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## **ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF MASTERS IN CUSTOMS SERVICE**

The research paper concerns the issue of evaluating the level of professional competence of masters in the field of Customs service including assessment of professional knowledge and skills as well as professionally significant personal qualities (ethics, integrity, personal dignity, confidence, empathy, customer-oriented approach). The authors suggest methods and instruments of developing and improving professional competence, in particular, by means of various professional tasks, modeling Customs environment challenges, discussions and interaction, e-learning techniques together with analyzing regulatory documents concerning international Customs law. The paper also emphasizes the importance of implementing a new approach to enhancing the level of personal qualities that are vital for successful performance of professional functions, especially for future Customs management staff.

*Key words: assessment, development, professional competence, professional knowledge and skills, professionally significant personal qualities, masters in Customs affairs.*

**P**roblem statement. Signing the Bologna Declaration resulted in striving to harmonize national systems of higher education in general and a significant remodeling of approaches, goals and objectives being implemented within the training of specialists in different areas, in particular. A special focus is put on the process of education of professionals, whose sphere of activity is connected with representing our country in the world and influences on its perception as a democratic person-oriented society, taking care, meanwhile, of its economic, political, environmental, military, travel safety and other interests.

One of the main addressees of this work are government officials, namely Customs officers of various ranks. Along with the need for an appropriate modernization of their activity the active phase of the Ukraine's European integration demands training the new generation of specialists of the highest educational qualification level who could exercise their professional functions on the principles of transparency, facilitation, integrity and professional ethics, high quality professional communication with the subjects of «customs interaction», adoption of the world's best multicultural standards while performing public duties.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Analysis of diverse studies that have direct or implicit relation to the solution of the issue being discussed made it possible to note the existence of a large number of scientific works that laid the basis for its implementation, in particular: the reform of higher education with an emphasis on harmonization with the European educational systems and standardization of the national system of higher education (O. Golubenko [2], V. Gulo [5], M. Mikhailichenko [12]); general problems of training and use of effective methods (S. Martynenko [10], M. Perets [15], O. Pometun [16], Yu. Suharnikov [18], N. Volkova [22]); theoretical and methodological principles of creation and development of professional competencies of specialists in public positions (L. Hridnyeva [6], N. Kichuk [8], A. Morozov [11], V. Tenischyeva [19]); some aspects of training, retraining and advanced training of Customs personnel (M. Graaf [3], A. Gubin [4], A. Pankratov [13], O. Pavlenko [14]).

The analysis of recent scientific works has made it possible to identify positive trends in the field of professional education both in the developed and some developing countries, specify the successful models of content creation, the forms and methods used in training Customs officers. These ideas can be adopted to make suggestions for the modernization of professional training of Ukrainian specialists.

**Purpose of the article.** Taking into consideration the increasing volume of international trade operations and wider geography of commerce, on the one hand, and growing quantity of Customs frauds both on the national and global levels, governments make greater requirements to educate professionals able to provide better regulative and protective systems. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assess the level of professional competence of masters in Customs service who will take management positions in Customs administrations and develop strategy and policy of their organizations.

**Main material.** The content of the educational-qualification characteristics of graduates with Master's degree in the field of Customs service and the international professional standards of Customs officers as well as the EU Customs Competency Framework together with the theoretical provisions of competency approach have specified the requirements for professional qualifications of a Customs administrator. In particular, we found that these documents emphasize the high level of professional knowledge, skills and specific personal qualities (ethics, integrity, personal dignity, confidence, empathy and customer-oriented approach), organizational, managerial and general communication skills, foreign language communication skills. Furthermore, the nature of Customs work causes the necessity to develop skills to plan, organize and control one's own actions and others' activities as well as interact at different levels with a variety of means, including using foreign language skills.

