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Teachers' Readiness for Learning via MOOCs During War-time: Ukrainian Case

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Abstract

This article explores the topical issue of Ukrainian teachers' readiness to obtain micro-credentials during wartime. Rapid changes in the education system, such as the swift digitalization of the educational process, the implementation of inclusive education, and the emergence of a new position of a teacher's assistant, along with the need for psychological support during wartime, demand continuous professional development from teachers. As part of the Erasmus+ K2 project "MOOC-based micro-credentials for teacher professional development" (CRED4TEACH), a national framework for recognizing micro-credentials in Ukraine is being developed, as well as institutional framework to ensure the quality of micro-credentials and their focus on regional educational needs. The project aims to provide high-quality, timely, inclusive, flexible, and competency-based learning for teachers. Therefore, as part of the development of institutional framework at Drohobych Ivan State Pedagogical University (DSPU), a survey of regional teachers was conducted to assess their perceived needs for obtaining micro-credentials. The purpose of this article is to analyze the readiness of Ukrainian teachers to obtain micro-credentials during wartime and to identify the factors influencing this process. The novelty of the research lies in filling the gap in scientific knowledge about teachers' readiness to obtain micro-credentials in the face of challenges.

Based on a survey of 280 teachers in Lviv Oblast, the study analyzes the levels of teachers' readiness for self-education and their desire to obtain micro-credentials. Respondents chose the forms, methods, and terms of study for obtaining micro-credentials and evaluated their own level of motivation and readiness to obtain micro-credentials. The obtained results are a valuable contribution to understanding the needs of teachers and developing strategies for their professional development in challenging conditions. This article will be useful for educational program developers, school directors, and teachers seeking to improve their qualifications.

Keywords: micro-credentials, teacher, self-education, professional development, war, Ukraine.

Introduction

Micro-credentials, a relatively new concept in higher education, have emerged as a promising solution to address the evolving needs of learners and employers. These bite-sized credentials, often focused on specific skills or knowledge areas, offer a flexible and accessible pathway to professional development. The growing popularity of micro-credentials can be attributed to several factors:

Alignment with Contemporary Challenges (Oliver, 2019): Micro-credentials effectively respond to the rapidly changing labor market, where skills obsolescence is a growing concern. By providing learners with the opportunity to acquire specific skills on demand, micro-credentials help individuals stay relevant and competitive in their careers.

Enhanced Accessibility and Flexibility (Brown et al., 2021): Micro-credentials often involve online delivery formats, making them accessible to a wider range of learners, including those with limited time or geographic constraints. Additionally, the modular nature of micro-credentials allows learners to customize their education based on their individual needs and career goals.

Industry Support and Investment (Ashan, 2023; Williams, 2024): The potential of micro-credentials has not gone unnoticed by industry leaders, universities, and governments. Significant investments are being made to develop and promote micro-credential programs, further driving their growth and adoption.

Despite their many advantages, micro-credentials are not without their challenges. Standardization and regulation are essential to ensure the quality and credibility of micro-credential offerings. Moreover, while micro-credentials can complement

traditional educational programs, they cannot fully replace comprehensive degree programs. Developing appropriate regulatory and institutional mechanisms is crucial to support the integration of micro-credentials into the broader higher education landscape (Ratnasari, Chou & Huang, 2024).

Micro-credentials represent a significant advancement in higher education, offering a flexible, accessible, and skills-focused approach to learning. As the demand for micro-credentials continues to grow, it is imperative to address the challenges associated with their implementation and ensure that they contribute to the overall improvement of educational services and outcomes. A highly effective method for enhancing teacher professional development is by leveraging Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which offer a scalable platform for accessing quality learning opportunities. (Boltz et al., 2021).

Ukrainian legislation clearly defines professional development as an integral component of teachers' career growth. This process involves not only acquiring new knowledge and skills but also the continuous improvement of existing competencies. This analysis focuses on the key provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Education" (2017) regarding teacher professional development. The Law clearly distinguishes between "retraining" and "professional development". Retraining is aimed at acquiring a new profession, while professional development involves improving existing competencies within the already acquired profession. Both processes are integral parts of postgraduate education and are aimed at ensuring a high level of professionalism among teachers.

The Law guarantees teachers the right to professional development and retraining. Moreover, they have the right to freely choose the forms, programs, and educational institutions for their professional development. Importantly, the state guarantees the financing of teacher professional development. Educational institutions play a crucial role in ensuring teachers' professional development. They are obliged to create conditions for teachers' self-education, promote their participation in professional development programs, and support any other forms of professional growth.

