

# EUROPEAN TEACHING EXCELLENCE FOR STUDENTS' BETTER PERFORMANCE: WHAT IS TEACHERS' FEEDBACK ON JEAN MONNET MODULE?

**Oksana Zabolotna**

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor

Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, Uman, Ukraine

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4901-1053> e-mail: [oxana.zabolotna@gmail.com](mailto:oxana.zabolotna@gmail.com)

**Olena Lokshyna**

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor

Institute of Pedagogy of the NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5097-9171> e-mail: [luve2001@hotmail.com](mailto:luve2001@hotmail.com)

*The article provides information about Jean Monnet Module 'European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance' (2020-2023) in terms of its contents, objectives, and outcomes. The Module addresses a better understanding of European policies and effective practices for developing key competencies and basic skills for lifelong learning, and it targets teachers as key change agents. The authors focus on the participants' feedback to improve the Module's key components.*

*Keywords: Jean Monnet Module; teachers' feedback; European quality; students' performance*

**Introduction.** Since 2016 the Ukrainian school education has been transforming within the New Ukrainian School initiative, which focuses on the shift from theoretical knowledge to key competencies and basic skills. In 2018, it was the first time Ukraine participated in PISA. However, by the Average Score in Mathematics, Science, and Reading, it fell behind the most EU member states, especially Estonia, Finland, and Poland, which were the top EU PISA countries. That brings about the need for learning education practices of the top PISA countries regarding successful teaching and learning.

As Belfali (2020) puts it, "There is no "one size fits all" education model for countries and economies, but the PISA provides countries with the evidence to appreciate challenges, to learn from the experiences of other successful countries, and to create momentum for collective actions to make change happen for improvement (Belfali, 2020, p. 60).

**Literature review.** PISA has been a research focus for more than two decades since 1997 when it was established. Main PISA global and regional findings have been described in the OECD research (OECD/UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2019a; OECD, 2019b). Literature on this topic is plentiful and easy to find in the open access on the official OECD site. Also, plenty of publications focus on the results of particular countries, either in English or their national languages. The most common are national reports, analytical materials, and teaching recommendations (Natsionalnyi Zvit, 2019; Starahina, Tereshchenko & Panchenkov, 2020; Vakulenko, Lomakovych & Tereshchenko, 2017).

The achievements and challenges of PISA are the subject of analysis of many researchers. The Google Scholar finds about 1,940,000 "PISA" hits. For instance, few studies have considered the teacher's role in boosting student learning for PISA (Belfali, 2020) and acquiring 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as the focus of the teacher's professional

development (Yue, 2019). The issue is twofold as, on the one hand, the teachers often bear responsibility for their students' performance and thus should be aware of the PISA task characteristics; on the other hand, teachers can be treated as learners who acquire 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills to be able to teach their students accordingly. As a response, the authors present their action research during the teacher professional development course as a part of Jean Monnet Module "European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance" (2020 – 2023).

**General overview of the Module.** Its purpose is to use the experience of the PISA top EU PISA countries to improve the Ukrainian students' performance. It will bring Ukraine closer to EU standards and significantly improve the quality of school education in Ukraine, directly related to most spheres of society.

The Jean Monnet Module addresses a better understanding of the European policies and effective practices for developing key competencies and basic skills for lifelong learning.

The Module comprises:

- The Summer School annually (for the groups of Humanities, Science and Mathematics teachers) on the European policies, tools and best practices in school education;
- content multiplication, as the teachers who are the Summer School participants, in their turn, design PISA-like tasks on the EU-related content that are sent to all the experimental schools;
- intense dissemination at five conferences, three webinars, and three roundtables.

This Jean Monnet module is the first European study course for teachers at the Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences (NAES) of Ukraine. It prepares them to effectively implement the best European practices in transforming Ukrainian school education within the New Ukrainian School Reform. Besides, the conferences and roundtables as components of the Module activities promote the dissemination of knowledge on the European policies and best practices among policy-makers, mass media representatives, and civil society in Ukraine. The broader public gets access to the added value of the Module through the free online materials designed by the teachers and through the Module website (<https://etest.org.ua/>) and its Facebook and Instagram active accounts.

