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ENHANCING THE ECONOMIC COMPETENCE OF FUTURE SPECIALISTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. The article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of developing the economic competence of future specialists in the context of contemporary socio-economic transformations. Particular attention is paid to the growing importance of economic competence in ensuring the professional competitiveness of graduates and their successful adaptation to labor market requirements. The study analyzes the concepts of competence and competency, explores various scientific approaches to the interpretation of economic competence, and identifies its essential structural components.

Keywords: economic competence, future specialists, competency-based approach, higher education, professional training, economic literacy, economic thinking, digital competence, entrepreneurship education, project-based learning, professional competence, labor market competitiveness.

In the current socio-economic conditions of our country, the preparation of future specialists for professional activity should be carried out with due consideration of the ongoing changes in society, the economy, science, and the content of education. Today, the growing demand for highly qualified personnel, the creation of effective mechanisms for implementing innovative scientific achievements in practice, and the need to ensure the economic sustainability of educational institutions require the training of competitive specialists capable of innovative thinking and supporting technological advancement.

In this regard, the statement of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, that “we all witness how intense global competition is becoming. We can respond adequately to this fierce competition only through the wide implementation of modern science, advanced technologies, and innovative achievements” highlights the relevance of this research. Furthermore, the Presidential Decrees of the Republic of Uzbekistan, including PF-60 “On the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026” and Resolution PQ-3151 “On Measures to Further Expand the Participation of Economic Sectors and Industries in Improving the Quality of Training Specialists with Higher Education,” emphasize that the quality of specialist training within higher education institutions is a key factor in ensuring innovative economic development, modernization of production, and structural transformation of the national economy.

Analysis of scientific literature demonstrates that the concepts of “competence” and “competency” have become central categories of the modern educational paradigm. Since the second half of the twentieth century, these concepts have been extensively studied in pedagogy, psychology, and management sciences. The competency-based approach evaluates educational outcomes not merely by the volume of acquired knowledge but by the ability to apply this knowledge effectively in practical activities. From this perspective, economic competence is interpreted as an integration of economic knowledge, skills, values, motivation, and practical experience.

In scientific research, the concept of competence has been interpreted in various ways. Competency, derived from the English word “competence,” refers to the ability to effectively

utilize acquired theoretical knowledge and demonstrate one's capabilities in professional activities. Economic competence encompasses the formation of personal qualities, economic thinking, economic behavior, and the ability to organize diverse socio-economic activities.

The concept of economic competence is interpreted differently in academic literature. Most researchers describe it as an integration of economic knowledge, economic thinking, economic culture, and economic behavior. According to Khodjibaeva, economic competence represents an individual's ability to acquire economic knowledge, understand economic phenomena and processes, and apply economic approaches in professional activities. The researcher considers economic competence one of the fundamental determinants of professional success in contemporary society.

Nurmatova argues that economic competence is a complex personal characteristic that enables individuals to understand economic processes, develop economic thinking, and consciously participate in economic activities under market economy conditions. She characterizes economic competence as the unity of economic knowledge, economic culture, and economic behavior.

The emergence of the competency-based approach is associated with the necessity of evaluating educational outcomes not solely through the amount of knowledge acquired but through an individual's ability to apply knowledge effectively in practical situations. According to Chekanushkina and colleagues, the competency-based approach has become one of the principal methodological foundations for improving the quality of professional training in contemporary education. The authors define competence as an integrated system consisting of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, independent thinking, and the ability to perform effectively in professional situations.

In recent years, the issue of economic competence has also attracted considerable attention within the international academic community. Studies indexed in Scopus and Web of Science focus on the structural composition, development mechanisms, and assessment criteria of economic competence. Research conducted by Federiakin and co-authors within German and Russian higher education systems defines economic competence as the ability to understand microeconomic and macroeconomic knowledge, analyze economic situations, and make well-reasoned economic decisions. The authors emphasize that assessing and developing economic competencies has become an essential component of international educational standards.

