



## CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMPETENCE AND COMPETENCY IN PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

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### Abstract:

This study explores the multifaceted nature of professional competence for English language teachers, with a focus on integrating subject-specific expertise, pedagogical skills, digital literacy, and personal attributes to enhance teaching effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. Drawing on contemporary educational theories, including Channa et al. (2025), Rasulova (2024), and Markova's model, professional competence is conceptualized as a dynamic, integrative framework encompassing special, social, personal, and individual competencies. The research highlights the growing importance of digital pedagogy, intercultural communicative competence, emotional intelligence, and reflective practice, particularly in the context of Uzbekistan's educational reforms and global trends in teacher education. By synthesizing frameworks such as UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework, the EU's DigCompEdu, and CEFR standards, the study proposes a comprehensive digital platform to foster the holistic development of future English teachers. This platform emphasizes not only linguistic mastery and teaching methodologies but also adaptability, cultural responsiveness, and technological proficiency to meet 21st-century educational demands. The findings underscore the need for teacher training programs to support continuous professional growth through reflective, inclusive, and technology-enhanced practices, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings.

**Keywords:** Teacher professional competence, English language teaching, digital pedagogy, intercultural competence, reflective practice, emotional intelligence, teacher education, Uzbekistan, CEFR standards, DigCompEdu, UNESCO ICT Competency Framework

The notion of **professional competence** in teaching has been widely discussed in educational theory. It generally refers to the integrative capabilities that enable a teacher to perform effectively in their role. Channa et al. (2025) describe professional competence as "a dynamic process that improves working quality" and leads to teachers' professional development and self-improvement. In practical terms, teacher competence includes mastery of subject content, pedagogical skills (methodologies, classroom management), and affective or personal attributes (motivation, self-regulation). Rasulova (2024) emphasizes that in modern education, raising the **quality of education** is directly tied to teaching staff, who must be versatile, responsible, and continuously self-improving. In this view, a competent teacher is not only knowledgeable in their subject (e.g. English language) but also adept at organizing learning, managing diverse learners, and reflecting critically on practice.

Markova's model (cited in Rasulova) elaborates that teacher competence comprises cultural, professional, and social components, with four types of professional competence: **special (technical), social, personal, and individual**. Special competence refers to mastery of one's professional domain (subject knowledge and teaching methods); social competence involves skills for collaboration and communication in professional communities; personal competence covers abilities for self-development and adaptability; and individual competence relates to self-regulation and motivation for continual growth. Summarizing, **competence** is an "integral characteristic of business and personal qualities" reflecting the requisite knowledge, skills, and also the moral stance of the teacher.

The object and subject of competence studies can vary by context. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the **TEMPUS project** has classified English teacher competences, but as Buronova and Shodiyev (2022) note, practical measurement tools are still lacking. However, their research highlights that a teacher's professional competence must include both subject-specific and broader educational competences, alongside positive interpersonal skills in the classroom. This aligns with general definitions: competence extends beyond factual knowledge (such as grammar rules) to include didactic skills and emotional intelligence. The UNESCO framework for teacher education (2015) similarly underscores that educators should "demonstrate professional competence and mastery of subject matter" while also collaborating and innovating.

Importantly, current discourse frames digital and technological skills as part of teacher competence. As the OECD (2023) reports, many teachers feel underprepared for ICT-based teaching despite frequent professional development opportunities. Digital competence involves technical know-how (software, tools), but also pedagogical sensibility in using technology to enhance learning. Thus, a modern concept of teacher competence necessarily includes **digital pedagogy** – the understanding and attitude needed to integrate digital tools meaningfully into teaching practice ([Advancing digital education in Uzbekistan: Wendy Gorton's mission to empower teachers | UNESCO](#)) ([Teacher digital competences: formal approaches to their development | OECD](#)). In sum, this study adopts a comprehensive view of teacher professional competence: an amalgam of subject content knowledge, pedagogical skills, personal attributes (motivation, adaptability), and digital/interactive capabilities. This theoretical foundation will guide the design of the development platform, ensuring it addresses all these facets.

The terms *competence* and *competency* are often used interchangeably in education, but they have nuanced meanings. In pedagogical theory, **competence** generally refers to the holistic ability of a teacher to perform effectively in professional contexts. This includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the capacity for reflective practice. Perrenoud (1997) defines competence as "the ability to act effectively in many specified situations, the ability based on, but not limited by, knowledge". This highlights that competence is action-oriented and context-sensitive, relying on but transcending subject knowledge. In contrast, *competency* often denotes specific, observable components of competence (e.g. grammatical competence, intercultural competence).