One of the Module's added values is developing and modernizing the curricula on European Studies through the cooperation of researchers from Ukraine and the European Union, thus providing learners with relevant knowledge for the effective transformation of national education. Also, the Module specifically focuses on the EU quality of education, which is particularly important for the Ukrainian schools.

The Module improves the teaching contents of teacher professional development programmes accredited at the Institute of Pedagogy. Furthermore, it significantly contributes to the extension of awareness of European educational policies and best practices among teaching staff, young researchers, students, policy-makers, educational experts, and the public through the summer school and online presentation of the Module.

The Module aims at highlighting positive examples of the European policies and practices for quality school education with the interdisciplinary focus on developing students' key competencies and basic skills for lifelong learning. The main outputs of the Module are increasing teachers' awareness of key aspects of EU educational policies and practices effectiveness and challenges and bringing this knowledge into Ukrainian

classrooms. Besides, the online course design for teachers involved tasks that developed critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information, media, and technology literacy, etc.

The paper *aims at* analyzing the results and feedback the teachers gave after the participation in the 2021 Summer School. Also, the authors have analyzed the reasons that prevented some teachers from completing the Summer School course.

The research questions are:

*To what extent did the teachers benefit from the professional development course?*

*What prevented some teachers from completing the course?*

*What should be done to improve the course in the successive cohorts?*

**The participants.** In 2021, the summer school for three groups of teachers, i.e., of the Humanities, Science, and Mathematics was conducted. There was some competition as the project team selected the teachers who demonstrated high levels of motivation that could be traced in their applications. It resulted in the first dropout wave that, presumably, brought higher quality participants. However, as the school was an intense course, there was some percentage of teachers who had not completed it. So, we can talk about the second dropout wave that encompassed teachers who did not manage to complete the five-days course offered to them. After the school, the teachers got a follow-up task connected with designing competency-based tasks to be piloted and published after editing. It caused the third dropout wave as not all of them managed to complete the task (table 1).

**Table 1. Summer school participants**

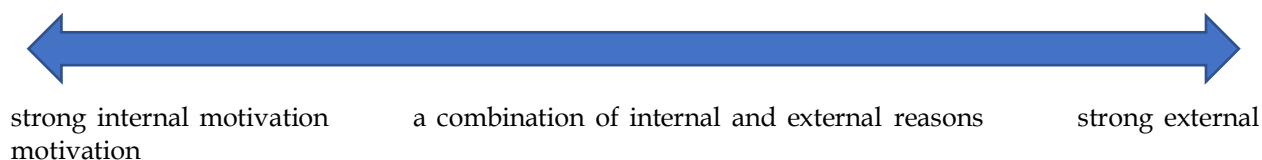
The subject taught	Registered participants	Selected participants	First dropout wave, %	The participants who completed the intense course	Second dropout wave, %	The participants who completed the follow-up task	Third dropout wave, %
Humanities	25	20	20	16	20	9	44
Sciences	27	20	26	20	0	15	25
Mathematics	26	20	23	18	10	18	0

## Methods

The action research comprised two stages, namely, pre-intervention and post-intervention. Some data were collected during the intervention stage. Before the intervention, the authors conducted baseline research that focused on the teachers' awareness of what tasks were used in PISA-2018, the general theoretical knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, and the teachers' motivation to participate in the professional development course. The research was a combination of a questionnaire and analysis of motivation letters submitted in the application for the course. After the intervention, the authors conducted ten in-depth interviews with the course participants (6 interviews with those who completed the course and four interviews with those who dropped out). Some information came during the intervention through the participants' reflection submitted through google-forms after each session. Thus, the authors applied mixed method research that was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

### *Data selection*

Motivation letters analysis (n=78 (teachers who submitted their applications)) was carried out by placing the participants' reasons for participating in the professional development course on the continuum between the poles 'strong internal motivation' and 'strong external motivation'. The examples of the markers for 'strong internal motivation' were synonymous with '*I feel the need for...*', '*I have done a lot of reading on the issue but still would like ...*'. On the other hand, the examples of the markers for 'strong external motivation' were the following: '*The school principal urged me to apply for the course, 'The course will bring me another certificate that is useful for teachers' certification...*'.



