

Professional and personal competencies of teachers' trainers in Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine the personal and professional competencies of qualified trainers in a teachers' training center managed by the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) in Lebanon. The study adopts a qualitative case study design and employs thematic analysis. Individual interviews were conducted with three trainers whereas four focus group interviews were conducted with 40 trainees upon completing a training module. The findings revealed two aspects of trainers' competencies: professional and personal attributes. From the trainers' and trainees' perspectives, it was found that professional trainers' competencies include knowledge mastery, teaching experience, self-development, collaborative interaction, use of practical activities and hands on, as well as use of visual aids and technology. Whereas the personal trainers' competencies include confidence, communication, organization, time management, problem solving, creativity, and respect for individual differences. These findings inform the design of competency-based frameworks for trainer selection and professional development in public education systems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within educational settings, reform and school improvement initiatives have evolved addressing a profound educational key that of teaching quality. Reform initiatives have highlighted that teaching quality can be reinforced through investing in teachers' training for the aim of building their capacities and improving their knowledge [1], [2]. Research has found that training enhances teachers' knowledge which in turn improves instruction and ultimately leads to greater student achievement [3], [4]. Furthermore, it was found that the best schools are the ones which organize continuous training initiatives for the purpose of elevating quality standards and improving school effectiveness [5]. School teachers, in light of all the global advances, are expected to adapt to new changes and develop innovative skills within the curricular, assessment and instructional delivery domains. The key to quality teachers' training lies in trainers who are the ones in charge of providing teachers with the most recent methodologies and techniques that are meaningful and practical to them.

In the globalization era, trainers need a wide range of competencies to overcome the challenges and demands of their jobs. Nowadays, trainers' competencies are directly linked to the success of organizational programs [1], [2]. The trainer's role has changed significantly to include mentorship, consultation as well as leadership. Thus, trainers' competencies have been the subject of discussions in both research and policy contexts for more than 40 years [6].

Since decades, researchers have linked the concept of competency to psychology through using it as an instrument to evaluate employees' performances [7]. According to literature, competency has the dimensions of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes needed to deal with situations in complex professional contexts [8]. Knowledge is the basis of developing skills and attitudes. Skill is the ability to practically implement learning; and is developed through repeated use of knowledge in a specific context. Ability determines the capacity to do intellectual or physical work. Attitude, which represents the individual's view of the world and its surroundings, is a framework that defines and shapes the field of thought and practice [8], [9].

Research exploring the correlation between trainer competencies and training quality, such as training satisfaction, trainee knowledge or training transfer into practice, emphasized that trainer competencies affect training outcomes [10]. Further research also stressed that training affects trainees' behaviors only when cultivating the trainers' characteristics and competencies [3], [4], [9]. Moreover, educational research demonstrates that adult learners are more likely to acquire knowledge and skills from trainers who possess certain personal and professional attributes [1], [2], [9]. Since trainers are considered the key constituents of the training, trainers directly impact trainees' understanding of the training content [4]. Trainers are the core elements of the training package and along with their methods, styles and techniques affect trainees' benefit and acquisition from the training content [4].

Therefore, when exploring the factors for fruitful training transfer, researchers have stressed the trainers' qualifications [11]. Consequently, an increased interest has developed in trainers, and more specifically, their knowledge and skills, which have been considered important transfer factors [9]. Taking into consideration the impact of trainers on training quality and benefit, it is crucial to explore the competencies of trainers. Trainers play a role in creating various learning environments to enrich teachers' repertoire and enhance their teaching practical skills. Moreover, there is a need for educated and skilled teachers' trainers to receive adequate opportunities to update their competencies and skills. Hence, the increasing need for up-to-date information about personal and professional development emphasizes new requirements for teachers' trainers.

