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DEVELOPING LEARNERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES BASED ON THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract. The competency-based approach is a key guideline in modern higher education and represents a methodological foundation aimed at developing learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills in professional and real-life situations. The study addresses the relevance of competency formation among master's students as a critical indicator of educational quality and modernization of academic programs.

The aim of this study was to determine the level of awareness of master's students of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science regarding the competency-based approach, their attitudes toward the applied educational practices, and to identify program components that contribute to or hinder the formation of key competencies. Particular attention is paid to learners' perceptions of the content of academic programs and the teaching methods used.

From a scientific point of view, the study clarifies how educational transformations in master's programs are perceived, from a practical point of view, it formulates specific directions for improving curriculum.

Methodologically, the study is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained through a survey of 83 master's students. A Likert scale and thematic analysis of open-ended responses were used.

The results show that most learners support the idea of a competency-based approach, value practice-oriented formats, and recognize the importance of structured educational progress. A small number of respondents point to a weak connection between formal competency statements and the actual content of disciplines.

This study contributes to the understanding of the implementation practices of the competency-based approach in master's degree and highlights the importance of taking learners' opinions into account. The practical significance lies in the possibility of using the obtained results in updating curricula and teaching methods in the higher education system.

The results can be used to improve master's degree programs by aligning learning outcomes with professional competencies and refining teaching methods.

Keywords: competency-based approach, master's degree, higher education, professional competencies, educational programs, quality of education, education, educational standard

Introduction

The higher education system is undergoing steady structural transformations aimed at improving the quality of professional training in line with current labor market demands and international standards. One of the core directions of these reforms is the adoption of a competency-based approach, which focuses on developing learners' ability to apply knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in both professional and real-life situations.

The origins of the competency-based approach can be traced back to the works of N. Chomsky. According to Chomsky, use itself represents a manifestation of competence in various types of activity, as it is closely linked to human thinking and experience. The application of acquired experience in the form of knowledge, skills and abilities later came to be defined as competence. The term was initially used within the framework of linguistic theory and transformational grammar [1].

This concept evolved within pedagogical science particularly in the studies of R. White, who interpreted competence as an integral personal quality that includes a motivational component [2].

In the glossary of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, competence is defined as the ability to apply knowledge and skills in standard or changing professional situations.

The final list of key competencies that a graduate should possess remains a subject of ongoing academic and expert discussion. The concept of the new generation of educational standards, the emphasis on the formation of competencies allows for the design of more flexible and comparable course structures, ensuring the transparency of qualification frameworks both nationally and internationally.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the competency-based approach is embedded in the current State Compulsory Standards of Higher Education, as well as in the National Qualifications Framework [3], which aligns with the European Qualifications Framework and the principles of the Bologna Process [4]. However, as several studies indicate, challenges remain at the implementation level: the connection between formally stated competencies and the actual content of disciplines is not always evident, and the assessment of learning outcomes proves difficult [5, p. 119]. Especially important to consider learners' perceptions and experiences, as they are the direct participants of educational reform. This study treats learners' views as consequential evidence of the enacted curriculum and as a practical guide for improvement.

Today, the competency-based approach is viewed not merely as a reform trend but as a necessary response to dynamic changes in the social and professional environment. Its core idea lies not in the accumulation of knowledge, but in the graduate's ability to solve practical problems, work collaboratively, make independent decisions, and adapt to rapidly changing conditions. According to the publications «Theory and Practice of the Competency-Based Approach in Education» [6, pp. 183-184] and «Competency-based approach and competencies in higher education: a theoretical review» [7, p.8], these very attributes are seen

as key indicators of a successful educational program. Recent research shows that learners particularly value elements of instruction that provide active feedback, diverse assignments, and opportunities for initiative.

The ideas of the competency-based approach are actively developed in the research of Kazakhstan researchers. A. Zhumasheva and A. Tulepbergenova emphasize the importance of fostering an active learning stance among learners as a foundation for their professional self-realization [8]. G. Murzakhmetova substantiates the need for the deliberate development of the self-recognition competence, particularly at the master's degree, as a key component of professional growth and reflective thinking [9].