**Figure 1. Continuum of teachers' motivation for participation in the course**

Before the course, selected teachers (n=60) filled in a questionnaire that focused on the teachers' awareness of what tasks were used in PISA-2018 and on the general theoretical knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The questionnaire had 16 items, out of which 3 were open-ended questions.

After the course, ten respondents were randomly selected for participation in semi-structured in-depth interviews about the benefits and drawbacks of the teacher professional development course and the dropout reasons. The authors conducted six interviews with those who had completed the course and four interviews with those who had dropped out. Some information came during the intervention through the participants' reflection that was submitted through google-forms after each session. Thus, the authors applied mixed method research that was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

### **The intervention**

In the project's first year, the authors may write about covering the first stages of the action research, namely, planning, intervention, reflection, and planning for improvement. Further on, there will be another stage connected with checking the improved model.

#### *Cycle 1*

The first intervention cycle was connected with the teachers' participation in online sessions. The curricula regulated this part of synchronous learning with different contents for each of the three courses but with the same modes of teaching, approaches, and tools. There are three of them: Curriculum for the Teachers of Ukrainian Language and Literature (Topuzov, Zabolotna, Lokshyna, Kalinina, & Vasylieva, 2021a), Curriculum for the Teachers of Sciences (Topuzov, Zabolotna, Lokshyna, Kalinina, & Vasylieva, 2021b), Curriculum for the Teachers of Mathematics (Topuzov, Zabolotna, Lokshyna, Kalinina, & Vasylieva, 2021c).

The teaching approaches were: task-based approach and constructivist learning.

The teaching modes were: group collaboration, pair work, and plenary.

The tools were: zoom videoconferencing tool, Google documents, Word Wall, Kahoot, Jamboard, and Padlet.

#### *Cycle 2*

The second intervention cycle was connected with the teachers' asynchronous work on designing PISA-like tasks. If in the first cycle, they did it in groups, in the

second cycle, they were expected to do it individually. At the end, the teachers participated in peer-review sessions where they could express their opinions and improve the designed tasks.

As a result of teachers' collaboration, they could publish three selections of competence-based tasks for school students.

### The findings

Comparing the baseline study (BS) and the post-intervention test (PIT) can contribute to understanding the extent to which the teachers have raised their awareness of the issues related to PISA, its tasks in general, and the competencies it requires.

The teachers were divided into three groups by the level of their awareness. Particular criteria were taken into account when defining the level. The criteria have been defined in the curricula of the course.

**Table 2. Teachers' awareness of PISA, its tasks and required skills, before and after the course, %**

Aspects of awareness	High level		Middle level		Low level	
	BS	PIT	BS	PIT	BS	PIT
The teachers' awareness of what PISA is	10	70	40	20	50	10
The teachers' awareness of what kind of tasks were used in PISA-2018	8	46	12	34	80	20
The general theoretical knowledge of 21 <sup>st</sup> -century skills	18	46	42	34	40	20
Teachers' vision of how the course content can influence their work in the classroom	16	78	40	22	44	0

Table. 2. demonstrates that there is an evident difference in the teachers' awareness of what PISA is, what its tasks and required skills are before and after the course. It proves that the designed curriculum enhances teacher involvement, the content perception, and cognitive and social professional activities that may further develop educational practice. Thus, we may state that the participating teachers have benefitted from the professional development course which they also mentioned in the course satisfaction survey and in in-depth interview, calling it 'engaging', 'thought-provoking', 'pioneering', 'practical', 'creative' etc.

However, a high dropout rate brought about the research question about the reasons that prevented some teachers from completing the course. The authors conducted six interviews with those who had completed the course and four interviews with those who had dropped out. The successful participants repeated the idea that motivation and interest were the key reasons that prevented them from dropping out. The authors compared the information from motivation letters that the applicants submitted before the course and the dropout rate in three categories of teachers.

