

CHALLENGES IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SERVANTS AMID NEW REALITIES IN ADULT EDUCATION: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMPETENCE AND SYSTEM APPROACHES

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Abstract. *The article examines the multifaceted problems faced by public servants in their professional development within the dynamic conditions of adult education's new challenges within the conceptualisation of competence and the need for system approaches. The challenges in the professional development of public servants in the context of adult education necessitate a reimagining of competence and the adoption of system approaches. Conceptualising competence in a multidimensional way, including digital and interdisciplinary dimensions, is essential. System approaches that integrate training programs, promote continuous learning, coordinate government-wide efforts, and include diverse stakeholders offer a comprehensive solution to address the complex challenges faced by public servants in the contemporary landscape of adult education. By embracing these approaches, public sector organisations can ensure that their workforce is well-equipped to navigate the evolving demands of governance effectively. As practical material for the study, the authors of the article used theoretical and practical experience in training civil servants in Ukraine and the PR China (in particular, the experience of training management personnel in these countries both in the field of formal and non-formal education, as well as the very concept of “managing personnel”).*

Keywords: *civil servants, education management, local officials, officials' professional training in PR China, officials' professional training in Ukraine, professional development, professional training of officials.*

Introduction

Recent few years have become turbulent for European countries and the world in general. In 2015, with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (What are the Sustainable Development Goals, 2024) as a basic strategy for the development of humanity, it seemed that the main vector was defined and the only thing we needed was to consistently follow it. The global challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic forced societies around the world to review their development strategies. The changes in strategies affected not only health care systems, but education as well. The Pandemic and strict total restrictions that were associated with the policy of “0 tolerance to the disease and the strategy for developing general immunity” (Martins, Carlos, & etc., 2019) made the countries to revise approaches to such fundamental social phenomena as social management, human rights and education (Kalashnyk, Krasivskyy, 2020). At all levels of lifelong education, teachers, employers, and managers were forced to rethink not only the form of education (as the distance education became dominant and the only opportunity available), but also the content of it, widen (to narrow) the content and set of competencies necessary for lifelong education (Ji, Kalashnyk & etc., 2021). Another challenge for the European region was the war in Ukraine, which started with the Russian invasion in February 2022. From the point of view of education management and lifelong education, it became a real test for the education systems of different countries, involved in the refugee programs for the Ukrainians. It has become necessary for European countries (in the majority) in a short period of time not only to integrate a large number of students of various ages into the school and higher education systems, but also to relearn and adapt several million adults: a new language, new professional competences within the limits of existing qualifications, obtaining a new professional qualification etc. (over 4.2 million people from Ukraine benefit from the temporary protection mechanism. Data up to November 2023 (Infographics - Refugees from Ukraine in the EU, 2024)). The existing challenges highlighted the varied strategies employed in training specialists across different countries and underscored the challenges in decision-making for management. Officials from various nations found it challenging to devise a coherent policy for adult education during times of crisis. They discovered the need to navigate and overcome these hurdles while also reconciling divergent educational paradigms prevalent in different countries. Consequently, the authors of the article advocate for considering two distinct approaches to training, especially for officials, that are demonstrated in different countries: competency-based and systemic (alternatively termed systemic-institutional based on specific characteristics).

The purpose of the article is to compare the systems of professional development in Ukraine and the People's Republic of China, to determine the components of the systems that allow for the development of officials.

The goals of the article were achieved thanks to research methods: analysis (to determine the initial provisions of the professional development systems of officials), comparison and research of legislation (to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the professional development systems in Ukraine and the PRC), forecasting and modeling methods (to determine the possibilities of implementing foreign experience).

The similarities and contradictions of the systems of increasing the level of professional competence of the People's Republic of China and Ukraine can be characterized from several key positions. China and Ukraine in the modern world are each unique in their own way. The PRC is one of the most powerful economies in the world, which is developing very quickly, and this is facilitated, in particular, by the public administration system of this country. Ukraine is in a military conflict and at the same time trying to ensure the efficiency of state administration. A comparison of professional development systems on the example of education throughout the life of officials can help determine how public servants in the two countries adapt to effective administrative management.