In general, we have outlined three main kinds of professionally specific competences necessary to comply with the national and international requirements for Customs profession, in particular: professional competence, organizational and management competence, communicative competence. Professional competence being the most important is, in our opinion, represented as a knowledge system that ensures the fulfillment of certain professional functions and includes knowledge of the international trade facilitation principles, security of the international supply chain, Customs control, risk management and risk analysis, the provisions of national and international Customs laws and standards of international conventions in the field of Customs service, Customs post audit, tariff classification; skills in Customs control procedures, use of risk analysis approach, determination of tariffs; professional-important personal qualities (ethics, integrity, personal dignity, confidence, empathy, customer-oriented approach).

According to some scientists [9], obtaining knowledge, including professional one is a process maintained by grasping operations, transformation of external experience into internal one, resulting in skills and abilities development. Professional ability is such a combination of theoretical knowledge and professional actions that ensures successful fulfillment of professional tasks. Therefore, we believe that the creation and development of professional skills of future top-level employees in the field of Customs require systematic and purposeful use of various professionally-oriented learning tasks, adopting the experience of the international Customs community, modeling future professional activities aimed at implementing theoretical knowledge in practice.

In addition, the specificity of the profession of Customs officer provides for mastering a certain range of personal qualities needed for successful professional activities and without which,

whatever professional knowledge and skills a specialist might possess, he or she cannot be considered a highly qualified worker. Such professionally significant personal qualities (ethics, integrity, personal dignity, confidence, empathy, customer-oriented approach) being diagnosed and developed during our study were defined based both on the statutory and regulatory provisions of Ukraine and the World Customs Organization Professional Standards [17] and the EU requirements for competence of Customs administrations officials [1].

Diagnosing the level of professional competence of masters in Customs affairs has implied the detection of the depth of Customs knowledge, skills and personal qualities helping to create in practice a system of tools and techniques to achieve professional goals, quickly orient oneself in professional situations, plan one's own activities and efficiently perform professional tasks. To identify the knowledge and skills a detailed analysis of the educational progress of students in three professional subjects «Risk Analysis in Customs», «Basics of Export Control» and «Methods of Combating Smuggling and Customs Violations» has been made. Based on the analysis of students' final marks and the survey of teachers of these subjects as to success of the students in doing practical tasks and tests the following conclusion has been made: only 8.1% – 10.6% of students in the control and two experimental groups (the first experimental group consisted of the masters in Customs service from the Ukrainian Academy of Customs, the second – the masters from Poltava University of Economics and Trade) have a high level of knowledge and skills; the vast majority of masters have an average (37.4% – 38.6%) and low (50.8% – 54.5%) level of knowledge in these three subjects. The highest level of knowledge and skills (10.6%) was registered for those masters who had already studied within bachelor programs created in compliance with the international professional standards of Customs officers. However, the data showed that the total impact of even such training was very low [21].

In addition, the results of the test work on the subjects showed that only 9.4% of respondents have a high level of theoretical knowledge and applied skills; however, there was a fairly high rate of those students who had a low level of knowledge and skills (55.7%).

The summarized description of masters' level of acquiring professional knowledge and skills is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

**Outcomes of professional knowledge and skills creation**

Group of respondents	Level					
	High		Average		Low	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Control	5	7,15	27	38,57	38	54,28
Experimental(1)	8	9,41	33	38,83	41	51,76
Experimental(2)	7	9,33	29	38,67	39	52,00

According to the data in Table 1 the respondents of control and two experimental groups revealed a rather low level of mastery of professional knowledge and skills (54.28%, 51.76% and 52% respectively).

The authors also assessed the personal qualities being identified by the international professional standards as professionally important for Customs officers that, to our mind, have a direct impact on the development of professional competence [21]. These qualities include ethical conduct, personal dignity, confidence, empathy and client-oriented approach that correlate with the students' answers to the question which qualities, in their opinion, have the greatest influence on the effectiveness of future professional activities. Thus, the most important, according to students' responses, are responsibility (24.8%), personal dignity (18.3%), confidence (11.4%), respect for people (10.8%), fairness (8.5%), and empathy (6.9%).

However, monitoring the activities of students during the performance of various learning tasks, including group ones, and modeling moral and professional situations, the results of the proposed questionnaire and methodology, respondents' self-observation for their own behavior

showed a low level of almost all of the professional qualities: majority of masters did not reveal respect for the opposite view, did not seek to address the needs of others, were not able to argue their decisions constructively with considering different points of view, were not guided by rules of ethics.