**Table 3. Teachers' motivation for participation in the course and dropout rate, %**

	Strong internal motivation	Combination of internal and	Strong external motivation	Dropout rate

		external reasons		
Teachers of Mathematics	58	12	30	10
Teachers of Sciences	44	10	46	25
Teachers of the humanities	42	6	52	55

The Table 3 illustrates the lowest dropout rate of Mathematics teachers, with the highest percentage of those who demonstrated strong internal motivation. Although the percentage of those who had strong internal motivation was nearly the same for teachers of Sciences and the Humanities, the dropout rate of the latter is much higher. The authors attribute it to the fact that, at the start, there was a high percentage of teachers with strong external motivation, which did not prevent them from dropout.

In in-depth interviews with the teachers who did not complete the professional development course, the respondents stated that 'there was too much work at school' (though the course was at the end of June when the school year was over), 'they had bad internet connection', 'they did not think that the course would be so intense, 'they did not have necessary skills for interactive activities, 'it was hard to return to designing the PISA-like tasks after the vacation' etc.

### **Discussion**

The study explored teachers' participation in the professional development course "European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance," designed to focus on the competencies that come into play in preparing students for PISA-like tasks. The data from motivation letters, reflective forms, post-course tests, and in-depth interviews were analysed, focusing on the course content and modes of delivery, teachers' discussion on the course challenges, and possible changes. The authors carried out an action research focusing specifically on how the course might be transformed to meet the teachers' needs better. Drawing from the analysis of the teachers' awareness of the course content before and after the course, the overall finding shows that the designed curriculum enhances teacher involvement, content perception, and cognitive and social professional activities that may further develop educational practice. Thus, answering the first research question, the authors state that the participating teachers have benefitted from the professional development course, which is further elaborated in the course satisfaction survey.

First and foremost, the motivation letters analysed against the teacher dropout rate elicit a direct connection to teachers' motivation at the start of the course. Whereas strong internal motivation and a combination of internal and external reasons supported the teachers in completing the course tasks and activities in both live sessions and individual work, external motivation was more characteristic of the teachers who dropped out. Other dropout reasons mentioned by the teachers were connected with organizational and technical problems. Therefore, the information elicited from the research can enable a somewhat changed way of teaching and organization of the course as well as introducing the individual task to the teachers.

The logic of the conducted research also confirms the importance to modernize the summer school participation requirements. It is obvious that there is a need to strengthen the emphasis on the mandatory presence of the participants in sessions, their

participation in the joint forms of the work, and the completion of individual tasks after online classes.

One of the findings concerns the need to take into account the school's functioning schedule when defining the summer school dates. It will eliminate overlap with periods of special workload for teachers in the course of their work. This refers primarily to the start and end of the school year, examination sessions, etc. An equally important result of the conducted research regarding the format of the summer school organization is the need to strengthen vertical and horizontal communication during the second intervention cycle connected with the teachers' asynchronous work on designing PISA-like tasks. Cooperation with trainers as well as interaction with the other participants will contribute to monitoring, support, and internal motivation increase.

Another contribution is the findings derived from the in-depth interviews and motivation letters, indicating that the participants with internal and mixed motivation are more likely to successfully complete the course, so this should be taken into account in the selection process. In the research, such implications concern the engagement of the teachers who are willing to develop professionally, enabling a creative context that triggers their task achievement.

### **Conclusion**

The conducted research emphasized the importance of the Module's openness to change. The modifications should be comprehensive relating to both organizational and contextual aspects. Such holistic approach will ensure better meeting the teachers' needs and reducing the dropout rate.

The research has led the authors to pinpoint the teachers' internal motivation as a priority factor for lowering dropouts. The internal motivation assists in establishing a context in which the course participants, on the one hand, feel comfortable and, on the other hand, are challenged to complete their individual tasks.

The emphasis on the participants' digital competence development is regarded as an additional tool for increasing their internal motivation. Aside from the immediate benefits to them relating the performance of the Summer School tasks and increasing the interaction with other participants, the digital competence mastering will contribute to their teaching quality raising in schools. At the same time, the aspect of individual support in the development of digital competence of older participants is sensitive.