At the international level, the development of competencies is being emphasized through initiatives such as the OECD Learning Compass 2030 [10]. It emphasizes not only the importance of academic knowledge, but also the development of values, attitudes, and the capacity to act responsibly. The document emphasizes the importance of preparing learners for an uncertain future by fostering lifelong learning, adaptability, and active participation in building a better society. This positions the competency-based approach not just as a technical tool for educational reform, but as a foundation for the sustainable development of both individuals and society as a whole. This perspective underpins the present study's interpretation of learner responses.

A European study involving learners from humanities and social science disciplines found that the most valued competencies include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, and teamwork. In contrast, self-organization and self-management were perceived as less internalized, revealing some ambiguity in how learners view their own efficacy and preparedness for independent activity [11, pp. 129-130]. These findings provide a comparative backdrop for interpreting learners' perceptions.

The novelty of this study is that, from master students' perspective, it examines how the competency-based approach actually works at the master's level by comparing program-declared competencies with real learning formats and combining Likert-scale results with analysis of open-ended responses to identify gaps between goals, content and assessment.

Despite the presence of formal standards and institutional support, the implementation of the competency-based approach requires more nuanced alignment with academic culture, the structure of master's programs and the role of graduate master's students as active participants in the educational process. In this regard, exploring learners' perceptions is particularly valuable, as their perspectives serve as a vital indicator of educational program effectiveness.

The successful integration of the competency-based approach depends largely on the coherence between curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment tools.

This study focuses on examining how master's students at the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science perceive and evaluate the competency-based approach. By analyzing their opinions and reflections, the research aims to identify which aspects of graduate training contribute to the development of key

competencies and which elements need refinement, thus outlining directions for improving the quality of educational programs.

Materials and methods

In the modern context, the professional sphere clearly defines its requirements for future specialists and those who possess a well-developed set of relevant and transferable competencies increasingly hold significant advantages and greater competitiveness. These competencies serve as the foundation for successful entry into the professional world and long-term achievement.

The methodological basis of the present study is the competency-based approach, regarded as a strategic direction in the training of specialists capable of acting effectively in conditions of high dynamism, uncertainty and interdisciplinary challenges.

The theoretical and methodological framework of the research draws upon the works of leading researchers in the field of professional education, such as I. Zimnyaya, A. Khutorskoy and A. Markova. These sources provide an integrated interdisciplinary foundation that unites psychological, pedagogical and sociological perspectives on the understanding of professional competence.

Following I. Zimnyaya, competence is treated as an integrated system that unites cognitive (knowledge of the competency-based approach), operational (skills in applying it to learning tasks) and motivational value components (acceptance of its goals and relevance) [12]. In A. Khutorskoy's typology, emphasis is placed on meta-subject competencies informational, communicative, problem-solving and self-education which inform the survey's subscales of awareness and perceived mastery [13]. A. Markova's model of professional competence, the instrument also captures operational-technical, communicative and personal-reflective dimensions as indicators of readiness for professional activity [14].

In Kazakhstan, the relevance of the competency-based approach has been consistently supported by recent national research. The analysis of current practices in master's programs, particularly those of the scientific-pedagogical track, demonstrates a number of positive tendencies in its implementation. Master students' confident command of theoretical knowledge, their ability to apply it in project-based and case-oriented learning and their engagement in reflective practices confirm the systematic and practice-oriented character of academic preparation. These tendencies correspond to the conclusions of Z. Temirgazina et al., who highlight the priority of professional and research competencies as key outcomes of master's degree education in Kazakhstan. The convergence of empirical and theoretical evidence thus reinforces the methodological rationale for adopting the competency-based approach as a strategic foundation for the modernization of higher education and the professional formation of future educators and researchers [5].

Grounded in these theoretical models, the research design aims to empirically examine how the identified dimensions of competence are reflected in master's students' awareness, attitudes and learning experiences.

The research follows a quantitative-descriptive design. Its objective is to assess the level of awareness and attitudes of master's students toward the competency-based approach within their educational programs, as well as to explore how learners themselves evaluate the application of this approach in their own education. A mixed-methods strategy was applied, in which quantitative data reveal aggregate findings, while the analysis of open responses provides deeper insight and helps interpret the results from different perspectives.

The survey involved 83 master's students from the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science. Participants included both first- and second-year master's students enrolled in the scientific-pedagogical field who agreed to participate in the study. The average age of respondents was 27,8 years. The questionnaire was administered in electronic form.

The research tool was a survey comprising nine closed-ended statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – «strongly disagree» to 5 – «strongly agree») and two open-ended questions for qualitative input.

