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**COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Theoretical substantiation of the content of *competency-based approach* has been under fierce debate recently. Being aware of the topical significance of this issue, we will attempt to make a contribution to this discussion.

In the research into the problem, there is no accepted view as for the nature of this notion. As the first step, it is necessary to determine the factors stimulating the appearance of this new category – competency-based approach. The world of today changes faster than it did ever before. General civilizational tendencies influence all spheres of individuals and society's activity. Among such trends V. H. Kremen' distinguishes globalization and transition from industrial technology to scientific and information one, in the context of which competitiveness and rivalry between countries becomes global, and the development of the personality turns into an indicator of each country's level of progress [12, p. 3].

Transformation processes, especially in the educational sphere (rapid progress, collapse of certain states and changes in the geopolitical map of the world, scientific inventions and their implementation), have had an impact on the requirements that are now put forward to education [17, p. 6]. Presently, education has to develop young people's ability to use new technology and knowledge, process and control information, act and make decisions quickly; it should teach them how to change and adapt to the demand of the new labor market and encourage lifelong learning. Ukraine is a European country and cannot avoid the influence of these processes [17, p. 6].

Education priorities are determined in international conventions and acts and seen as strategic reference points for international community. Individual states shape their education systems with the goal of direct integration into this international community.

Under such conditions, the need for a new concept of education has emerged. It should reflect the afore-mentioned changes and focus on developing personality traits that have become the challenges of the 21st Century: mobility, dynamism, constructiveness, professional, social, personal, and daily life competences, etc. [2, p. 57].

The aim of the article is to examine the appearance of competency-based approach in relation to the *Bologna Process* unfolding in Ukraine; to differentiate between the terms *competency* and *competency-based approach*; to characterize the peculiarities and specificities of competency-based approach implementation in higher education, compare and contrast this new category with the traditional triadic *knowledge, skills, abilities* model.

The signing of *The Bologna Declaration* in 1999 started a large-scale reform in higher education, which, to a large extent, conditioned one of the directions of higher education development in Ukraine. *The Bologna declaration* defined the concept of the international recognition of the learning outcomes, encouraging academia to develop generally accepted and understandable criteria for such recognition.

The Bologna Process stimulated vivid interest in the development of a variety of such criteria, and this new methodology was entitled *competency-based approach*.

Ukraine's willingness to participate in the *Bologna Process* requires that our educational system use the language comprehensible to the educational systems of other countries-participants, namely it necessitates the adaptation of foreign educational terminology. For European conceptual system, the notion of *competency-based approach* is natural and reflects the evolution of its educational system for the last 40 years. Placed in the context of Ukrainian educational tradition, which uses a different system of notions to describe scholarship and professionalism (for instance, the famous *knowledge, skills, abilities* triadic model), this approach necessitated the reasonable revision of the system of educational categories, as well as the definition of the place of these new categories in our traditional system and their interaction with the traditional notions.

It is a well-known fact that terminology is of not only scientific, but also of

political significance. Vague terms are difficult to understand. Thus, it is important for the academia, employers, and graduating students to speak the same language when discussing the quality of learning outcomes, as well as the level of knowledge, abilities, and skills development.

Therefore, the transition to *competency-based approach* requires working on a new theoretical basis, identifying those categories of European education terminology that will be understood by all participants of the educational process [19, p. 48].

The views on *competency-based approach* range from the statements of support to criticism and rejection.

Thus, some researchers (M. Y. Bershadsky) believe that the emergence of the category *competency-based approach* is slightly artificial and aims mostly at concealing old problems behind new labels [4, p. 136 – 143]. Others (Y. M. Zeyer, Y. V. Semanyuk) emphasize the discrepancy between the initial practical orientation of *competency-based approach* and the existing disciplinary (and meta-disciplinary) orientation of the educational practices [9, p. 24 – 28]. A. V. Nesterov notes that the conceptual and innovative potential of *competency-based approach* has not been determined so far. For instance, the fundamental difference between the latter and the well-established psychological and educational activity- and development-oriented concepts is yet to be defined [15].

However, most scientists agree that, in general, competency-based approach reflects the essence of modernization processes, which are under way in all European countries:

- *competency-based approach* guarantees high level and effectiveness of professional training (G. V. Lezhnina) [13];
- *competency-based approach* ensures updating of the content of pedagogical education (V. M. Antipova, K. Y. Kolesina, G. A. Pahomova, I. D. Frumin) [2, p. 57 – 62];
- *competency-based approach* increases the practical orientation of education, leaving behind the boundaries once set by *knowledge, skills, abilities* model (A. L. Andreyev) [1, p. 19 – 27];

– *competency-based approach* allows graduates to meet new market requirements, equips them with the tools necessary to cope with real life problems, search for their identity in the social structure (V. I. Baydenko, N. M. Bibik, A. I. Subetto) [3; 6; 23]; and

– *competency-based approach* aims at constructing educational process in accord with the expected and desired learning outcomes (what the student will know and be able to do upon graduation) (I. Zimnyaya) [11], et al.