While training programs have been the focus of many studies, there is a scarcity of research examining characteristics of effective trainers [12]. Consequently, efforts to identify the competencies and characteristics of effective trainers have increased [2]. Little information is available regarding the personal and professional profile of qualified trainers [2], [12], [13]. Such a profile helps gain a better understanding of their overall character and is useful in hiring training personnel and improving the training effectiveness and transfer. In Lebanon, few studies were conducted to address the effectiveness of training and trainers within educational settings [14]. Among these studies, none addressed the personal and professional competencies of qualified teachers' trainers. This study on trainers' competencies fills the research gap in Lebanon, as well as extends the current international research on this topic. Beyond identifying competencies, this study contributes a dual-perspective framework that highlights convergence between trainers' self-perceptions and trainees' experiential evaluations, a dimension rarely addressed in trainer competency research. Moreover, this study addresses competencies that are critical for training transfer not just training delivery. Unlike many studies that focus primarily on instructional skills, this research emphasizes trainers' capacity to ensure that learning is applied effectively in real work contexts, highlighting an aspect of professional competence that has been largely overlooked in the Lebanese training literature.

In addition, this study reflects a context-specific competency configuration. The competencies identified are influenced by Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) training program, the Lebanese educational system, and the socio-organizational conditions under which professional development is implemented. From this standpoint, the current research taps on the trainer's profile addressing competencies of teachers' trainers in one of CERD training centers in Lebanon. Recommendations emerging from the literature and the collected data call for actions and further studies to inform policy and practice.

This study aims to investigate the trainer profile through exploring the personal and professional competencies of teachers' trainers in one of CERD training centers in Lebanon. Particularly, this study aims at answering the following research question: what are the "personal and professional competencies of qualified teachers' trainers" from the perspectives of trainers and trainees? The study focuses on examining trainers' competencies as perceived by both trainers and trainees within the selected context. It contributes to the broader field of teacher professional development and trainer capacity building.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

During the last decades, research has addressed trainer profile and competencies which were identified in literature as trainer characteristics, trainer effectiveness, best practices or areas of expertise [15]. Some studies discussed trainers' competencies generally; others focus on specific characteristics, such as enthusiasm, charismatic trainer behavior or instructional proficiency [2], [10], [15], [16]. Different approaches were employed to measure trainers' competence. One of these approaches is the qualitative methodology like

interview and Delphi studies [17]. Others include quantitative approaches such as surveys, experiments and tests [17]. Moreover, some researchers employed a mixed methods approach through which competencies identified in a specific qualitative study are measured using a quantitative survey [17].

International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) researched basic training competencies. A study conducted in Canada and USA revealed that competencies address a package of both skills and knowledge [18]. Of the 30 different kinds of knowledge required for this era, the most important three are “adults’ psychology”, “adults’ needs”, and “adults’ self-knowledge” [18]. Of the 37 identified skills, the most rated are: communication, self-development, problem solving, students’ needs assessment, and contextualized learning experiences [18].

In Europe, Qualified to Teach (QF2TEACH) study, which investigated trainers’ competencies within educational settings, aims to: i) identify the needed trainers core competencies in Europe and ii) design a qualification framework for trainers based on the European Qualification Framework (EQF) [19]. The study collected responses from 208 researchers across eight European countries including Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Romania, Germany, Poland, and the UK. Results revealed 45 sub competencies covering nine broad titles which are: personal competence, personal professional development, subject expertise, learning analysis, effective instruction, motivating trainees, communication, supportive learning environment, addressing the learner, as well as effective group supervision. The competencies given high priority include: communication, managing groups, stimulating learners, addressing participants’ needs, building on participants’ experiences, evaluating the learner’s needs, and assessing educational outcomes. The study also highlighted that creating comfortable learning context and reinforcing collaboration are considered the most essential competencies [19].

On the other hand, the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Psych-pedagogical Competencies of Adult Educators (VINEPAC) project was initiated in 2006 by the Romanian Institute of Adult Education in partnership with Germany, Spain, Malta, and France [19]. The project aimed to design a competence profile for adult educators. Based on the competence profile, the project developed specific tools called Validpack, to authorize the trainer’s competencies [19]. Six trainers’ competencies were identified: knowledge, management, learning assessment, monitoring and counselling, professional and personal development and a specific category of teaching activities [19].