Experts in the above mentioned observation were 20 university lecturers. Evaluation of the levels of the professionally significant personal qualities was made according to an eight-score scale proposed by K. Karalkina to study the creation of professional qualities of a personality [7]. The highest level (7) provided that quality always showed up; high level (from 6 to 5) – was almost always revealed; average level (from 4 to 3) – more showed up than didn't; low level (from 2 to 1) – the quality is almost undetectable; extra low (0) – the quality is absent. The data on the demonstration level of these professionally important personal qualities are shown in Table 2 [21].

Table 2

**Outcomes of the demonstration parameter of each professionally important personal quality in the student control and two experimental groups in the process of professionally directed training activities**

Group of respondents	Level									
	highest		high		average		low		extra low	
	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%
Ethics of conduct										
Control	–	–	6	8,57	20	28,57	39	55,71	5	7,15
Experimental (1)	–	–	9	10,59	28	32,94	46	54,12	2	2,35
Experimental (2)	–	–	7	9,33	23	30,67	40	53,33	5	6,67
Personal dignity										
Control	–	–	5	7,14	19	27,14	41	58,57	5	7,15
Experimental (1)	–	–	8	9,41	26	30,59	48	56,47	3	3,53
Experimental (2)	–	–	6	8,00	23	30,67	43	57,33	3	4,00
Confidence										
Control	–	–	8	11,43	19	27,14	41	58,57	2	2,86
Experimental (1)	–	–	11	12,94	27	31,76	45	52,94	2	2,36
Experimental (2)	–	–	9	12,00	22	29,33	42	56,00	2	2,67
Empathy										
Control	–	–	4	5,71	18	25,71	42	60,00	6	8,58
Experimental (1)	–	–	6	7,06	25	29,41	50	58,82	4	4,71
Experimental (2)	–	–	5	6,67	21	28,00	44	58,66	5	6,67
Client-oriented approach										
Control	–	–	4	5,71	13	18,57	43	61,43	10	14,29
Experimental (1)	–	–	7	8,24	20	23,53	48	56,47	10	11,76
Experimental (2)	–	–	5	6,67	17	22,67	43	57,33	10	13,33

The data in Table 2 demonstrate that no students from the control and two experimental groups revealed the highest level of professionally significant personal qualities; in each group there is mostly poor mastering of the qualities under study, in particular, from 52.94% (confidence) to 61.43% (client-oriented approach), extra low – from 2.35% (ethics of conduct) to 14.29% (client-oriented approach). The high level of these qualities was specific to from 5.71% (empathy, client-oriented approach) to 12.94% (confidence) students; the average level was represented by from 18.57% (client-oriented approach) to 32.94% (ethics of conduct) respondents.

Thus, we can state that since each of the elements of professional competence (knowledge, skills and professionally significant personal qualities) had a low level of development, in general, the professional competence itself had not been properly created and developed.

The results of the diagnosis being made led to the implementation of various tasks in the training programs of masters in the field of Customs aimed at increasing the level of knowledge and skills as well as professionally significant personal qualities on the basis of international professional standards for Customs officials. This was accomplished following the next stages.

First, after a thorough analysis of academic programs of professionally-oriented subjects, we suggested expanding their content by relevant content modules that optimize the training of masters in Customs affairs on the basis of the international professional standards. Second, the educational process was complemented by the training instruments of the World Customs Organization CLiKC e-learning platform, in particular, electronic thematic modules, interactive training courses, different tasks aimed at learning regulations concerning the basic Customs and trade standards and procedures of international organizations, display slides, glossaries, methods for assessing professional knowledge development (interim tests, exercises, surveys), means of interaction (forums, chat rooms, experts community, blogs, workshops) [20].