I am familiar with what the «competency-based approach» means in education.

My educational program clearly outlines goals related to the development of competencies.

I understand which professional and universal competencies I am expected to acquire during my studies.

The course topics and assignments are designed to develop specific competencies.

Teachers actively use skill-developing methods (case studies, project-based tasks, etc.).

My achievements are assessed not only on theoretical knowledge but also on practical application.

This approach helps me to plan my professional future more consciously.

I feel that this system makes me better prepared for real work.

I prefer a traditional model of education that focuses on the transmission of theoretical knowledge.

The open-ended questions were:

10. How do you personally understand the meaning and goals of the competency-based approach in education?

11. Which elements of your master's program, in your opinion, truly contribute to the development of professional and personal competencies?

The survey also included a demographic section covering: age, year of study and educational program (specialty).

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. All respondents were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurances and their right to withdraw at any stage. The study was conducted in strict accordance with the institutional ethical standards governing research.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including the calculation of means, medians and standard deviations for each statement. Responses to open-ended questions were processed through thematic

grouping, with identification of the most frequently recurring opinions. Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Two independent coders reviewed all responses to identify recurring themes and develop a shared codebook. The coding process was iterative. After the initial coding, the researchers discussed discrepancies, refined the code definitions and re-coded the data to improve consistency. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa ($k \geq 0.70$), which showed substantial agreement between coders and ensured the credibility and reproducibility of the qualitative findings.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, particular attention was paid to data consistency and respondent clarity. This allowed for a more accurate reflection of student experiences and perceptions.

Results

Based on the analysis of 83 questionnaires, the average scores were calculated for each statement, indicating the extent to which learners agreed with them (figure 1).

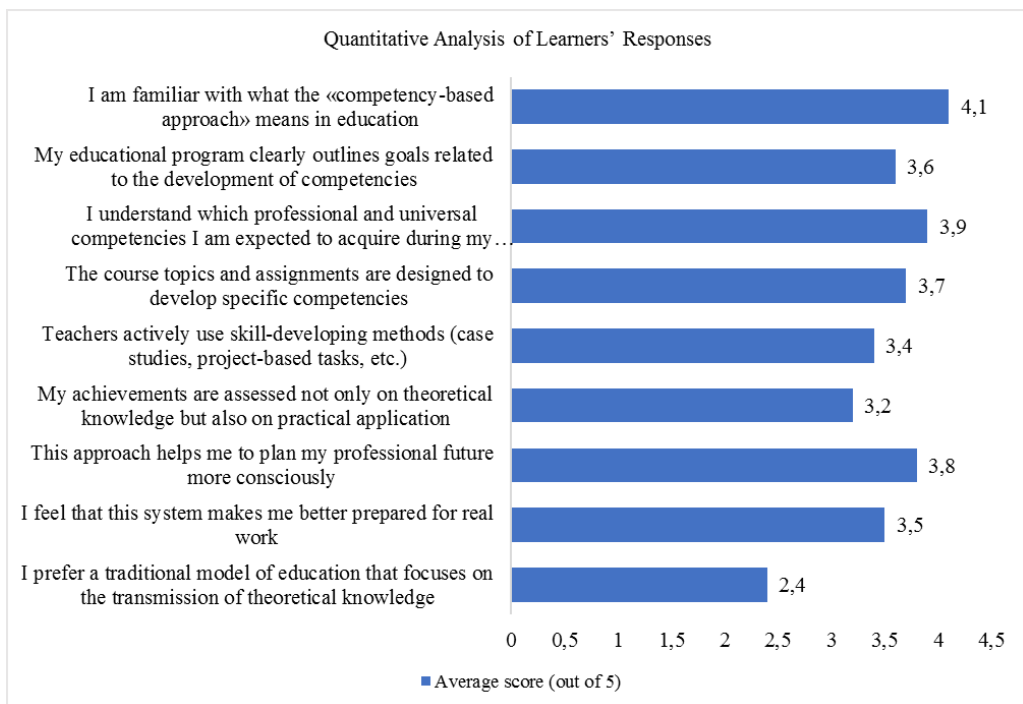


Figure 1 – Quantitative analysis of responses on the Likert scale

The quantitative analysis of master's students' responses demonstrates a generally high level of awareness and positive attitudes toward the competency-based approach. Most respondents reported familiarity with its core principles ($M=4.1$) and an understanding of the competencies they are expected to develop ($M=3.9$), which indicates conceptual clarity and internalization of the paradigm. The goals of educational programs are perceived as moderately well articulated