Literature review

Scientific publications reflecting general trends in the use of systematic and competency-based approaches to civil servant training within the concept of "Adult Education" were utilized for this research. These publications are referenced as positions (Ji, F. and et... 2021; Kalashnyk, N.,2020 ; Seryogin, S., 2013; The CAG Global..2022; What are the Sustainable...2024) in the current article's Reference List. Additionally, works were consulted to understand the application of these approaches in the contexts of Ukraine and China, along with historical perspectives. For Ukraine, relevant positions in the Reference List are (Ji, F. and et... 2021; Kalashnyk, N.,2020; On the approval...2019), while for China, positions (Jing, Y., 2016; Meriade, L., 2015; Sun, Zh., 2013; Wang, LL.,2019; Yang, K., ...2012) were consulted. In addition to scholarly literature, documents and regulations at the national level were examined to validate the authors' assumptions regarding the current state of the investigated problem. Official websites of key institutions such as the National Civil Service Administration of the PR China, European Council, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service, PKU Research Center for Chinese Politics (RCCP), and Chandler Institute of Governance were accessed for this purpose. These sources provided valuable insights into policy frameworks, legislative measures, and institutional practices related to civil servant training and development in both Ukraine and China.

Methodology

Writing an article, the authors involved scientific methods commonly used in educational research and related fields. In particular, *the Literature Review method* lets the authors set the actual picture of existing approaches on adult education, professional development, competency-based education, and systemic approaches to understand the current state of knowledge, identify gaps in research, and build a theoretical framework for the article. Using the *Case Studies method* real-world cases of professional development programs for public servants in different countries (such as Ukraine and China) were analysed to provide rich, contextualised data that can illustrate the challenges and successes of implementing competency-based and systemic approaches. The *Document Analysis method* contributed a lot to the analysis of state policy documents, training materials, and other relevant documents and helped to understand the official discourse and practices surrounding professional development in public service in countries under consideration as well as helped uncover implicit assumptions, contradictions, and barriers to implementation. Under the *Comparative Analysis method* were analysed different approaches to professional development in public service across countries and highlighted variations in policy frameworks, cultural contexts, and institutional structures that influence the adoption and effectiveness of competency-based and systemic approaches in different countries. Since the authors of the article are educators actively engaged in lifelong education programs and the training of state servants in their respective countries, encompassing both the theoretical development of such programs and instructing this distinct student demographic, they employed the *Action Research method*. This approach involves showcasing the theoretical provisions based on the outcomes of the authors' hands-on collaboration with public servants and educational institutions to conceive, execute, and assess inventive professional development initiatives. By employing these scientific methods, the authors of the article tried to rigorously investigate the challenges and opportunities in the professional development of public servants amid new realities in adult education, and contribute their insights to the field.

Research results

The landscape of adult education is rapidly evolving, driven by technological advancements, socio-cultural shifts, and global interconnectedness. Within this context, the professional development of public servants assumes paramount importance, as they navigate complex challenges while fulfilling their duties to serve the public interest. China and Ukraine, despite their geographical and cultural differences, both face challenges and

opportunities in this regard. Both countries represent contrasting approaches to professional development in public service. China's centralised system emphasises top-down training programs and standardised assessments, focusing on technical skills and ideological education. In contrast, Ukraine has experienced decentralisation efforts aimed at empowering local governments and fostering innovation in public administration. Ukrainian approaches prioritise flexibility, adaptability, and democratic values in professional development initiatives.

In Ukrainian academic circles, there has been a prevailing notion for some time that "professional development involves nurturing qualities, specialized knowledge, abilities, and skills among civil servants crucial for the effective execution of their official functions, rights, and duties" (Seryogin, Borodin, Lipovska, 2013). However, in 2017, the adoption of the "Concept of reforming the system of professional training of civil servants, heads of local state administrations, their first deputies and deputies, officials of local self-government and deputies of local councils" marked a significant shift. This transition marked a move away from the systemic (systemic-institutional) concept towards a competence-based approach.

According to the new requirements outlined in the reform concept, the system of professional training for public servants is now viewed as a combination of training subsystems, specialisation, and advanced training for officials. It is perceived as a comprehensive set of interconnected components, which include:

- Identification of professional training needs
- Establishment, allocation, and execution of a state order
- Encouragement of motivation to enhance professional competence
- Maintenance and development of the educational services market in professional training
- Monitoring and assessment of education quality (On the approval of the Regulation ..., 2024).

