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THE FACTORS OF THE INTEGRATED COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Abstract

As we study factors affecting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers, we should keep in mind that an educator's expertise is ultimately aimed at improving children's learning and development outcomes while considering every child's potential and limitations in order to avoid overloading the learner. The competency framework for early childhood teachers comprises four components: educators' socio-psychological orientation; core competencies; professionally relevant qualities and abilities; and professionally relevant psycho-physiological characteristics. The purpose of the study was to identify factors promoting or inhibiting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers. To obtain the most complete and reliable information, we not only used practitioners' self-evaluations, but also determined their actual proficiency level using tools such as interviews, examination of performance appraisal records, feedback from peers, children, parents, etc. We proposed indicators to better explore learning sessions characterized by a hands-on, creative approach. In order to ensure higher teaching performance and provide each educator with an environment encouraging creative pursuits and professional development, we recommended that instruction management be informed by assessment results. Based on the obtained data on teachers' challenges, needs and demands, we created an assessment scorecard incorporating all available information about the integrated competency framework.

Keywords: Competency framework, creative practices, educators' satisfaction, early childhood teachers, motive, self-education.

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1. Introduction

As we study factors affecting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers, we should keep in mind that an educator's expertise is ultimately aimed at improving children's learning and development outcomes while respecting principles of learner-centred communication and considering every child's potential and limitations in order to avoid overloading the learner (Dudina & Dolgova, 2016a; Dudina & Dolgova, 2016b; Gampe & Daum, 2018).

Learner-centred communication is an educational interaction that provides a stimulating environment encouraging high motivation, promotes teacher-student cooperation and supports children's creative development (Shiyan & Kokontseva, 2014; Van Reet, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

The competency framework for early childhood teachers comprises four components:

(1) educators' socio-psychological orientation (pedagogical beliefs and attitudes, professional standards, professional interests, professional values and ethics, professional motives, professional demands, etc.);

2) educators' core competencies (teaching, civic and community engagement, workplace activity, children's health and well-being protection, recreation and leisure management);

(3) educators' professionally relevant qualities and abilities (logical reasoning, educational humanism, creativity, internal locus of control, social intelligence, empathy, professional responsibility, pedagogical tactfulness, pedagogical reflection, managerial abilities, etc.);

(4) educators' professionally relevant psycho-physiological characteristics (communicativeness, emotional resilience, extraversion, spatial and temporal awareness, hand-eye coordination, reactivity, high energy, etc.).

Drawing upon the developed competency framework, we can identify professionally relevant personality traits of a modern teacher. These include: extensive knowledge; sensitivity to the needs and capabilities of children; clear speech (articulation); general and specific expertise; an elegant look and expressive body language; ingenuity with regard to tackling problems as they occur and working out solutions; encouraging children to establish good relationships with peers; promoting parent engagement; self-regulation to cope with stressful situations (Kiverstein, 2015).

Professionally relevant personality traits and core competencies of a modern teacher determine which skills are developed by children: the move is from learning seen as a painful experience to learning perceived as an inner need and desire; from linear to hypertext learning; from instruction to construction and discovery; from task completion to independent goal-setting; from learning "by-the-book" to self-selection of knowledge; from external control to individual responsibility and self-development (Batenova, Dolgova, Emelyanova, Volchegorskaya, & Shayakhmetova., 2017; Vyatkin & Dorfman, 2017).

Current occupational standards incorporate knowledge and skill requirements a modern teacher must meet. The requirements can be summarized as follows: cognitivity, mobility, inner motivation, scientific potential; the ability to create a supportive upbringing environment, develop a communicative space and use teaching technologies. A teaching technology refers to a well-ordered and functionally

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structured set of actions, operations and procedures that ensure a specific, measurable output under changing conditions.

The quality of this output depends on another component of early childhood teachers' competency profile — the ability to interact with children and their parents that rests upon learner-centred educational communication.