Various scientific approaches exist regarding the content and structure of economic competence. Komelina and colleagues describe economic competence as a system comprising motivational, cognitive, and activity-based components. The motivational component reflects interest in economic activity and professional needs; the cognitive component represents a system of economic knowledge; and the activity component encompasses the practical application of knowledge in economic situations. The researchers substantiate that the use of problem-based situations, practical assignments, and project activities significantly contributes to the development of economic competence.

Morozova identifies value-motivational, cognitive, personal, and communicative-activity components within the structure of economic competence. According to the author, economic competence extends beyond the acquisition of economic knowledge and includes economic thinking, responsible decision-making, effective organization of economic relations, and communicative abilities.

Contemporary pedagogical studies recognize competency-based education, practice-oriented learning, project activities, innovative pedagogical technologies, and digital educational tools as the primary factors contributing to the development of economic competence among future specialists. A systematic review conducted by Marta Abelha and colleagues indicates that higher education institutions increasingly focus on competence development to ensure graduates'

success in the labor market. The researchers conclude that innovative teaching methods, cooperation between universities and employers, and practice-oriented education play a significant role in developing both economic and professional competencies.

Contemporary pedagogical research places particular emphasis on the structural components of economic competence. Sitnikova and Sosnovskaya define economic competence as a complex integrative characteristic consisting of cognitive, motivational-value, practical-activity, reflective, and personal components. According to the authors, the effective formation of economic competence contributes not only to the acquisition of economic knowledge but also to the development of economic thinking culture and economic responsibility among students.

From a theoretical perspective, the formation of economic competence is grounded in constructivist, activity-based, and competency-based approaches. According to the constructivist approach, knowledge is not transmitted in a ready-made form but is actively constructed and reconstructed by learners. Consequently, economic competence develops through independent analysis of economic problems, modeling of economic situations, and participation in decision-making processes.

The activity-based approach, in turn, emphasizes the development of economic competence through practical activities closely related to real-life situations. In Riznyk's studies, competency-oriented tasks with economic content are recognized as an effective means of fostering critical thinking among future economists. The author highlights the significant role of economic problem-solving, business case studies, economic modeling, and project-based activities in developing economic competence.

Research conducted between 2020 and 2025 demonstrates the increasing importance of digital technologies in fostering economic competence. According to Skrinnik, the digital economy requires economic competence to encompass data management skills, the ability to utilize digital analytical tools, economic forecasting capabilities, and financial data processing competencies. This trend indicates a substantial expansion of the traditional understanding of economic competence.

Modern scientific perspectives increasingly interpret economic competence in conjunction with global competencies. A systematic literature review conducted by Guo, Zhuang, and Hasan revealed that the development of global competencies has become one of the strategic priorities of contemporary higher education. The researchers argue that under conditions of economic globalization, future specialists must possess not only economic knowledge but also competencies related to international cooperation, intercultural communication, and understanding global economic processes.

Uzbek scholars have also devoted considerable attention to the development of economic competence. In the studies conducted by Khodjibaeva, students' economic competence is regarded as a critical factor in preparing specialists capable of meeting the requirements of the contemporary labor market. The author emphasizes that economic competence formation is inseparably linked with the acquisition of economic knowledge, the development of economic thinking, and the application of economic approaches within professional activities.

The legal and regulatory foundations for the development of economic competence are also being strengthened through policies aimed at modernizing higher education, introducing competency-based approaches into the educational process, and aligning educational quality with international standards. These reforms contribute to creating a favorable pedagogical environment for developing economic competence among future specialists.

Among the methodological foundations for developing economic competence, Project-Based Learning (PBL), Problem-Based Learning, applied research, and business simulations occupy a prominent place. Research conducted by Chekina demonstrates that the development of

pedagogical business projects contributes significantly to enhancing students' economic thinking, strategic planning abilities, and economic analysis skills.

Furthermore, communicative competence plays an essential role in the formation of economic competence. Contemporary economic activity increasingly involves negotiation, teamwork, presentation of economic information, and justification of economic decisions. Zahorodna and colleagues emphasize that the development of communicative-professional competence among students majoring in economics significantly contributes to improving the effectiveness of their future economic activities.