(M=3.6), while the design of courses and assignments (M=3.7) reflects a partial but consistent integration of competence-oriented content. Teachers’ use of active and skill-developing methods such as case studies and project-based learning received somewhat lower ratings (M=3.4), suggesting that practical components are not yet applied systematically. Assessment practices tend to remain focused on theoretical knowledge (M=3.2), highlighting the need to strengthen performance-based evaluation. Students emphasized that the competency-based model supports more conscious career planning (M=3.8) and enhances their preparedness for professional activity (M=3.5). The lowest score (M=2.4) was observed for preference toward the traditional, knowledge-centered model, confirming a clear shift in favor of practice-oriented and reflective forms of learning. Overall, the data indicate that master’s students demonstrate both cognitive understanding and value acceptance of the competency-based paradigm, although the mechanisms for its practical implementation still require further refinement. Approximately 10% of respondents noted a weak alignment between the formally declared competencies and the actual course content.

To deepen the interpretation of the quantitative data, respondents were invited to define and explain the competency-based approach in an open format. This allowed to capture their own wording, identify key themes and indicate areas that require clarification in program design and assessment.

The following open-ended questions were posed:

1. How do you personally understand the meaning and goals of the competency-based approach in education?

The analysis of open-ended responses revealed several key conceptual interpretations of the competency-based approach among master’s students. As shown in table 1, the majority of respondents perceive the approach primarily through its practical and career-oriented dimension. The table summarizes the most frequently mentioned perspectives, illustrating how learners understand the essence and goals of the competency-based approach in education. These findings provide insight into the depth of learners’ comprehension of the concept and help identify areas where further methodological clarification may be required.

The following thematic categories were identified based on the content of the 78 open responses:

Table 1. Perceptions of the competency-based approach

Main Interpretations	Mentions
Practical application of knowledge, career orientation	27
Development of soft skills: critical thinking, communication, teamwork	19
Personal development and self-realization	9
General, unstructured definitions	8
Uncertainty or difficulty in understanding	6

These findings indicate that most students interpret the competency-based approach in practical terms, emphasizing its relevance to real-life and professional contexts. This provides a foundation for exploring how specific program elements

contribute to competence development.

The second open-ended question was designed to explore which specific components of the master's program students considered most effective for developing professional and personal competencies. Table 2 presents the frequency of mentions for each element, offering a practical overview of which teaching and learning formats students find most beneficial.

2. Which elements of your master's program, in your opinion, truly contribute to the development of professional and personal competencies?

As table 2 indicates, master's students associate the development of competencies mainly with interactive and practice-oriented forms of learning.

The responses reflect the presence of practice-oriented components within the academic process. The most frequently mentioned elements include:

Table 2. Program elements contributing to competence development

Program Elements	Mentions
Project assignments, group work, case studies	41
Public speaking, presentations and thesis defense	37
Research activities (academic projects, participation in conferences, publications)	35
Discussions and debates in seminars	18
Active involvement of teachers, use of practice-oriented teaching methods	24
Mentorship, individual consultations and feedback	32

The data presented in table 2 illustrate that students predominantly value interactive and practice-oriented learning methods, such as project work, research activities, presentations and mentorship. These findings confirm that learners recognize the importance of active participation, feedback and collaboration in the process of competence formation. The results also indicate that structured mentoring and formative assessment play a crucial role in promoting reflective learning and professional growth, which aligns with international best practices in competency-based education.

The analysis of open-ended responses allowed for the identification of common viewpoints among the participants. 78 out of 83 respondents (94%) provided extended answers, demonstrating significant engagement in discussing both their understanding of the competency-based approach and the specific elements of their educational programs that they believe contribute to the development of key competencies.

Discussion

The analysis of the obtained data allows us to identify a number of positive trends in the implementation of the competency-based approach within master's programs of the scientific-pedagogical track. Strong theoretical knowledge, the ability to apply it in practice, participation in project-based activities and successful completion of case assignments demonstrate the systematic nature and depth of academic training.

These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Z. Temirgazina et al., who emphasize the priority of professional and research competencies as key outcomes of master's-level educational programs [5].