In addition, in order to effectively develop professional knowledge and skills we offered to apply discussion methods in the form of round tables (discussion of professional topics as an exchange of views between five or six students and with the «audience»), meetings of an expert group («panel discussions» between five or six students being designated by the head who then present their outcomes to the audience in the form of notification or report), forum (a discussion, in which «expert group» exchanges views with «audience»), symposium (a discussion, during which participants present their reports offering own opinions, then answer the questions from the audience), debate (a discussion based on the presentations of participants who represent two opposing teams), trial (a discussion that simulates a lawsuit), brainstorming. We consider that application of the above mentioned methods helps to optimize masters' awareness of issues related to various aspects of their future profession, specify the problems and identify approaches to address them from the perspective of each participant, express one's own opinions, argue and confirm them by facts [21].

To develop personal qualities, empathy, and reflective skills it was suggested using special tasks aimed at learning the provisions of the Arusha Declaration concerning integrity in Customs and discussing the rules of professional conduct and possible punishment for dishonest and corrupt actions, to make an analysis of videos, which presented different behaviors of Customs officers and their treatment of customers, to prepare presentations on the topics «International Rules of Integrity of Customs Personnel», «Methods of Increasing Moral and Ethical Level of Ukrainian Customs Officers». The discussion of the videos and presentations provided for expressing reasoned opinions, credibility in facts statement, the use of additional examples to support one's own position, comparison of international experience with the existing practice in Ukraine, respect of the opinions of other students.

**Conclusions and further researches directions.** To sum it up, we should emphasize that the assessment of the level of professional competence of masters in Customs service showed that the majority of students didn't possess appropriate professional knowledge and skills as well as professionally significant personal qualities necessary to solve professional tasks and meet challenges. In order to develop and improve professional competence of masters in Customs service, we consider it effective to introduce into masters' academic programs the revised content modules within Customs subjects, different professionally-oriented tasks, discussion methods involving simulation of possible professional situations, e-learning instruments as well as special assignments to improve integrity, ethics of conduct and empathy, confidence and train to meet clients' needs.

Further research in this area can imply the development of a national electronic platform for on-campus and off-campus training of Customs managers and creation of video courses targeted at increased integrity of Ukrainian Customs personnel.

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У статті розглянуто питання оцінки рівня професійної компетентності магістрів у галузі митної справи, включаючи оцінку професійних знань і умінь, а також професійно значущих особистісних якостей (етики поведінки, професійної чесності, особистої гідності, впевненості в собі, емпатії, застосування клієнтоорієнтованого підходу). Авторами запропоновано методи і інструменти розробки і вдосконалення професійної компетентності, зокрема за допомогою різновидів професійних завдань, моделювання складних ситуацій у митному середовищі, дискусій і взаємодії, методів електронного навчання, а також аналізу нормативних документів, що стосуються міжнародного митного права. У статті також наголошується на важливості реалізації нового підходу до підвищення рівня особистісних якостей, які мають важливе значення для успішного виконання професійних функцій, особливо для майбутніх керівників митних установ.

*Ключові слова: оцінка, розвиток, професійна компетентність, професійні знання і навички, професійно значущі особистісні якості, магістри у галузі митної справи.*

В статье рассматривается вопрос оценки уровня профессиональной компетентности магистров в области таможенного дела, включая оценку профессиональных знаний и навыков, а также профессионально значимых личностных качеств (этики поведения, профессиональной честности, личного достоинства, уверенности в себе, эмпатии, применения клиентоориентированного подхода). Авторами предложены методы и инструменты развития и совершенствования профессиональной компетентности, в частности с помощью решения различных профессиональных задач, моделирования сложных ситуаций, характерных для таможенной среды, дискуссий и взаимодействия, методов электронного обучения, а также анализа нормативных документов, касающихся международного таможенного права. В статье также сделан акцент на важности реализации нового подхода к повышению уровня личностных качеств, которые имеют большое значение для успешного выполнения профессиональных функций, особенно в отношении будущих сотрудников таможенно-управления.

*Ключевые слова: оценка, развитие, профессиональная компетентность, профессиональные знания и навыки, профессионально значимые личностные качества, магистры в области таможенного дела.*

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