An analysis of legislative norms indicates that teacher professional development in Ukraine is a priority of state policy in the field of education. The legislation creates the necessary conditions for ensuring the continuous professional development of teachers, guaranteeing their rights and obligations, and defining the role of educational institutions in this process. Types of Professional Development: training programs (this includes participation in seminars, workshops, trainings

(seminar-workshops, seminar-conferences, seminar-trainings), webinars, masterclasses, and so on) and internships.

According to the current legislation, professional development can be carried out in various forms, including participation in academic mobility programs, research internships, self-education, obtaining a scientific degree, and higher education. In accordance with the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Certain Issues of Advanced Training of Pedagogical and Scientific and Pedagogical Staff" (2019), pedagogical staff have the right to independently choose the forms, types, directions, and subjects of professional development. This indicates the decentralization of the professional development process and its focus on the individual needs of teachers. The Law of Ukraine "On Complete General Secondary Education" (2020) establishes the mandatory annual professional development for all pedagogical staff and guarantees reimbursement of expenses related to business trips for professional development. At the same time, each teacher has the right to choose any educational institution or other educational entity to improve their qualifications. The issue of the duration of professional development for pedagogical staff in Ukraine is regulated in detail by the current legislation, in particular by the Law of Ukraine "On Complete General Secondary Education" (2020) and the subordinate acts that supplement it.

According to the current legislation, the total duration of professional development for pedagogical staff is determined on an accumulative basis and is expressed both in hours and in ECTS credits. At the same time, different minimum standards are established for different categories of pedagogical staff: pedagogical staff of general secondary education (at least 150 academic hours over five years); pedagogical staff of preschool, out-of-school, and vocational secondary education (at least 120 academic hours over five years); pedagogical staff of higher and postgraduate education: at least 6 ECTS credits over 5 years.

One ECTS credit is equivalent to approximately 30 hours of total workload, including classroom activities, independent work, and preparation for exams. An important feature of modern educational programs is the integration of knowledge and practical skills. In particular, it is assumed that at least 10% of the study time will be devoted to the development and implementation of inclusive approaches in the educational process. In addition, teachers must have the skills to provide psychological support to students, which involves allocating at least 10% of the study time to the development of the corresponding competencies.

Research Question: How are Ukrainian teachers prepared to actively obtain new knowledge and skills through micro-credentials, particularly in the challenging context of wartime?

Method: A voluntary online survey was administered to secondary school teachers in the Lviv region, Ukraine, from August 10 to September 10, 2024. Invitations were sent to school directors, who then disseminated the survey among their staff. A total of 280 female teachers from 120 schools participated, representing a 9.9% response rate at the school level.

Participants: The sample consisted of 280 female teachers with an average age of 46 years (range: 25-60) and an average teaching experience of 23 years (range: 2-35). The sample was balanced in terms of geographic location, representing both urban and rural schools.

Findings

Ukrainian legislation and education laws stipulate that teachers must continuously engage in professional development. Research findings indicate that 74.3% of surveyed teachers are interested in obtaining micro-credentials. Among the factors influencing teachers' choice of micro-credentials, the following can be highlighted: labor market relevance (52.8%), the possibility of distance learning (44.4%), duration of study (22.2%), and the prestige of the institution (19.4%). The next significant factor in the choice was the format of learning. The vast majority of teachers selected an online course (MOOC) – 75% (fig.1). One of the defining criteria for motivation and readiness for self-education was the duration of the course, as MOOCs typically involve 4-6 ECTS (120-180 hours). 72.2% of surveyed teachers plan to obtain a micro-credential after short-term training.

In Ukrainian society, there is an active discussion about the digital skills of teachers, especially those in rural schools. Survey results show that 72.2% of teachers consider their digital skills sufficient to undergo training based on MOOC technologies. An important feature of MOOC-based online courses is the lack of constant pedagogical support; participants communicate on forums and form unique online educational communities. The majority of teachers surveyed, 63.9%, indicated that they do not have enough information about MOOCs to decide whether they need pedagogical support. However, 30.6% of respondents believe that they do not need pedagogical support and that MOOC learning is the best choice, as it has a flexible schedule and an individual pace of learning.

Regarding the forms and methods of presenting material in MOOCs for obtaining micro-credentials, teachers' opinions were divided.