Whereas Wisshak and Hochholdingner [11] study addressed trainers personal and professional knowledge and skills. Literature was thoroughly explored, then 41 aspects of trainer knowledge were extracted and circulated via an online questionnaire to 200 trainers, 253 trainees and 93 human resources personnel from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Results revealed that content-specific knowledge, communication techniques, as well as clarity and structure are fundamental pillars for qualified trainers [11]. Moreover, the report “key competencies for adult learning professionals” [19] aimed to design a competency package for trainers in Europe. The report identified several main competencies of effective trainers. These competencies include being an autonomous lifelong learner and motivator, as well as managing group dynamics [19].

Finally, Measure of Effective Attributes of Trainers (MEAT) is a framework developed by Boyd and colleagues [2] to evaluate trainer competencies that directly impact training effectiveness. The MEAT model is based on two key concepts: credibility-which resembles the traits that address a trainer’s qualifications, including professionalism, experience, and expertise; and charisma-which includes the trainers’ competencies addressing personal relationships with trainees, such as warmth, friendliness, and enthusiasm [2]. This model was designed as an evaluation tool for trainers’ personal and professional attributes that directly impact the success of training programs, specifically in the mental health and education fields [2].

The intent of this study is to examine the trainer’s profile tackling two types of teachers’ trainers’ competencies: the personal and professional ones. Organizations can no longer continue to train employees in the same old manner; thus, educational institutions must prepare trainers who are considerate to the needs of teachers and adaptable to the fast-paced world they live in. This makes it essential to clearly define the competencies that effective trainers should possess in contemporary educational contexts. Such understanding is crucial for improving the quality and relevance of teacher training programs.

3. METHOD

This research follows a qualitative case study design because it aims to understand within a real world setting an educational phenomenon which is the profile of qualified trainers in a Lebanese teachers’ training center [20]. This qualitative research study uses thematic analysis informed by grounded theory principles such as data iterations, categorizations and synthesis [20]. The study aims to answer this research question: what are the personal and professional competencies of qualified teachers’ trainers from the perspectives of trainers and trainees?

3.1. Data collection

3.1.1. Context and sample

The “Continuous Training Program” was established in Lebanon in 2000 and funded by the World Bank, the Lebanese and French governments. The program is directed by the CERD which is a public center linked to the Ministry of Education. The “Continuous Training Program” allows public school teachers to benefit from mandatory in-service trainings on an ongoing basis, through a training program that includes 250 trainers training teachers in 33 centers all over Lebanon [21]. The context of this study involves one of CERD training centers located in Saida city within the South governate of Lebanon.

In this CERD training center and during the second semester of 2023-2024, training was provided for two consecutive weeks by 3 trainers to a group of 45 public school teachers. Training addressed various topics including classroom management, instructional strategies, students’ assessment and lesson planning. Individual and focus group interviews were employed to ask trainees and trainers about the personal and professional competencies of qualified trainers. Participants’ consent to be interviewed were sought and they gladly accepted unconditionally such that their anonymity is maintained. At the end of the training, 40 trainees rated the quality of the training as very good and excellent using an evaluation checklist. Then, four focus group interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of the 40 trainees who agreed to the effectiveness of the training modules they attended. The focus group interviews addressed the trainees’ inputs regarding the personal and professional competencies of qualified trainers. The trainees’ data was then complemented by individual interviews with the three trainers. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

3.2. Data analysis

Data analysis for this study employed thematic analysis which is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data [20]. Thematic analysis involves identifying repeated themes then forming categories within a data set [20]. Data from focus group and individual interviews were summarized. Then open coding was employed through identifying findings using codes to generate categories. Codes were identified and organized to pinpoint recurring themes reported by the various interviewed participants. Related constructs or themes were merged to produce a list of subcategories, as shown in Table 1.

3.3. Trustworthiness and rigor

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed [22]. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation by collecting inputs from both trainers and trainees within CERD, allowing for cross-verification of perspectives on trainers’ competencies. Dependability was addressed by using a consistent semi-structured interview protocol across all participants, ensuring uniformity in data collection procedures. Confirmability was strengthened using verbatim quotations from participants and the maintenance of an audit trail, thereby minimizing researcher bias. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed contextual description of CERD, including its role, structure, and training functions within the Lebanese educational system, enabling to assess the applicability of the study findings to similar contexts.

