KEY COMPETENCE IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION: ITS PEDAGOGICAL MEANING AND FUNCTIONS

Sharipova Gulnora Anvarjonovna,
Independent researcher, Namangan State Pedagogical Institute;
Lecturer, Tashkent University of Applied Sciences
e-mail: gulnorasharipova2402@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0001-0774-979X

Abstract. *The article examines how the notions of competence and key competence are understood in international research, in policy documents of the European Union, the OECD and UNESCO, and in the education legislation of Uzbekistan. Comparing these sources, we single out six features that recur across approaches and use them to describe the internal structure of key competence as six interrelated components held together by contextual transfer. We also draw a working distinction between competence and competency level, and show how the six key competences of the national model can be observed in the extracurricular activities of pupils in Grades 5 and 6. Our main conclusion is that key competences are best developed together, through meaningful joint activity, rather than one at a time.*

Keywords: *competence, key competence, competency level, competence-based approach, transversal competences, transfer, extracurricular activities, general secondary education.*

UMUMIY O'RTA TA'LIMDA TAYANCH KOMPETENSIYA: UNING PEDAGOGIK MAZMUNI VA FUNKSIYALARI

Annotatsiya*. Maqolada kompetensiya va tayanch kompetensiya tushunchalarining xalqaro ilmiy tadqiqotlarda, Yevropa Ittifoqi, Iqtisodiy hamkorlik va taraqqiyot tashkiloti (OECD) hamda UNESCOning siyosiy-huquqiy hujjatlarida, shuningdek, O'zbekiston ta'lim sohasidagi qonunchiligida qanday talqin etilishi tahlil qilinadi. Mazkur manbalarni qiyosiy o'rganish asosida turli yondashuvlarda takroran uchraydigan oltita xususiyat ajratib ko'rsatiladi hamda ular kontekstual transfer orqali o'zaro bog'langan oltita tarkibiy komponentdan iborat yaxlit tizim sifatida tayanch kompetensiyaning ichki tuzilishini tavsiflash uchun asos qilib olinadi. Shuningdek, kompetensiya va kompetentlik darajasi tushunchalari o'rtasidagi shartli farq aniqlashtiriladi hamda milliy modelda belgilangan oltita tayanch kompetensiyaning 5–6-sinf o'quvchilari sinfdan tashqari faoliyatida qanday namoyon bo'lishi mumkinligi yoritiladi. Tadqiqotning asosiy xulosasi shundan iboratki, tayanch kompetensiyalarni alohida-alohida emas,*

balki mazmunli hamkorlikdagi faoliyat jarayonida o'zaro uyg'unlikda rivojlantirish eng samarali yondashuv hisoblanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *kompetensiya, tayanch kompetensiya, kompetentlik darajasi, kompetensiyaviy yondashuv, transversial kompetensiyalar, transfer, sinfdan tashqari faoliyat, umumiy o'rta ta'lim.*

КЛЮЧЕВАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ В ОБЩЕМ СРЕДНЕМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ: ЕЁ ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ И ФУНКЦИИ

Аннотация*. В статье рассматривается трактовка понятий «компетенция» и «ключевая компетенция» в международных научных исследованиях, политико-стратегических документах Европейского союза, Организации экономического сотрудничества и развития (ОЭСР) и ЮНЕСКО, а также в законодательстве Республики Узбекистан в сфере образования. На основе сравнительного анализа данных источников выделяются шесть характеристик, повторяющихся в различных подходах, которые используются для описания внутренней структуры ключевой компетенции как целостной системы из шести взаимосвязанных компонентов, объединённых контекстуальным переносом. Кроме того, проводится условное разграничение понятий «компетенция» и «уровень компетентности», а также раскрываются способы проявления шести ключевых компетенций национальной модели во внеурочной деятельности учащихся 5–6-х классов. Основной вывод исследования заключается в том, что наиболее эффективно ключевые компетенции развиваются не изолированно друг от друга, а во взаимосвязи, в процессе содержательной совместной деятельности.*

Ключевые слова*: компетенция, ключевая компетенция, уровень компетентности, компетентностный подход, трансверсальные компетенции, перенос, внеурочная деятельность, общее среднее образование.*

INTRODUCTION

When the term competence entered pedagogy, it brought with it a change in how learning outcomes are judged. The question was no longer only how much a pupil knows, but whether the pupil can use that knowledge in real situations. Yet the term itself has never been given a definition that all scholars accept. Tahirsylaj and Sundberg reviewed 84 studies published between 1997 and 2017 and described the task of defining competences for twenty-first-century curricula as "unfinished business" [1].