The literature distinguishes between **practical competences** (procedural skills and behaviors) and **interpretative competences** (conceptual understanding and creative problem-

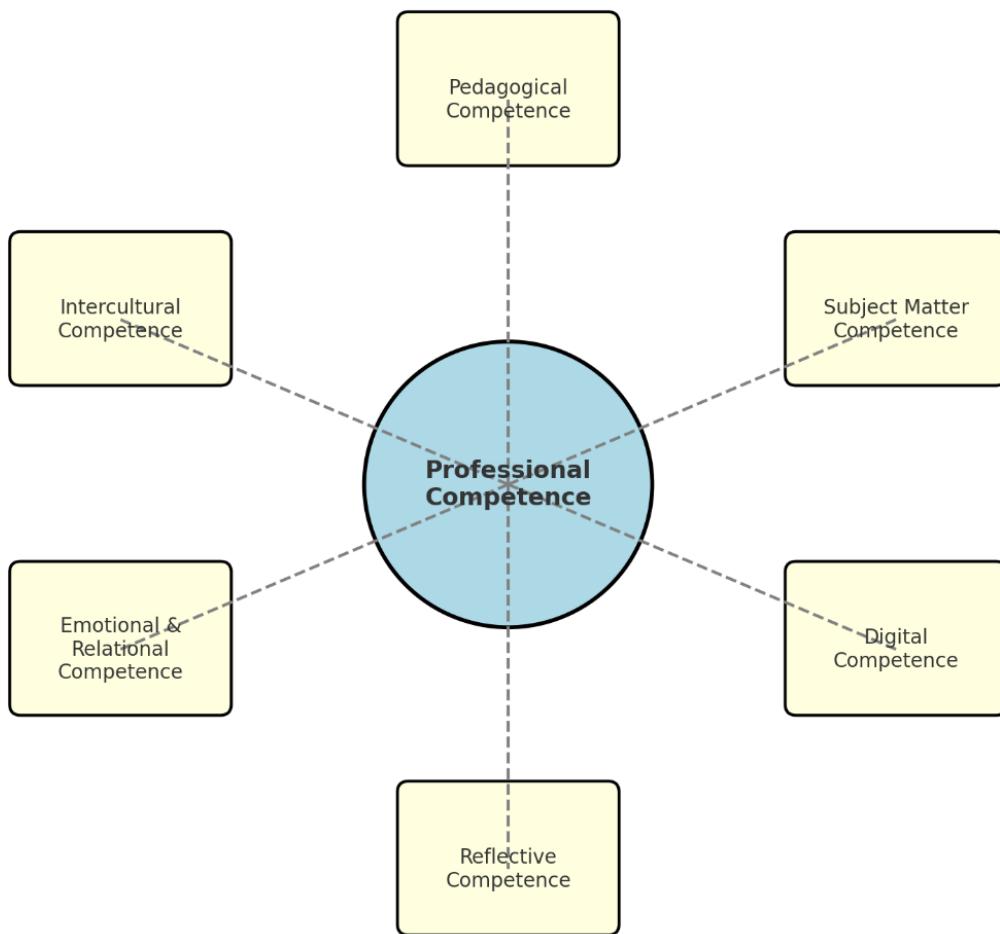


solving). For language teachers, practical competences include classroom management, lesson planning, and use of teaching technologies. Interpretative competences involve adapting instruction to learner needs and innovating pedagogical practices. The iNACOL Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework similarly emphasizes competencies in mindsets (values and beliefs) and practice (skills and knowledge).

UNESCO and the EU have also framed competencies in education. For example, UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT-CFT) identifies broad areas such as "Understanding ICT in Education" and "Curriculum and Assessment" ([\(PDF\) Digital Platform for Teachers' Professional Development](#)). Though focused on digital literacy, the ICT-CFT illustrates how competencies combine technology, pedagogy, and content. In general education policy, the EU's 2006 and 2018 Key Competences documents describe necessary competences for lifelong learning, including multilingualism and digital competence, which echo those needed by language teachers (e.g. the ability to communicate in foreign languages, to use ICT for learning).

Competence is further considered dynamic and developmental. HLTMAG (Grabowska, 2020) notes that competence today emphasizes not just knowledge but an individual's "potential" and capacity for self-critique. In this view, professional competence is not a fixed end-state but a continuous growth process. As OECD (2024) indicates, teachers' professional competence is influenced by both prior preparation and ongoing learning, making it a multi-dimensional construct. Thus, any training initiative must support both mastery of skills and reflective, adaptive expertise.