The analysis of how the notion of *competency-based approach* is seen by Ukrainian and foreign researchers can be found in the works by N. M. Bibik [6; 5, 24–37], O. M. Pometun [19, p. 20], O. V. Ovcharuk [17, p. 6 – 16], O. I. Lokshyna [14, p. 6 – 16], O. V. Onopriyenko [18, p. 32 – 37], et al.

Different views on the notion in question are obviously related to the peculiarities of social and economic development of a county, its national traditions, culture-specific features of the educational system establishment and development. Such researchers, as A. N. Andreyev, O. S. Zablotska, T. Kobylnyk, A. F. Prysyzhniaya, are convinced that *competency-based approach* reflects gradual re-orientation of the leading educational paradigm from communicating knowledge to creating adequate conditions for mastering a range of key, general, and disciplinary competencies, namely, the shift of the ultimate goal of education from knowledge to competence [8; p. 21, 71 – 78; 10; 1, p. 19 – 27]. The latter implies not only possessing knowledge in a certain field, but also having a qualification; what is more important, it signals that an individual has the right, permission to perform a particular task.

Foreign scientists Cl. Beelisle, M. Linard, B. Rey, L. Turkal, N. Guignon, M. Joras, et al. associate the content of *competency-based approach* in education with the formation of the ability and readiness of an individual to mobilize his/her resources (systemically organized knowledge, abilities, skills, aptitudes, and mental characteristics). These resources are necessary to perform a task efficiently and are appropriate for a particular situation, i.e., in line with the goal and conditions of a specific activity [18, p. 34].

Our analysis suggests that the concept of *competency-based approach* was defined most distinctly in the works of Ukrainian scholars (N. M. Bibik, O. V. Ovcharuk, O. I. Pometun, O. I. Lokshyna, O. Y. Savchenko, S. Y. Trubacheva, L. I. Taraschenko, et al.), who were part of the international project *Educational Policy and Education: the Equal – to the Equal* (The Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine). The authors of the project were able to clearly distinguish between the terms *competency* and *competency-based approach*, clarifying and specifying them.

The authors of the project suggest that competency should, first and foremost, be understood as a range of powers of an organization, institution, or individual. To the extent of his/her competence, an individual can be either competent or incompetent in certain areas, i.e., have/acquired a competency (competencies) to perform a specific activity.

In reference to education and personality development, one of the results of education should be the acquisition of a range of competencies, necessary for activity in various spheres [19, p. 66].

The system of competencies in education is described by the authors of the project as follows:

key competencies are interdisciplinary competencies, which are defined as individual's capability to perform multi-functional, multi-disciplinary, culture-syntonic activities, effectively solving relevant problems;

general competencies, which are acquired by students while mastering the content of various disciplinary areas in secondary school;

disciplinary competencies are mastered when studying a specific discipline in the course of secondary schooling [19, p. 66].

Concerning the notion of competency-based approach, of great importance to us is its interpretation by one of the authors of the project, O. I. Pometun. She defines it as the orientation of the educational process at the formation and development of the key (basic, main) and disciplinary competencies; this process should result in the formation of the general competence of an individual, which is a sum of key

competencies, an integrated feature of the personality. This characteristic is to develop in the course of study and encompass knowledge, abilities, attitudes, experience, and individual's behavior models [19, p. 66].

We believe that such understanding and interpretation of competency-based approach is complete enough to fully reflect its content. However, several peculiarities and nuances of competency-based approach interpretation in higher education are worth mentioning.

After *the Bologna declaration* had been signed, new programs and initiatives of various levels – supranational, national, and institutional – appeared, which had a positive effect on the formation of the European Higher Education Area. Most well-known and effective programs are of multilevel character, for instance, joint initiatives of *the European Commission* and *European University Association*, in which universities of all countries-participants of *the Bologna Process* took part: *Double or Joint Degrees Project*, *Quality Culture Project*, *Trends in European Higher Education Research*, etc.

100 universities from 16 countries-participants of the *Bologna Process* were involved in the development of these projects. Their main objectives were to work out a generally accepted classification according to levels in terms of competencies and learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are understood as sets of competencies, including student's knowledge, understanding, and skills, which are defined specifically for each program module, as well as for the program in general.

The aim of the projects was to reach the all-European consensus on what a graduate must be able to do upon the completion of a course of study, namely to design new-generation state standards with competency-based approach as their basis [24, p. 78].

In the context of the afore-mentioned project, the authors attempted to distinguish a range of competencies common for all higher educational establishments. As the first step, a list of 85 most significant competencies was composed. According to the working classification, they are grouped into three categories: instrumental, interpersonal, and systemic.