The formation and support in the developing the community of practice of the summer school participants is viewed by the authors as a promising tool for increasing internal motivation.

The authors assume that the modified Summer School format will stimulate teaching excellence. Innovative ideas implemented during the sessions will be accompanied by active debates which can improve dissemination of new approaches. It can strengthen the national role of the Institute of Pedagogy of the NAES of Ukraine as one of the key policy-makers in the area of the Ukrainian school education and will extend the scope of European integration studies within Ukrainian schools and universities.

### *References*



- Belfali Y. (2020). Boosting Student Learning: PISA for Development. In: Panth B., Maclean R. (eds) *Anticipating and Preparing for Emerging Skills and Jobs. Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects*, vol 55. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7018-6\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7018-6_8)
- OECD (2019a). *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.
- OECD (2019b). *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>.
- OECD/UNICEF (2021). *Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Findings from PISA*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ebbeb179-en>.
- Yue, X. (2019). Exploring Effective Methods of Teacher Professional Development in University for 21st Century Education. *International Journal of Innovation Education and Research*. 7. 248-257. 10.31686/ijer.Vol7.Iss5.1506
- Vakulenko, T., Lomakovych, S., Tereshchenko, V. (2017). *PISA: Reading Literacy*. Kyiv: UCEEQ
- Nacionalnyj zvit za rezultatamy mizhnarodnoho doslidzhennya yakosti osvity PISA-2018 [National Report on the international research on quality of education PISA-2018] (2019). [http://testportal.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PISA\\_2018\\_Report\\_UKR.pdf](http://testportal.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PISA_2018_Report_UKR.pdf)
- Starahina, L., Tereshhenko, V. & Panchenkov, A. (2020). *Nova ukrajinska shkola: rozvytok chytatskoyi kompetentnosti v uchniv pochatkovoyi shkoly v systemi intehrovanoho navchannya: navchalno-metodychnyy posibnyk* [New Ukrainian School: reading competency development in primary school students in the system of integrated education], Kharkiv : Sonyashnyk
- Topuzov, O., Zabolotna, O., Lokshyna, O., Kalinina, L., Vasylieva, D. (2021a). European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance. The programme of advanced training of scientific and pedagogical workers in the specialty 01401. Secondary Education. Ukrainian Language and Literature. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358630632\\_The\\_programme\\_of\\_advanced\\_training\\_of\\_scientific\\_and\\_pedagogical\\_workers\\_in\\_the\\_specialty\\_-\\_014\\_Secondary\\_education\\_Ukrainian\\_language\\_and\\_literature](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358630632_The_programme_of_advanced_training_of_scientific_and_pedagogical_workers_in_the_specialty_-_014_Secondary_education_Ukrainian_language_and_literature)
- Topuzov, O., Zabolotna, O., Lokshyna, O., Kalinina, L., Vasylieva, D. (2021b). European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance. The programme of advanced training of scientific and pedagogical workers in the specialty 01414. Secondary Education. Sciences. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358631822\\_The\\_programme\\_of\\_advanced\\_training\\_of\\_scientific\\_and\\_pedagogical\\_workers\\_in\\_the\\_specialty\\_-\\_014\\_Secondary\\_education\\_natural\\_sciences](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358631822_The_programme_of_advanced_training_of_scientific_and_pedagogical_workers_in_the_specialty_-_014_Secondary_education_natural_sciences)
- Topuzov, O., Zabolotna, O., Lokshyna, O., Kalinina, L., Vasylieva, D. (2021c). European Teaching Excellence for Students' Better Performance. The programme of advanced training of scientific and pedagogical workers in the specialty 014. Secondary education: Mathematics. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358636341\\_The\\_programme\\_of\\_advanced\\_training\\_of\\_scientific\\_and\\_pedagogical\\_workers\\_in\\_the\\_specialty\\_-\\_014\\_Secondary\\_education\\_mathematics/stats](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358636341_The_programme_of_advanced_training_of_scientific_and_pedagogical_workers_in_the_specialty_-_014_Secondary_education_mathematics/stats)