While remnants of the systemic-institutional concept persist within the system, the dominance of the competence-based approach is evident.

In 2019, a significant advancement occurred with the normative regulation of the structure and components of the professional training system for public servants. During this period, several guiding principles were officially endorsed, including mandatory and continuous professional training throughout public service tenure, ensuring the quality of education and educational activities, individualisation and differentiation of learning approaches, promoting openness and academic integrity, and facilitating access to educational services within the individual's place of residence and service (Methodological recommendations, 2024). This marked a pivotal moment as the system of professional development began to offer opportunities for personalised learning

experiences, thus solidifying the conceptualisation of the competence approach within the Ukrainian framework of adult education for public servants.

However, it's important to note that this transition didn't entirely discard the institutional aspect of the professional development system for public servants. Between 2019 and 2022, higher education institutions underwent restructuring, previously solely responsible for training and retraining public servants, integrating into other higher education entities. Presently, the institutional framework of the professional training system for officials in Ukraine comprises:

- customers of educational services in professional training
- entities providing educational services in professional training (providers)
- self-regulatory professional associations (professional associations, professional networks) representing entities providing educational services in professional training (providers) (Methodological recommendations, 2024;).

The above mentioned issues indicate that the educational services market within this field in Ukraine is now highly democratised and competitive. Institutions of higher education vie for prominence through their educational programs in public administration, specialised areas, provision of professional development services, and scientific programs.

China's rise as a global economic powerhouse has been accompanied by a determined endeavour to fortify its public service sector. At the core of this initiative lies the adoption of a system approach in professional development, which underscores the broader institutional landscape within which public servants function. The roots of this approach can be traced back to China's socialist governance framework and entrenched bureaucratic traditions. Since the inception of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government has placed significant emphasis on constructing a centralised administrative system capable of effectively implementing socialist policies and programs. This approach has prioritised hierarchical structures, standardised procedures, and adherence to ideological principles within the public service sector (Yang, Wu, Xu, Chen, 2012). From the earliest years of the country's existence and up to the 1980s, China embarked on extensive administrative reforms necessitated by the tumultuous events that had shaken its centralised governance and management system. The collapse of the Imperial Qin Dynasty's centralised system during the latter half of the 19th century, exacerbated by the aftermath of the Opium Wars, and the subsequent turmoil during the years of the Civil War (1927-1949), underscored the imperative for reform. These reforms have been chiefly focused on streamlining bureaucratic procedures, decentralising decision-making authority, and advancing accountability and transparency in public administration. Following the reforms

of 1985, the government's efforts have been directed towards the modernisation of the state management sphere. For instance, the State Council's reform initiatives initiated in 1991 have led to the establishment of pilot administrative service centres across various provinces and municipalities. These centres offer integrated services to citizens and businesses, marking a significant step towards enhancing administrative efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of the populace (Jing, 2016).

The implementation of performance management systems exemplifies the system approach within China's professional development landscape, serving as a cornerstone for enhancing organisational effectiveness, boosting employee motivation, and improving governance performance in contemporary China. This approach is evident across various institutions in the state, government, and public sectors. State institutions, such as the State Administration of Civil Service (SACS) and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, play pivotal roles in shaping and standardising performance management practices. SACS oversees the National Civil Service Performance Appraisal System, evaluating civil servants' performance at all government levels, while the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security develops and standardised performance management practices, offering guidelines and training programs to ensure consistency and effectiveness in performance evaluations. Local government initiatives, such as the Guangdong Civil Servant Performance Appraisal System and the Beijing Municipal Civil Servant Performance Appraisal System, align civil servants' performance evaluations with key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to the province's or city's development objectives. These assessments focus on areas like service quality, innovation, and leadership, bolstering organisational effectiveness and service delivery.

Public sector enterprises also contribute significantly to the adoption and integration of performance management systems, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. For example, China Mobile, a global telecommunications giant, implements performance management systems to optimize operational efficiency and enhance customer satisfaction. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) as well employs performance management systems to evaluate employee performance across its diverse business operations, aiming for operational excellence and competitiveness within the energy sector (In-depth analysis ..., 2022). The Chinese state government system sees system approach to professional development in the country as a quiet perspective one as it not only enhances an organisation's effectiveness but also promotes accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement, aligning with China's broader goals of sustainable development and global leadership (Civil Service Training Regulations, 2020).