This classification of the key competencies was not final, however. For instance, the European Council has identified five groups of key competencies, which have to be mastered by the youth while studying:

1. Political and social competencies.
2. Competencies that determine the ability to live in the multicultural and multinational society.
3. Competencies related to oral and written communication, including in foreign languages.
4. Competencies associated with the emergence of the information society: new technology proficiency, ability to apply it.
5. Competencies that realize the ability and willingness to pursue life-long learning [16, p. 23 – 24].

The European Commission distinguished eight key competencies, which every European citizen ought to possess:

- mother tongue competence;
- foreign languages competence;
- math, natural science, and technical competences;
- digital competence;
- learning to learn competence;
- interpersonal, intercultural, and social competences, as well as civic competence;
- entrepreneurship competence;
- cultural awareness competences.

There are other classifications of competencies as well, which were developed by different countries in accord with their needs, traditions, characteristic features, their educational goals. For instance, Austria distinguishes the following competencies: disciplinary, social, and methodological; Belgium singles out social, positive thinking, ability to act and make decisions independently, motivational, mental agility, functionality competencies. Among the key competencies in Finland are cognitive, social, personal, creative, pedagogical, communicative, and

administrative competencies, ability to work in a fast-changing environment, motivation, ability to work in different directions at the same time; Germany distinguishes intellectual, practical and knowledge, educational (instrumental), value orientations competencies. In this case, it is necessary to note that we are concerned with a number of the most general notions, which should be particularized in a complex of knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and attitudes in accordance with disciplinary and life areas of a young individual [17, p. 11].

Why is the classification of key competencies so varied? O. V. Ovcharuk stresses that key competencies must be accepted by all members of the society, irrespective of sex, class, race, culture, marital status, and language. Moreover, key competencies should correspond to not only ethnic, economic, and cultural values and conventions of the society, but also conform to educational priorities and goals, and be personality-centered [17, p. 14].

Ukraine has also employed competency-based approach as the foundation for the development of higher education state standards. Thus, social and personal, general scientific, instrumental, professional (general professional and specific professional) competencies have been distinguished as priorities.

As can be seen, among the tasks set by modern world are the acquisition and development of not only certain knowledge and professional skills, but also a set of competencies, which include both fundamental knowledge, as well as analytical and problem-solving skills that can be applied in new conditions [13].

The UNESCO report outlines that, “Nowadays, employers need not a qualification, which, too often, associated in their mind with the ability to perform certain material operations; they are more interested in competence, viewed as a combination of skills, specific for each individual, in whom qualification in the literary sense of the word, as well as social behavior, team-working skills, initiative, and love for risk are united” [7, p. 35].

This allows us to oppose competency-based approach to the traditional conceptual triadic *knowledge, ability, skills* model (KSAs model). In this context, knowledge, skills, and abilities paradigm is often directly identified with the image of

a 'closed', totalitarian society, in which a person is just a cog in a huge machine. Along the same lines, competency-based educational model is seen to correlate with the dynamic and open society, in which, as a result of socialization, education, general and professional training, aimed at the development of a full range of life functions, a responsible individual should appear, who will be ready to support free humanistic-oriented choice [1, p. 19].

Therefore, competency-based approach can be viewed as not only a means of updating the content of education, but as a mechanism serving to adjust it to the requirements of the modern world. In this case, the response to the challenges posed by the information revolution and global market can be a shift of the final goal of education from knowledge to competence. The latter is interpreted as an integrated ability to solve specific problems that arise in different spheres of life. This ability, apparently, presupposes having knowledge, but, as it was correctly noted in some theoretical research aimed at the justification of competency-based approach, it is necessary not only to have knowledge proper, but to possess a number of individual characteristics and be able to find and select knowledge from enormous storages of information created by the humanity [1, p. 20].

Competency-based approach is humanitarian by nature, since it is closely connected with the idea of comprehensive training and development of an individual as both an expert, professional in his/her area and a personality, a community and society member. The goal of humanitarian education is obviously not only the communication of knowledge and development of skills and abilities in a certain field, but also the development of individual's worldview, interdisciplinary intuition, and ability to make independent creative decisions, as well as framing conditions for self-education and promoting humanitarian values.

These features reflect the nature of competency-based approach.

Moreover, among its peculiarities in the context of higher education, the following can be mentioned: recognizing competencies as the ultimate learning outcome and their purposeful formation; shifting the emphasis from students' information awareness to their ability to use information for practical tasks solution;

evaluating the development of students' competencies as a result of educational process; student-centered learning; orientation of professional training at graduates' job placement in the future [8].

At the same time, a number of researchers challenge the universal character of competency-based approach as a substitute for the KSA model.