The learner-centred communication involves three interrelated dimensions: perception (knowledge of the self and the other, behaviour prediction), communication (information transfer, transmission of cultural practices and beliefs, experience presentation, knowledge identification) and interaction (ensuring the greatest possible joint success or a child's individual progress while investing as little effort as possible).

This can be achieved by adopting specific techniques that would enable practitioners to apply a creative approach to teaching and would be beneficial for communication with children and their parents alike: friendliness without overfamiliarity, sincerity without hypocrisy, empowerment without indulgence, request without begging, advice without nagging, prevention rather than intervention, persuasion without coercion, dignity without stiffness, humour without ridicule, constructive criticism without nit-picking, firmness without annoyance, no-nonsense attitude without schoolmarmish tone, etc. (Muravyova, Litvina, & Bogomaz, 2015; Emelyanova et al., 2017; Dolgova, Kutepova, Potapova, Kapitanets, & Kondratieva, 2017).

3. Research Questions

The research questions concern factors promoting or inhibiting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers. These include teachers' systematic training, development and self-education; their motives to engage in creative teaching practices; and satisfaction with their involvement in instructional management activities (Dolgova, Mamylina, Belousova, Melnik, & Arkayeva, 2016; Dolgova, Salamatov, Potapova, Yakovleva, & Yakovlev, 2016).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify factors promoting or inhibiting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers.

5. Research Methods

The study enabled us to propose indicators to better explore learning sessions characterized by a hands-on, creative approach (discussions, role-playing and simulation games of various types, etc.):

1. Delivering meaningful content.
2. Maintaining a strong focus on upbringing and personality development.
3. Encouraging children's thinking.
4. Arranging unsupervised activities to ensure independent comprehension and retention.
5. Illustrating practical relevance of the content.
6. Building general intellectual abilities and practical skills.

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7. Maintaining a strong learning culture.

8. Encouraging a creative approach to assigned tasks.

In order to ensure higher teaching performance and provide each educator with an environment encouraging creative pursuits and professional development, we recommended that instruction management in pre-school setting be informed by assessment results.

Building the instruction management on the base of assessment of teachers' challenges, needs and demands made it possible to:

1. Develop and plan day-to-day operations of the preschool, taking into account the actual challenges educators face in designing and delivering teaching activities.

2. Identify gaps in each educator's theoretical training, explore the reasons that cause them and outline individual corrective actions.

3. Determine key instruction management improvement issues that are of significance to the majority of teaching staff.

4. Ensure systematic reciprocal visiting, instruction guidance and mentoring.

5. Eliminate tick-box culture in teachers' self-education.

We relied upon other authors' assessment guidelines, which enabled us to provide a scientifically-based assessment of teachers' challenges and opportunities using a variety of approaches (Veldman et al., 2013; Tolkacheva et al., 2014).

These guidelines differ in terms of how teachers' performance self-evaluations are done and what kind of information about their professional activity is gathered (professional capacity, proficiency level, skills development level, personality traits, etc.).

To obtain the most complete and reliable information about teachers' challenges and opportunities, we not only used practitioners' self-evaluations, but also determined their actual proficiency level using tools such as interviews, examination of performance appraisal records, feedback from peers, children, parents, etc. Based on the obtained data on teachers' challenges, needs and demands, we created an assessment scorecard that incorporates all available information about the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers.

6. Findings

The study identified factors promoting and inhibiting early childhood teachers' systematic training, development and self-education.

The findings concerning inhibiting factors are presented in Table 1.