The adoption of the competence approach in China's professional development can be traced back to the late 20th century. Following the

economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, China embarked on a path of modernisation and globalisation, necessitating a skilled and adaptable workforce. In response, the Chinese government began to prioritise competency-based training programs aimed at enhancing the capabilities of public servants to meet the challenges of economic restructuring, urbanisation, and social transformation (Meriade, Li, 2015). The practical examples of competence approach to the in professional development of public servants in China implementation can be seen in:

- Establishing *specialised training programs* targeting key sectors such as finance, technology, and public administration. These programs provide public servants with targeted skill development opportunities tailored to the specific needs of their roles. For example, the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP; Shanghai) offers training programs focusing on leadership, innovation, and governance for senior officials from across the country;
- Implementing competency assessment and certification mechanisms to evaluate the proficiency of public servants in key areas. The National Civil Service Examination (NCSE) assesses candidates' competencies in areas such as policy analysis, decision-making, and communication skills. Successful candidates receive certification, enhancing their career prospects and contributing to a merit-based public service system;
- The competence approach in China extends beyond traditional public sector boundaries to foster collaboration between government, academia, and industry. Initiatives such as the National Key Laboratories and Joint Research Centers (started as state start-up programs in 2017) bring together public servants, researchers, and industry experts to address complex challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration. This approach promotes knowledge exchange, innovation, and skill development across sectors, enhancing the overall effectiveness of public service delivery;
- Priority of lifelong learning initiatives to ensure continuous professional development among public servants. Programs such as the National School of Administration's Executive Education Program (offered by Tianjin and Shanghai High courses for state servants and management personnel) offer opportunities for mid-career officials to enhance their skills and knowledge through short-term training courses, seminars, and workshops. These initiatives promote a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, enabling public servants to stay abreast of emerging trends and best practices (Wang, 2019; Training methods ..., 2021).

The competence approach has emerged as a cornerstone of professional development for public servants in China, reflecting the country's commitment to building a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of addressing complex governance challenges. Through specialised training programs, competency assessment mechanisms, cross-sectoral collaboration, and lifelong learning initiatives, China is equipping its public servants with the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to navigate the complexities of modern governance effectively (Sun, 2013). As China continues to prioritise capacity building and innovation in public administration, the competence approach will remain central to its efforts to achieve sustainable development, social cohesion, and global leadership.

Despite their differences, China and Ukraine share common challenges in professional development, including adapting to rapid technological changes, promoting ethical governance, and addressing socio-economic disparities. By studying how each country navigates these challenges, policymakers and educators can gain new perspectives and identify best practices that can be adapted to their own contexts. As both countries seek to modernise their governance systems and enhance public service delivery, adopting a global perspective is essential for staying abreast of international developments. By examining how China and Ukraine respond to new realities in adult education, policymakers and educators can identify emerging practices and technologies that have global relevance and applicability.

Conclusions

In the modern context, the professional development of public servants within the dynamic landscape of adult education carries a multifaceted significance. Firstly, it necessitates a response to the swift pace of technological advancements, socio-cultural shifts, globalisation, and international collaboration. Public servants are challenged to acquire and adapt to new tools and technologies, enhancing their performance in this rapidly evolving environment. In addressing these challenges, the competency approach emerges as particularly advantageous, emphasising individual skill development and adaptability. Conversely, a host of issues stemming from political and legal transformations, risk management challenges, and ethical considerations, including anti-corruption efforts, are better addressed through a systemic approach to professional development. This approach considers the interconnectedness of organisational dynamics and external influences, providing a comprehensive framework for tackling complex issues within the public service sector.

The authors note a positive trend towards departing from rigidly defined concepts of official training, favouring instead the integration of diverse

approaches traditionally employed in adult education. This integrated approach recognises the importance of both individual competencies and systemic factors in shaping public service practice. By combining targeted skill development with a nuanced understanding of organisational dynamics and external influences, public servants can effectively navigate the diverse challenges of their profession. By embracing both the competency and systemic approaches, policymakers, educators, and practitioners can develop holistic professional development initiatives that empower public servants to excel in their roles and meet the evolving needs of society.

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