## Core Dimensions of Professional Competence for English Language Teachers



In teacher education, the notion of *competency* often appears in competency-based curricula and standards (e.g. CEFR's teacher portfolio descriptors, TESOL standards). These documents break down competence into domains (language, pedagogy, assessment, professional growth) and specific indicators. For instance, English teachers require grammatical and sociolinguistic competences (knowledge of English and intercultural nuance), as well as communicative and digital skills to design interactive lessons. Modern theory, therefore, conceptualizes professional competence as an integrative framework: it includes subject mastery, pedagogical methodology, technological proficiency, and reflective capacity.

Building on this integrative framework, it is increasingly recognized that **teacher professional competence must be flexible, future-oriented, and culturally responsive**. In the context of globalization and digital transformation, teachers are expected to navigate diverse classroom environments, adapt to rapidly changing educational technologies, and respond to the unique socio-emotional and linguistic needs of their students. As **Darling-**

**Hammond et al. (2017)** argue, effective teaching in the 21st century is no longer just about delivering content—it involves designing meaningful learning experiences, facilitating inquiry, and cultivating critical thinking.

One essential dimension of modern teacher competence is **intercultural competence**, especially for English language teachers working in multilingual and multicultural environments. According to **Byram (1997)**, intercultural communicative competence involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to interact appropriately and effectively with people from different cultures. This is especially relevant in Uzbekistan, where English teachers often encounter diverse student backgrounds, regional dialects, and varying levels of exposure to English and global culture.

Another growing area of focus is **emotional and relational competence**, which includes the ability to manage classroom relationships, respond to students' emotional needs, and create a positive, inclusive learning climate. **Jennings and Greenberg (2009)** highlight that emotionally competent teachers are better able to foster student engagement, regulate their own emotions, and maintain classroom harmony, all of which contribute to academic success and personal development.

Furthermore, **reflective competence** has gained prominence as a core element of teacher professionalism. Inspired by the work of **Donald Schön (1983)** on the “reflective practitioner,” teacher education programs now widely incorporate reflective journals, portfolios, peer reviews, and critical incident analyses to help pre-service teachers internalize lessons from their experiences. This reflective orientation not only supports continuous self-improvement but also aligns with the lifelong learning paradigm emphasized by UNESCO and the OECD.

Incorporating **socio-pedagogical competence** is also vital. As noted by **Markova and Yakushina (2017)**, this refers to a teacher's ability to guide the social development of learners, understand the sociocultural context of learning, and apply ethical principles in teaching. For future English teachers, this means addressing issues such as gender equity, inclusive education, and the responsible use of technology, especially in under-resourced or rural settings where access and opportunities may vary.

These evolving demands have pushed many countries to align their teacher training programs with competency-based frameworks such as:

- **DigCompEdu** (European Commission) - which defines 22 educator-specific digital competencies.
- **ISTE Standards** – emphasizing equity, citizenship, digital content creation, and student empowerment.
- **UNESCO's Framework on Teacher ICT Competency** – outlining how to integrate digital tools to improve pedagogy and curriculum.

In the **Uzbekistan context**, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation has made it a policy priority to align teacher education with **CEFR standards**, improve English

proficiency, and build capacity in digital pedagogy. National reforms also focus on **personalizing teacher development**, integrating **ICT tools like onlinedu.uz**, and promoting **continuous professional learning** through in-service platforms and micro-credentialing. Therefore, when conceptualizing teacher competence in this study, the focus is not merely on what teachers know, but also on what they can **do** - and **how they reflect, adapt, and grow**. A truly competent English language teacher in the 21st century is:

- A **content expert** with mastery in English linguistics and methodology;
- A **pedagogical designer** who applies varied and inclusive teaching strategies;
- A **digital navigator** capable of using and creating technology-enhanced learning experiences;
- A **reflective thinker** who self-assesses and improves through critical engagement;
- A **relational leader** who manages classroom dynamics with empathy and confidence;
- And an **intercultural communicator** who promotes global citizenship and tolerance.

These facets will serve as the core pillars for the development of the digital platform proposed in this research - ensuring it goes beyond technical training to support the holistic development of future English teachers in Uzbekistan.

In summary, the **theoretical underpinnings** of the study by defining teacher professional competence and situating it within the context of English language education and digital pedagogy. We have seen that teacher competence is multifaceted – integrating content knowledge, pedagogical skill, personal qualities, and digital literacy. We have also highlighted specialized components for English teachers (language proficiency and communicative techniques) and noted that modern frameworks emphasize ICT skills. This will inform the design of the competence-building platform: ensuring it addresses the full spectrum of teacher competences identified in research and policy. In particular, the importance of interactive learning methods and supportive digital tools flows directly from these theoretical principles. We have defined the landscape of professional competence for English language teachers. We have conceptualized competence as multifaceted, comprising knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable effective teaching in diverse contexts.

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