The respondents (83 master's students) clearly distinguish between knowledge as information and competence as the ability to apply that knowledge in real-world settings. This aligns with international interpretations of competencies.

According to the OECD Learning Compass 2030 framework, competence is defined not merely as knowledge or skill, but as the capacity to act autonomously and responsibly in uncertain situations by drawing upon knowledge, values, attitudes and skills [3]. The primary aim of education, therefore, is to develop the ability to act meaningfully. Master's students emphasized the relevance of this approach by referring to practice-based tasks, teamwork projects and independent thinking.

Many of the surveyed learners identified key indicators such as informed choice, reflective learning and the practical application of knowledge. Responses to several survey items indicated a positive perception of project-based and practice-oriented learning (questions 6 and 7), highlighting them as effective tools for competence development. Respondents also noted the importance of feedback and self-assessment mechanisms in fostering both personal and professional growth.

Some caution was evident in learners' evaluations. While the majority endorsed the approach, around 16,9% indicated a weak alignment between declared learning competencies and the actual content of academic disciplines. This supports earlier findings suggesting that regulatory frameworks often lack clear methodological tools for implementation [6, p. 120].

Another empirical study conducted by Kazakh scientists points to the need for broader involvement of all educational stakeholders – teachers, learners and employers in joint work on the content of programs and mechanisms of competence assessment [15, pp. 15-17].

Similar observations have been made in international research: although learners recognize the value of competencies such as critical thinking and teamwork, they often note a disconnect between those goals and actual learning activities [11, pp. 139-140].

Learners have a good understanding of what constitutes a competency-based approach in education and support the use of practical learning methods, including project work, group tasks and research activities. Most express a positive attitude toward receiving feedback and engaging in self-reflection.

These findings are consistent with current international benchmarks. Areas identified for improvement offer meaningful insights for enhancing master's programs with greater transparency, inclusiveness and interdisciplinarity.

Conclusion

The study findings confirm that learners possess a strong awareness of the core principles underlying the competency-based approach and acknowledge its importance for personal and professional development. The survey data shows

that learners view competencies not merely as an accumulation of knowledge and skills, but as a broader ability to think independently, make decisions, work collaboratively and pursue self-development. The study offers a learner-centered diagnostic of competency-based approach within a quality-assurance context, empirically identifying gaps between the competencies formally declared and the course content and assessment practices actually implemented.

It is especially encouraging that many learners are actively engaged in practice-oriented forms of learning, including project work, public presentations, group collaboration and independent research. Their favorable views of these activities as well as their openness to feedback and self-assessment suggest that the mechanisms of the competency-based approach are gradually becoming a part of the educational environment of master's programs.

Learners express the need for deeper and more consistent integration of the competency approach into course content, teaching strategies and evaluation systems. This points to significant opportunities for advancing educational program design along the principles of flexibility, interdisciplinarity and personalized learning.

The National Qualifications Framework outlines educational levels and expected learning outcomes, ensuring alignment between academic achievements and professional standards. State Compulsory Educational Standard of Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan specifies the formation of key and professional competencies at the master's degree, structuring programs and defining implementation principles. The European Qualifications Framework serves as a reference for mutual recognition of qualifications and harmonization of educational systems across countries. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 stresses autonomy, responsibility and the ability to act meaningfully in uncertain contexts.

The higher education system currently provides favorable conditions for the sustainable implementation of the competency-based approach. The active engagement of learners serves as a key indicator of its relevance and effectiveness, reflecting their readiness to embrace innovative learning formats, pursue self-actualization and take ownership of their academic and professional development.

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ЖОҒАРЫ БІЛІМ БЕРУ ЖҮЙЕСІНДЕ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІК ТҰҒЫР НЕГІЗІНДЕ БІЛІМ АЛУШЫЛАРДЫҢ КӘСІБИ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІКТЕРІН ДАМУ

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Аңдатпа. Құзыреттілік тұғыр – қазіргі жоғары білім берудегі негізгі бағыттардың бірі бола отырып, білім алушылардың нақты кәсіби және өмірлік жағдайларда білім мен дағдыларды қолдана алу қабілетін қалыптастыруға бағытталған әдіснамалық негізді құрайды. Бұл зерттеу магистранттар арасында құзыреттердің қалыптасу деңгейін анықтау және білім беру бағдарламаларының сапасын арттыру мәселелеріне арналған.