Part of the difficulty is that competence is used to mean several different things at once. Depending on the author, it may refer to a personal quality, a learning outcome,

readiness to act, the act of drawing on one's resources in a given situation, or the result of that act. For schools, and for extracurricular work in particular, teachers need a working interpretation that is both theoretically sound and usable in practice.

In this article we aim to clarify what key competence means pedagogically and what role it plays in general secondary education, taking extracurricular activities in Grades 5 and 6 as our example. We compare the main theoretical approaches to competence, propose a description of its internal structure, distinguish competence from competency level, and examine how the national set of key competences appears in extracurricular work.

METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical. We used comparative analysis of the literature, analysis of legal and policy documents, generalisation and conceptual modelling. The literature consisted of articles from peer-reviewed journals (Curriculum Perspectives, Journal of Curriculum Studies, Human Resource Development International and Education + Training) together with documents issued by the Council of the European Union, the OECD and UNESCO. Uzbek legislation was consulted in its current wording in the National Database of Legislation (lex.uz).

RESULTS

1. Recurring features of the competence concept

Westera was among the first to point out that the word competence is used so loosely in education that it causes real confusion. He argued that if competence is not understood as the effective use of knowledge and skills in a particular context, it adds nothing to the ordinary idea of a skill [2]. For our purposes, this gives a useful first criterion: competence is about performing well in a concrete situation, not about possessing knowledge as such.

Delamare Le Deist and Winterton compared how competence is understood in the USA, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. They found that single-dimension models were giving way to multidimensional ones and proposed a holistic typology that combines cognitive, functional and behavioural (social) elements [3]. One consequence is that a competence cannot be reduced to a list of separate items of knowledge and skill; what matters is how these are combined to meet the demands of a task.

A much larger picture of the field is offered by Mannonen and colleagues, who mapped 14,546 studies on competence using direct citation network analysis. They describe competence research as broad and fragmented and identify four main traditions in it: healthcare education, general education, language and intercultural education, and developmental and educational psychology. In their review of definitions, competence is

usually seen as made up of integrated components, typically knowledge, skills and attitudes, with some authors adding values, motivation and emotions. They also note that one of the central questions for the field is how learners apply what they have learned outside educational settings [4].

Policy documents point in the same direction. The 2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning defines competences as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It describes key competences as those everyone needs for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, a sustainable lifestyle, a successful life in peaceful societies and active citizenship. These competences are developed throughout life, in families, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods, through formal, non-formal and informal learning, and they overlap and interlock rather than standing apart [5].

The OECD Learning Compass 2030 treats competency as a holistic concept that includes knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The compass image was chosen to stress that students must learn to find their own way in unfamiliar contexts. In this view the student is not someone who waits for instructions but someone who makes choices, takes decisions and accepts responsibility for them [6].

Table 1 summarises what each of these sources contributes and how we use it in the present study.

Table 1

Recurring features of the competence concept and their use in this study

Source or approach	Main feature of competence	How it is used in this study
Westera [2]	Effective use of knowledge and skills in a specific situation; need for clearer terminology	Competence is not treated as a synonym for skill
Delamare Le Deist and Winterton [3]	Integration of cognitive, functional and behavioural dimensions	Key competence is described as a multicomponent system
European Union [5]	Knowledge, skills and attitudes; development in formal, non-formal and informal settings	Extracurricular activity is treated as a legitimate setting for developing competences

Source or approach	Main feature of competence	How it is used in this study
OECD Learning Compass 2030 [6]	Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; student agency and responsibility	The pupil is seen as an active participant, not a passive recipient
Mannonen et al. [4]	Several integrated components; application of learning beyond school	Transfer and context are built into the model
National model of Uzbekistan [8; 9]	Communicative, information, self-development, civic, national-cultural and mathematical-scientific domains	Gives the competences their national, moral and practical content

2. Why key competences are transversal

The word key matters here. Key competences are not tied to any one school subject. They are general intellectual, communicative, social and self-management resources that pupils draw on again and again in different kinds of activity. The European framework speaks of competences that overlap [5], and the OECD framework of competences that are mobilised in new and unfamiliar situations [6]; both describe the same transversal quality.