Implementing competency-based approach, according to A. L. Andreyeva, can lead to a dissociation and appearance of compromise double mechanisms, in which it is combined with the traditional KSA model. These combinations can be of different forms: competences are built on top of knowledge, skills, and abilities forming interdisciplinary connections; the two models co-exist, taking up different sections and levels of the education space [1, p. 21].

In this case, the tendency to contrast competency-based and KSA approaches does not seem to be well-justified, as the former emphasizes the importance of experience, abilities, and skills, but preserves procedural and methodological independence. Another issue that needs thorough consideration is meeting the *Bologna Process* requirements concerning the problem in-question.

Close examination reveals that most European documents illustrate the point of view of the so-called Euro bureaucracy, whereas smaller states are interested in setting such international criteria and standards that will allow leveling the unique features and advantages of education aimed at increasing knowledge in the "fusion points" of modern science.

Training a middle manager, competent official, construction engineer, food industry engineer, or a lawyer possessing a set of necessary competencies is possible in any European country. But preparing a knowledgeable person, able to make a breakthrough in such fields as anthropogenic civilization, geoecology, psychology of giftedness, comparative ethnopsychology, philosophy of culture, historical alternativistics, mathematical modeling of nonlinear processes, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and other areas, as a rule, happens in such institutions as the *École Normale Supérieure* or *Sorbonne*, *Cambridge* or *Stanford*, *Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv* or *National Technical University of Ukraine "Kyiv*

Polytechnic Institute”, etc., that is in those school which have their own traditions and specific approaches to the organization and realization of the educational process [1, p. 25].

In any event, it should be noted that taking competency, competence, and competency-based approach as working terms, scientific and educational communities in the countries with a well-established scientific and educational tradition do not tend to use them too extensively, but, rather, along with such integrated terms as knowledge, qualification, professionalism, abilities, etc.

Thus, taking the afore-mentioned into consideration, we believe that the theoretical foundation for competency-based approach has not been fully formed yet.

Actually, we have entered the stage of historical ambiguity, the development of which is difficult to foresee in every detail. This complicates the task of describing a standard set of competencies satisfying modern requirements and, what is more, distinguishing key competencies among them, which demands constant search for competency-based paradigm in higher education

The problems of modern higher education that have become apparent in the context of competency-based approach encourage us to develop fundamentally new education standards, as well as create and bring to life our own historical project of Ukrainian higher education modernization.

Among the prospective areas of further research in this field is studying competency-based approach with regard to the type of higher educational institution, as well as searching for models of an integrated multi-level professional training system.

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Pobirchenko N. S. Competency-based Approach in Higher Education: a Theoretical Perspective

The article examines the emergence of and research into the category of “competency-based” approach in the context of the Bologna process in Ukraine. The author discusses the difference between the notions of “competency” and “competency-based approach”, characterizes the peculiarities of competency-based approach implementation in higher education, namely its student-centeredness and orientation at job placement of prospective specialists. The comparative analysis of the new category and the traditional triadic *knowledge – skills – abilities* model suggests that the two approaches should not be opposed due to their relatedness.

Key words: competency, competency-based approach, the conceptual triad “knowledge – skills – abilities” (KSA), The Bologna Process.

Побірченко Н. С. Компетентністний підхід у вищій школі: теоретичний аспект

У статті розглянуто проблему виникнення та дослідження категорії «компетентністний підхід» в контексті Болонського процесу в Україні. Автор

розмежовує поняття «компетенція» та «компетентністний підхід», характеризує особливості та нюанси застосування компетентнісного підходу у вищій школі, зокрема студентоцентризм навчання, спрямованість фахової підготовки на майбутнє працевлаштування випускників. Порівняльна характеристика нової категорії та традиційної поняттєвої тріади «знання – уміння – навички» («ЗУН») доводить, що компетентністний підхід не можна відверто протиставляти «ЗУНам», оскільки вони взаємопов'язані.

Ключові слова: компетенція, компетентністний підхід, поняттєва тріада «знання – уміння – навички» («ЗУН»), Болонський процес.

Побирченко Н. С. Компетентностный подход в высшей школе: теоретический аспект

В статье рассматривается проблема возникновения и исследования категории «компетентностный подход» в контексте Болонского процесса в Украине. Автор разграничивает понятия «компетенция» и «компетентностный подход», характеризует особенности и нюансы применения компетентностного подхода в высшей школе, в частности студентоцентризм обучения, направленность профессиональной подготовки на будущее трудоустройство выпускников. Сравнительная характеристика новой категории и традиционной понятийной триады «знания – умение – навыки» («ЗУН») показывает, что компетентностный подход нельзя противопоставлять «ЗУНам», поскольку они взаимосвязаны.

Ключевые слова: «компетенция», «компетентностный подход», понятийная триада «знания – умения – навыки» («ЗУН»), Болонский процесс.

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