Осы зерттеудің мақсаты – философия және саясаттану факультетінің магистранттарының құзыреттілік тұғыр туралы хабардар болу деңгейін,

қолданылатын білім беру практикаларына қатынасын анықтау, сондай-ақ негізгі құзыреттердің қалыптасуына ықпал ететін немесе кедергі келтіретін бағдарлама компоненттерін айқындау. Негізгі назар білім алушылардың бағдарламалардың мазмұндық жағы мен оқыту әдістерін қабылдауына аударылды.

Ғылыми тұрғыдан алғанда, бұл жұмыс магистратурадағы білім беру өзгерістерін қабылдау туралы түсінікті нақтылауға ықпал етеді, ал практикалық жағынан – оқыту бағдарламаларын жетілдіруге бағытталған нақты ұсыныстарды қалыптастырады.

Зерттеу әдіснамасы – 83 магистрантқа жүргізілген сауалнама негізінде алынған деректерге сандық және сапалық талдау жасау. Лайкерт шкаласы және ашық сұрақтарға берілген жауаптардың тақырыптық талдауы қолданылды.

Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, білім алушылардың басым бөлігі құзыреттілік тұғыр идеяларын қолдайды, практикаға бағытталған оқыту формаларын және саналы білім беру бағытын жоғары бағалайды. Сонымен қатар, респонденттердің аз бөлігі ресми тұжырымдалған құзыреттер мен пәндердің нақты мазмұны арасындағы байланыстың әлсіз екенін атап өтті.

Зерттеу нәтижелері магистратурада құзыреттілік тұғырды жүзеге асыру тәжірибесін зерттеуге өз үлесін қосып, білім алушылардың пікірлерін ескерудің маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Практикалық маңызы – жоғары білім беру жүйесінде оқу жоспарларын және оқыту әдістерін жаңарту барысында алынған нәтижелерді қолдану мүмкіндігінде.

Нәтижелерді магистратура бағдарламаларын жақсарту үшін оқу жетістіктерін кәсіби құзыреттермен сәйкестендіру және оқыту әдістерін жетілдіру мақсатында қолдануға болады.

Тірек сөздер: құзыреттілік тұғыр, магистратура, жоғары білім, кәсіби құзыреттер, білім беру бағдарламалары, білім сапасы, білім беру, білім беру стандарты

РАЗВИТИЕ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЙ ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ НА ОСНОВЕ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТНОГО ПОДХОДА В СИСТЕМЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

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Аннотация. Компетентностный подход является ключевым ориентиром современного высшего образования и представляет собой методологическую основу, направленную на формирование у обучающихся способности применять знания и умения в реальных профессиональных и жизненных ситуациях. Исследование посвящено актуальной проблеме формирования компетенций у магистрантов как показателя качества и модернизации образовательных программ.

Целью данного исследования стало выявление степени осведомлённости магистрантов факультета философии и политологии о компетентностном подходе, их отношении к применяемым образовательным практикам, а также определение компонентов программ, способствующих или затрудняющих формирование ключевых компетенций. Основное внимание уделено восприятию обучающимися содержательного наполнения программ и применяемых методов преподавания.

С научной точки зрения она способствует уточнению представлений о восприятии образовательных трансформаций в магистратуре, а практической – формулирует конкретные направления для совершенствования программ обучения.

Методологически исследование представляет собой количественно-качественный анализ данных, полученных в результате анкетирования 83 магистрантов. Использовалась шкала Лайкерта и тематический анализ открытых ответов.

Результаты демонстрируют, что большинство обучающихся поддерживают идею компетентностного подхода, ценят практико-ориентированные форматы и осознанную траекторию обучения. Вместе с тем небольшое количество респондентов указывают на слабую связь между формальными формулировками компетенций и реальным содержанием дисциплин.

Проведённое исследование вносит вклад в изучение практик реализации компетентностного подхода в магистратуре и подчёркивает значимость учета мнения обучающихся. Практическая ценность заключается в возможности использования полученных результатов при актуализации учебных планов и методов преподавания в системе высшего образования.

Результаты могут быть использованы для улучшения магистерских программ путем согласования результатов обучения с профессиональными компетенциями и совершенствования методов преподавания.

Ключевые слова: компетентностный подход, магистратура, высшее образование, профессиональные компетенции, образовательные программы, качество образования, образование, образовательный стандарт

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