learning, offer access to up-to-date professional resources and develop the digital literacy that is now part of almost every occupational profile.

The analysis also reveals that the effectiveness of these methods depends less on the method itself than on the conditions of its use. Four pedagogical conditions emerged as essential. The first is alignment: learning outcomes should be formulated in terms of observable professional actions derived from occupational standards, and both teaching activities and assessment must serve these outcomes. The second is authenticity: tasks should be based on real professional problems, ideally developed together

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with employers. The third is systematic feedback: students need regular, specific and timely comments from lecturers, peers and practitioners. The fourth is competence-oriented assessment, which evaluates performance in context through projects, case analyses, practical demonstrations and portfolios rather than relying solely on written tests.

An additional factor is the preparedness of the teaching staff. Active methods require the lecturer to shift from the role of information transmitter to that of facilitator, consultant and organiser of learning. This transition calls for targeted professional development, institutional support and a reasonable reduction in lecture load so that teachers have time to design high-quality tasks. Where these conditions are absent, active methods risk becoming a formal imitation that adds activity to the lesson without deepening learning.

Conclusion

The development of professional competence requires a fundamental reorientation of teaching from the transmission of knowledge to the organisation of meaningful learner activity. The study has shown that problem-based learning, project-based learning, case study, simulation and role-play, cooperative learning, reflective practice and blended learning together form a complementary system: each method strengthens particular components of competence, and their combination covers its cognitive, practical, social and personal dimensions.

The effectiveness of this system depends on clearly defined pedagogical conditions: alignment of outcomes, activities and assessment with professional standards; authenticity of learning tasks; continuous feedback; competence-oriented assessment; and the readiness of teachers to act as facilitators of learning. Future research should focus on empirical verification of the proposed model in specific academic programmes and on developing reliable instruments for measuring the growth of professional competence over the course of study.

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