The learning process, its intensity, duration, and independence from others are the key advantages of MOOC technologies. Most respondents (33.3%) indicated that they can obtain MOOCs both individually and as a team, and will adapt to the conditions of MOOCs. This confirms the thesis of the constant adaptation of teachers to new educational realities. Given the workload of modern teachers, the war, shelling, and problems with electricity, mobile communication, and the Internet, an important criterion for developing MOOC tasks and materials was determining the amount of time (hours per week) that teachers can devote to MOOC training. Most respondents (30.6%) are ready to devote 2-3 hours per week to training.

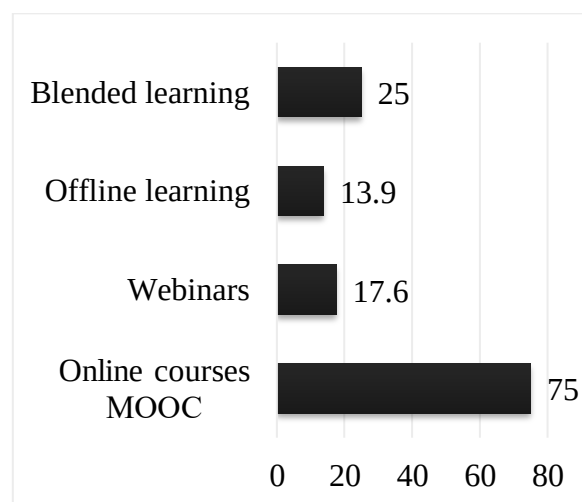


Fig.1. What is the most convenient training format for teachers? (%)

When selecting a MOOC, teachers aim to obtain micro-credentials for various purposes: the vast majority of respondents (80.6%) - to expand their professional knowledge and skills, 58.3% - for personal development, and 36.1% - to improve work efficiency (fig.2).

To reduce the risk of not completing a MOOC online course and, consequently, not obtaining a micro-credential, it is necessary to identify the obstacles that may hinder this. According to surveyed teachers, the main reasons may be lack of time (58.3%), financial constraints (41.7%), and family circumstances (33.3%). It should be noted that very few of those surveyed chose reasons related to military actions and lack of electricity. When choosing MOOCs, teachers focus on the relevance of a particular profession in the labor market. Despite the ever-increasing demands of

society on teachers, some of them choose micro-credentials for self-development.

To develop relevant MOOCs and implement them on educational or academic platforms, it's crucial to analyze the areas of interest for teachers in obtaining micro-credentials. Among a wide range of fields, 44.4% of teachers chose innovative teaching technologies, 36.1% selected inclusion, and 27.8% opted for digital skills.

Conclusions

Over the past 10 years, several educational platforms have gained popularity in the Ukrainian educational landscape (Vseosvita, Osvityoria, Na Urok, Osvita Nova, etc.), and new ones continue to emerge. Teachers frequently attend webinars on these platforms, which is why 72.2% of respondents indicated they would seek information on educational platforms. The majority of teachers (69.5%) plan to undergo MOOC training on pedagogical support for students in inclusive classrooms at the Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University and obtain micro-credentials.

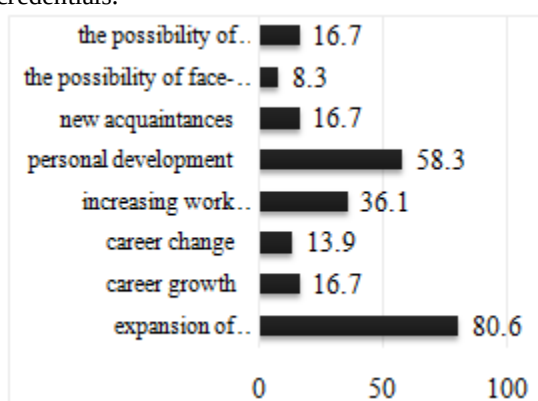


Fig.2. Expectations of teachers from obtaining micro-credentials (%)

This research examines teachers' willingness to pursue micro-credentials during challenging times, particularly in the context of war. Findings indicate that teachers are open to obtaining micro-credentials, driven by various motivations. Their self-organization and self-control suggest a growing trend of micro-credential acquisition for professional development. However, the study's limitations include the research design and low response rate. Future research should employ standardized methodologies and a broader range of evaluation methods.

Recommendations

Educational program developers, school principals, and teachers should consider the relevance of micro-credentials in the labor market. MOOC developers for teacher professional development in Ukraine should focus on flexibility, relevance, and personalized learning experiences, addressing the unique challenges and interests of teachers.

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