Despite these advances, challenges remain regarding the assessment of economic competence. The model developed by Ring and Oberrauch for evaluating economic graphic competence demonstrates that while students generally experience little difficulty in interpreting simple economic graphs, they often struggle to analyze complex economic relationships and draw evidence-based economic conclusions. In particular, students encounter difficulties when interpreting demand and supply models, market equilibrium, and interrelationships among economic indicators. These findings indicate that the practical and analytical components of economic competence remain insufficiently developed.

One of the most important indicators reflecting the current state of economic competence development is the level of economic literacy. Recent studies increasingly regard economic literacy and economic competence as interconnected concepts. A systematic review conducted by Straume and colleagues, based on forty-nine scientific articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, revealed a strong relationship between economic education, financial literacy, and the development of transversal competencies. The researchers argue that modern economic education should focus not only on economic knowledge but also on critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and digital literacy.

Among the factors influencing the development of economic competence in higher education, teachers' professional competence occupies a special place. Research conducted in 2024 indicates that teachers' professional competence significantly affects students' economic literacy and economic behavior. The findings demonstrate that economic and digital literacy function as mediating factors between teacher competence and students' economic behavior. This underscores the necessity of continuously improving the qualifications of teaching staff to foster economic competence effectively.

Recent scientific studies have also explored the relationship between economic competence and digital transformation processes. According to Kovalchuk, economic competence within the digital economy includes the ability to use artificial intelligence technologies, manage and analyze data, employ digital analytical tools, and conduct economic forecasting. Although many students demonstrate a relatively high level of digital literacy, their ability to integrate digital technologies into economic analysis remains insufficiently developed.

In Uzbekistan's higher education system, the development of economic competence has become one of the strategic priorities. The Concept for the Development of Higher Education until 2030 identifies the preparation of competitive specialists based on competency-oriented approaches as a key objective. This strategic goal is directly related to the enhancement of economic competencies. Khodjibaeva notes that insufficient levels of economic competence complicate graduates' adaptation to labor market requirements. Therefore, the modernization of economic education methodologies, expansion of practical training opportunities, and broader implementation of innovative educational technologies are considered essential.

Studies conducted by Akbarova have also examined the current state of economic competence formation among students. The findings indicate that the development of economic competence depends not only on economic knowledge but also on creative thinking, readiness for economic activity, and professional adaptability. The author emphasizes the importance of

interdisciplinary integration and innovative educational technologies in fostering economic competence.

An analysis of international experience reveals that several challenges continue to impede the development of economic competence. These challenges include:

– the predominance of theoretical economic knowledge over practical application;
– insufficient integration between economic education and professional practice;
– inadequately developed assessment criteria for economic competence;
– difficulties in forming competencies required by the digital economy;
– disparities in economic literacy levels;
– insufficient development of economic thinking and analytical skills.

Nevertheless, contemporary research also demonstrates positive trends in the development of economic competence. These include the improvement of educational curricula based on competency-oriented approaches, the expansion of project-based learning technologies, the development of startup ecosystems, the implementation of digital educational tools, and the integration of economic education with practical professional activities.

Research conducted by Hoshko indicates that university startup ecosystems serve as effective mechanisms for developing entrepreneurial and economic competencies among future economists. Similarly, studies by Sharafutdinov and co-authors provide experimental evidence supporting the effectiveness of pedagogical technologies aimed at developing entrepreneurial competencies among students in non-economic specialties. The findings confirm that innovative pedagogical technologies positively influence the practical dimensions of economic competence.

In conclusion, the analysis of scientific literature demonstrates that despite positive developmental trends, several systemic challenges remain in the field of economic competence development among future specialists. Contemporary studies confirm the growing significance of practice-oriented education, digital technologies, economic literacy, entrepreneurial skills, and competency-based approaches in this process. Therefore, improving pedagogical mechanisms, modernizing the content of economic education, and developing an integrative model of economic competence should be regarded as priority directions for future pedagogical research and educational practice.

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