Table 01. Early childhood teachers' self-evaluation of factors inhibiting their systematic training, development and self-education (control stage) (%)

	Factors	**Educators**	
		EG	**CG**
1.	Lack of time	26	13
2.	Constrained resources, life circumstances	26	13
3.	Health status	24	1
4.	One's own sluggishness, laziness	10	20

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5.	Lack of objective data on oneself	6	10
6.	Lack of help and support from the principal	4	13
7.	Hostility from others unwilling to accept peers' need to explore new ways of doing things	3	18
8.	Discouragement caused by past failures	1	12

Table 1 indicates that key factors inhibiting systematic training, development and self-education of early childhood teachers in the experimental group (EG) are lack of time, constrained resources and life circumstances, health status, lack of objective data and one's own sluggishness, whereas in the control group (CG) the most commonly reported inhibiting factors were hostility from others, one's own laziness, discouragement caused by past failures, limited resources and lack of help and support from others.

The findings concerning factors promoting teachers' development and self-education are presented in Table 2.

Table 02. Early childhood teachers' self-evaluation of factors promoting their systematic training, development and self-education (control stage) (%)

	Factors	**Educators**	
		EG	**CG**
1.	Effective instruction management in the pre-school	22	15
2.	Interest in new types of activity, conducive working environment, opportunities for innovation	15	8
3.	Engagement in self-education	12	10
4.	Trust/empowerment	10	6
5.	Effective organization of work in the pre-school	8	7
6.	The impact of example and influence of peers	8	7
7.	Passion for work	7	6
8.	Serious attention to the issue on the part of the principal, directors and instruction advisory unit managers	5	6
9.	Opportunity to earn recognition from colleagues	4	2
10.	The impact of example and influence of the principal, directors and instruction advisory unit managers	4	6
11.	A growing sense of responsibility	3	6
12.	Attending training courses	2	21

Table 2 provides the following information:

- Key factors promoting systematic training, development and self-education of teachers in the experimental group are: effective instruction management in the pre-school, interest in new types of activity, opportunities for innovation, conducive working environment, engagement in self-education, empowerment.
- Key factors promoting systematic training, development and self-education of teachers in the control group are: attending training courses, effective instruction management in the pre-school, engagement in self-education and interest in new types of activity.

We now discuss the second research question concerning teachers' motives to engage in creative teaching practices. The findings of this section of the study are summarized in Table 3.

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Table 03. Early childhood teachers' motives to engage in creative practices (%)

	Parameters (motives)	Educators	
		EG	CG
1.	A wish to gain a deeper insight into the topic for further practical research in pre-school settings	30	35
2.	Ambition, the need for self-actualization	30	20
3.	Influence of instruction advisory units	15	25
4.	Influence of the instruction advisory board	15	10
5.	Other motives	10	10

In both groups, the main motive to engage in creative teaching practices is a wish to gain a deeper insight into the topic for further practical research in pre-school settings. Apart from that, educators in the control group more often than those in the experimental group emphasized the role of the pre-school instruction advisory board and instruction advisory units.

We finally address the third research question concerning teachers' satisfaction with their involvement in instructional management. Overall, job satisfaction and passion for work come from professional success. This success, in turn, is achievable when an individual has the necessary knowledge and skills.

Table 4 presents survey findings on satisfaction of teachers in the control and experimental group.

Table 04. Early childhood teachers' satisfaction with their involvement in the pre-school instructional management activities (%)

	Level of satisfaction	Educators	
		EG	CG
1.	Completely satisfied	20	25
2.	Somewhat satisfied	25	25
3.	Don't know	20	20
4.	Somewhat dissatisfied	15	15
5.	Completely dissatisfied	20	15

Note that the highest level of satisfaction was found among educators in the control group. Face-to-face interviews have shown that the level of satisfaction is a measure of intensity of teachers' emotional attitude towards instructional management activities. Although the significance of job satisfaction was highlighted by many other authors (Cruwys et al., 2013; De Simone et al., 2016), the novelty of our examination is that it concerns satisfaction of teachers in a pre-school setting.

7. Conclusion

The study identified factors promoting and inhibiting the integrated competency framework for early childhood teachers. These include teachers' systematic training, development and self-education; their motives to engage in creative teaching practices; and satisfaction with their involvement in instructional management activities.

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