This does not make key competences abstract or detached from subject learning. They grow out of concrete experience: studying subjects, working with classmates, looking for and using information, carrying out projects, solving problems and taking part in community initiatives. The third phase of the ERI-Net regional study, coordinated by UNESCO Bangkok, likewise concentrated on how transversal competences can be built into everyday teaching and learning and how teachers can be prepared for this [7].

3. The internal structure of key competence

Two levels of classification are often confused in the literature. One is the type of key competence, for example communicative competence or competence in working with information. The other is the set of components inside each competence. Mixing the two makes assessment very difficult. Since a multicomponent structure is one of the most consistent findings in international research [3; 4], we describe each key competence in terms of six related components.

The cognitive component concerns understanding a situation, seeing what the problem is and recalling the relevant concepts, rules and principles. Knowledge is not the competence itself, but no competence exists without it; the competence-based approach changes the role of knowledge, turning it into a tool for action, rather than discarding it [6]. The operational component covers planning and carrying out practical actions: searching for information, solving a problem, calculating, presenting, or taking on a role in group work. It corresponds closely to the functional dimension described by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton [3].

The motivational component reflects whether the pupil actually wants to take part, accepts the goal and sees the task through. Being able to do something and choosing to do it on one's own initiative are different things. The value component gives the activity its ethical, cultural and social direction, including respect for national and universal values [6; 9]. The social-communicative component covers cooperation, expressing one's ideas clearly, listening to others and handling disagreement constructively; the European framework lists communication, teamwork and critical thinking among the skills that run through all key competences [5]. Finally, the reflective component allows pupils to look back at what they did, how they did it and what they would change. The "learning to learn" element of the European framework rests on the same mechanism [5].

What ties these components together is transfer. We prefer not to treat it as a seventh component. If a pupil can perform an action only in the situation where it was practised, the competence is still limited. It shows itself fully when the pupil can choose suitable knowledge and ways of acting in a new, partly unfamiliar situation that resembles real life [4].

The process can be pictured as a cycle: knowledge and experience, understanding the situation, forming a goal and motive, choosing and using resources, acting alone or with others, obtaining a result, reflecting on it, and then carrying the experience into a new situation. Seen this way, competence is not something achieved once and for all. A single correct performance does not prove that a competence has been formed; we can speak of a developed competence only when it appears repeatedly, with growing independence, and in changing conditions.

4. Competence and competency level

The English terms competence and competency are themselves used differently in different traditions [3], so a universal boundary between them is hard to draw. For the sake of consistency, in this study competence means an integrative ability, or area of activity, that schooling sets out to develop. Competency level (Uzbek: kompetentlik) means the extent to which that competence has actually developed in a given pupil.

Communicative competence, for instance, involves starting a conversation, expressing ideas, listening and cooperating. When a particular Grade 5 pupil defends her opinion in a group project, agrees on roles with her classmates and helps settle a disagreement, we observe her individual competency level. We do not offer this as a general definition; it is a working position that will guide the choice of criteria, indicators and levels in later stages of the research.

5. The national model and extracurricular activities

In Uzbekistan, the competence-based approach was introduced widely into general secondary education through the state educational standards approved by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 187 of 6 April 2017. In their original version the standards named six key competences: communicative competence; competence in working with information; self-development competence; socially active civic competence; national and general cultural competence; and mathematical literacy together with awareness and use of scientific and technological advances [8].

The resolution has since been amended several times, and its Annexes 1 to 3 were repealed by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 345 of 3 June 2021 [8]. We therefore treat the six domains not as the current official list but as the conceptual framework through which the competence-based approach became established in Uzbek schools. Table 2 shows what each domain means and how it can be seen in the extracurricular activities of Grade 5 and 6 pupils.

Table 2

Key competences in extracurricular activities

Key competence	Pedagogical meaning	Examples in Grade 5–6 extracurricular activities
Communicative	Expressing ideas, understanding others, adjusting to the situation, cooperating	Discussions, debate elements, group projects, quizzes, staging a play, planning a school event as a team
Working with information	Finding, selecting, checking, processing and responsibly using information	Library and internet research, choosing data for a project, comparing sources, making a media product

