THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL COMPETENCE AND PROFESSIONAL WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Abstract Digital competence has become one of the most important professional skills in modern education. Teachers who work with children with special educational needs are expected to use digital technologies for communication, lesson planning, assessment, documentation, and individualized instruction. In the context of digital transformation, the level of teachers' digital competence is closely connected with their professional well-being.

Special education teachers who possess strong digital skills are more confident in their work, less likely to experience stress, and more capable of adapting to changes in educational environments. In contrast, teachers with low levels of digital competence may experience anxiety, professional dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion.

This article examines the relationship between digital competence and professional well-being among teachers working with children with special educational needs. The study highlights the importance of digital literacy, professional development, emotional resilience, and institutional support in improving teachers' well-being.

Keywords: digital competence, professional well-being, special education, teacher stress, digital literacy, inclusive education, teacher motivation.

Introduction The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed the educational system in many countries. Teachers are increasingly expected to use digital platforms, online communication tools, electronic assessment systems, and educational applications in their daily practice.

For teachers working with children with special educational needs, digital technologies are particularly important because they can support individualized instruction, communication, and accessibility. Students with autism spectrum disorders, speech impairments, visual or hearing disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and learning difficulties often benefit from digital tools that are adapted to their needs.

Special education teachers use digital technologies to create visual schedules, interactive tasks, online games, speech therapy exercises, audio materials, and individualized learning plans. Digital platforms also help teachers communicate with parents, monitor student progress, and collaborate with psychologists and other specialists.

However, the successful use of digital technologies depends on teachers' digital competence. Digital competence refers to the ability to use technologies effectively, safely, critically, and confidently in professional activities.

Teachers with strong digital competence are usually more confident and better prepared to solve technical problems, adapt materials, and organize online learning. As a result, they are more likely to experience professional satisfaction and emotional stability.

In contrast, teachers with low levels of digital competence may feel overwhelmed by technological demands. They may spend excessive amounts of time trying to solve technical problems, experience anxiety during online lessons, and feel insecure about their professional performance.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between digital competence and professional well-being among teachers working with children with special educational needs.

Methods This article is based on a qualitative analysis of scientific literature related to digital competence, teacher well-being, inclusive education, and special pedagogy.

The following methods were used:

1. Review of scientific literature published between 2020 and 2025;
2. Comparative analysis of digital competence frameworks;
3. Analysis of the relationship between competence and well-being;
4. Synthesis of practical recommendations for educational institutions.

The study focused on identifying the main areas of digital competence and examining how they influence teachers' emotional and professional well-being.

Results

The Importance of Digital Competence in Special Education

Digital competence has become an essential requirement for special education teachers. Modern teachers are expected to know how to use educational technologies not only for teaching but also for communication, assessment, planning, and documentation.

Special education teachers often need to use:

- Online learning platforms;
- Speech therapy applications;
- Visual learning tools;
- Assistive technologies;
- Digital assessment systems;
- Communication applications;

- Interactive educational games;
- Online reporting systems.

These tools can improve the quality of education and make learning more accessible for children with special educational needs.

Areas of Digital Competence

Digital competence includes several important areas:

- Ability to use digital devices;
- Knowledge of educational software;
- Skills in creating digital content;
- Ability to organize online communication;
- Understanding of digital safety and privacy;
- Use of assistive technologies;
- Skills in online assessment and feedback.

Teachers who have competence in these areas are more likely to feel confident and effective in their work.

Influence on Professional Well-Being

The study found a strong relationship between digital competence and professional well-being.

Teachers with strong digital competence are more likely to:

- Experience lower levels of stress;
- Feel more confident in their work;
- Adapt more easily to changes;
- Have higher job satisfaction;
- Feel more motivated;
- Experience less anxiety during online teaching;
- Save time through efficient use of technology.

When teachers know how to use digital tools effectively, they spend less time solving technical problems and more time focusing on teaching and communication with students.

Digital competence also improves teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can successfully complete tasks and achieve professional goals. Teachers with higher self-efficacy are usually more emotionally stable and more satisfied with their profession.

Negative Consequences of Low Digital Competence

Low levels of digital competence may negatively affect teachers' well-being.

Teachers who lack digital skills often experience:

- Fear of technology;
- Professional insecurity;
- Increased stress;
- Emotional exhaustion;

- Low confidence;
- Difficulties in communication;
- Poor work efficiency.

They may also feel embarrassed when technical problems occur during lessons or when they are unable to use digital tools successfully.

Over time, these experiences may lead to frustration, burnout, and professional dissatisfaction.

The Role of Professional Development

Professional development is one of the most effective ways to improve teachers' digital competence.

Educational institutions should organize:

- Digital literacy courses;
- Workshops on assistive technologies;
- Training on online teaching methods;
- Peer mentoring programs;
- Practical technology sessions;
- Webinars and online conferences.

Such opportunities help teachers improve their knowledge, increase their confidence, and reduce anxiety related to technology.

Institutional Support

Institutional support is also very important. Schools should provide teachers with:

- Access to modern devices;
- Stable internet connection;
- Technical support services;
- Clear digital policies;
- Opportunities for collaboration;
- Reduced administrative pressure.

When teachers feel supported, they are more likely to use technology confidently and maintain positive emotional well-being.

Discussion The findings show that digital competence is closely connected with teachers' professional well-being. Teachers who possess strong digital skills are usually more confident, less stressed, and more satisfied with their work. They are able to organize lessons more effectively, solve technical problems more quickly, and communicate with students and parents more confidently.

Teachers with high levels of digital competence are also more flexible when educational changes occur. For example, they can adapt more easily to online learning, use new educational platforms, and prepare digital materials without experiencing excessive anxiety. As a result, they are more likely to feel successful and professionally motivated.

However, digital competence should not be considered only a technical skill. It is also closely connected with emotional resilience, self-confidence, problem-solving ability, and the capacity to adapt to change. Teachers who know how to use digital technologies effectively often feel more independent and more in control of their professional activities.

In contrast, teachers who have low levels of digital competence may feel insecure and stressed. They may spend more time solving technical issues, preparing online materials, and learning how to use unfamiliar technologies. Such difficulties may reduce their confidence and increase emotional exhaustion.

Educational institutions should therefore invest in teacher training and provide continuous support. It is especially important to support special education teachers because they often work in more complex environments and face additional responsibilities. They need to adapt educational materials, use assistive technologies, communicate with parents, and monitor students with different types of disabilities and learning difficulties.

Schools should organize regular professional development programs that help teachers improve their digital literacy and practical skills. These programs may include workshops, mentoring sessions, webinars, online courses, and peer learning activities.

At the same time, schools should avoid overloading teachers with unnecessary digital tasks. Technology should simplify work, not create additional stress. Teachers should not be required to use too many digital platforms at the same time or spend excessive amounts of time completing online reports and administrative tasks.

Educational leaders should create supportive environments where teachers feel safe to ask for help, share experiences, and learn from mistakes. A positive school culture can improve teachers' confidence, reduce stress, and strengthen their professional well-being.

Therefore, digital competence should be viewed not only as a professional requirement but also as an important factor that influences teachers' emotional health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life.

Conclusion Digital competence plays a crucial role in the professional well-being of teachers working with children with special educational needs.

Teachers with strong digital skills are more confident, emotionally stable, and professionally satisfied. In contrast, low levels of digital competence may contribute to stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Educational institutions should support teachers by providing training, technical assistance, professional development opportunities, and positive working conditions.

Improving teachers' digital competence is not only important for the quality of education but also for their emotional and psychological well-being.

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