Key competence	Pedagogical meaning	Examples in Grade 5–6 extracurricular activities
Self-development	Setting goals, managing one's own work, learning independently, self-assessment	Personal plans, portfolios, reflective diaries, individual goals in a club, assessing one's own results
Socially active citizenship	Taking part in community life, understanding rights and duties, responsible initiative	Class or school projects, environmental campaigns, volunteering, proposing solutions to school problems
National and general cultural	Respect for national and universal values, cultural identity, tolerance	Studying historical monuments, creative evenings, museum visits, heritage projects
Mathematical, scientific and technical	Logical reasoning, calculation, using models and data, practical understanding of scientific phenomena	STEM projects, experiments, design tasks, calculating an event budget, reading charts and statistics

As Table 2 suggests, a well-planned extracurricular project rarely involves just one competence. Take a project called "Less Waste at Our School". Pupils look for information on the topic, calculate how much waste the school produces and draw a chart, work in groups and present their findings, take a position on an environmental problem, and finally discuss what went well and what did not. In a single project they use information, mathematical, communicative, civic and self-development competences. This kind of overlap is exactly what the European framework describes [5].

DISCUSSION

Our analysis suggests that key competences should be developed together rather than in isolation. A teacher who plans a session around one competence only ("today we work on communication") is likely to achieve less than one who puts pupils in a meaningful situation where several competences are needed at the same time. This agrees with the broader shift in OECD and UNESCO documents away from simply passing on content and towards preparing pupils who can act in real contexts [6; 7].

At the same time, the Uzbek model is not a copy of international frameworks. National and general cultural competence is singled out as a separate domain, which

reflects the cultural context of the country's education system. The Law "On Education" lists the integration of national and universal values into education and upbringing among its basic principles [9], which gives this domain additional weight. In our view, key competences in the national model combine two things: universal abilities such as communication, working with information, problem solving and independent learning, and content rooted in national culture, civic responsibility and the moral expectations of society.

The study has clear limitations. It is theoretical, and the component structure and the cycle described above still need to be tested empirically with Grade 5 and 6 pupils. Statements about the current educational standards and curricula should also be checked against their latest versions before they are used in practice.

CONCLUSION

There is still no single accepted definition of competence, but international approaches agree on several points: competence has several components, it shows itself in effective action in context, and it must be transferable beyond the classroom. Key competence is cross-curricular by nature. We have described it through six components (cognitive, operational, motivational, value, social-communicative and reflective) linked by transfer.

Separating competence, as an aim of schooling, from competency level, as what a particular pupil has actually achieved, provides a basis for developing diagnostic criteria and indicators. Extracurricular activity offers good conditions for developing several key competences at once, since a single project can draw on many of them. Finally, the national model shows that key competences can be both universal and grounded in a specific cultural context.

REFERENCES

1. Tahirsylaj A., Sundberg D. The unfinished business of defining competences for 21st century curricula — a systematic research review // Curriculum Perspectives. 2020. Vol. 40, No. 2. P. 131–145. DOI: 10.1007/s41297-020-00112-6. URL: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41297-020-00112-6

2. Westera W. Competences in education: a confusion of tongues // Journal of Curriculum Studies. 2001. Vol. 33, No. 1. P. 75–88. DOI: 10.1080/00220270120625. URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270120625

3. Le Deist F.D., Winterton J. What is competence? // Human Resource Development International. 2005. Vol. 8, No. 1. P. 27–46. DOI: 10.1080/1367886042000338227. URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/1367886042000338227

4. Mannonen J., Hooshyar D., Urrutia F., Hämäläinen R., Araya R., Lehesvuori S. The concept of competence in educational research: a knowledge map of main research traditions and topics // Education + Training. 2025. Vol. 67, No. 10. P. 132–149. DOI: 10.1108/ET-02-2024-0070. URL: https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2024-0070

5. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (2018/C 189/01) // Official Journal of the European Union. 2018. C 189. P. 1–13. URL: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)

6. OECD. OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. Concept note: OECD Learning Compass 2030. Paris: OECD, 2019. URL: https://search.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_concept_note.pdf

7. UNESCO Bangkok. 2015 ERI-Net Regional Study on Transversal Competencies in Education Policy and Practice (Phase III): Preparing and Supporting Teachers in the Asia-Pacific to Meet the Challenges of Twenty-First Century Learning. Regional synthesis report. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2016. 99 p. ISBN 978-92-9223-570-3. URL: https://iiep-lib.gn.apc.org/node/55206

8. Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Resolution No. 187 of 6 April 2017 "On approval of the state educational standards of general secondary and secondary specialized education" (as amended). URL: https://lex.uz/docs/-3153714

9. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ZRU-637 of 23 September 2020 "On Education". URL: https://lex.uz/docs/-5013007