Table 1. Trainers’ competencies as identified by participants

No.	Competencies
Professional	
1.	Knowledge mastery
2.	Teaching experience
3.	Use of practical activities
4.	Use of visual aids and technology
5.	Self-development
6.	Collaborative interaction
Personal	
1.	Confidence
2.	Communication
3.	Respect for individual differences
4.	Time management
5.	Organization
6.	Problem solving
7.	Creativity

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trainees and trainers generated 13 personal and professional characteristics of qualified trainers as follows:

4.1. Professional competencies

To address the research question, the three trainers were asked individually to identify the professional competencies of qualified teachers' trainers. They claimed that qualified trainers are the ones who master knowledge about content and teaching methodologies and strategies. They added that it is essential for them to help trainees reflect on their professional experiences and further support them during the training sessions. Trainers also stressed that reinforcing collaborative interaction in planning and organizing the training activities is essential for creating a supportive learning environment where trainees help one another throughout the learning process. Stressing on "collaborative interactions" reveals the cultural spirit embedded within the Lebanese public schools where teamwork and group dynamics represent fundamental keys for teaching and learning.

Simultaneously, trainees were asked in four focus groups to discuss the professional skills of qualified trainers. Trainees claimed that competent trainers possess a thorough understanding and expertise in the subject matter they are teaching as well as knowledge in the content they are delivering. A trainee highlighted that *"Trainers should have practical and teaching experience in their field, which enhances their credibility and ability to relate theoretical knowledge to real-world applications and challenges."*

Moreover, a trainee claimed that self-reflection and development are continuous practices that trainers should nurture. He elaborated that *"Qualified trainers engage in a self-training process through attending training courses regularly and practicing continuous reflective thinking."* Trainees also linked group work to participants' involvement. One participant recognized this trainer attribute as excellent. Add to this, trainees stressed that real-life examples including the trainer's own success stories represent added value to the quality of training they received.

One trainee added that *"Trainers should incorporate hands-on exercises and simulations to reinforce learning and provide practical experiences where applicable."* Another mentioned *"They should utilize technological and visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and multimedia presentations to enhance understanding and engagement during training."* This emphasis on integrating technological tools and aids into training reflects the consistent efforts of the Lebanese public schools to align their teaching practices with modern technological innovations and standards.

4.2. Personal competencies

To address the research question, each of the three trainers was asked to discuss the personal competencies of qualified teachers' trainers. From the trainers' perspectives, the highlighted core competencies include interpersonal skills such as support, motivation and encouragement. Trainer one clarified *"Being a trainer is not about being in a training room and delivering content. It's more than that; it is mainly being fully available for trainees and motivating them to reach their fullest potentials."* Trainer two stressed *"To foster relationships and enrich learning experiences, trainers should encourage open communication channels and reinforce collaboration among trainees."* He elaborated that it is essential for trainers to adopt and promote a collaborative communication style while also acknowledging that addressing people's emotions is crucial for building strong relationships in any learning experience.

From the trainees' perspectives, qualified trainers possess various personal skills. These skills include communication, listening, motivation, emotional support, and conflict management. Out of the data, the most recurrent competencies were communication skills, as reported by one trainee *"The most important characteristic is actively listening to people and interacting with them genuinely and openly."* Another trainee added *"Qualified trainers communicate clearly and effectively to ensure information is conveyed accurately and understood by all participants."* This emphasis on communication may reflect the highly relational nature of professional learning communities in Lebanese public schools, where trust-building and emotional support are critical for engagement and transfer. Trainees also stressed that qualified trainers tend to be creative so that they innovate and adapt training methods to maintain interest, promote engagement, and effectively convey complex concepts.

Moreover, self-confidence was found essential as it contributes to the effectiveness of a trainer in facilitating meaningful learning experiences. One trainee mentioned *"Trainers should exhibit confidence and belief in their knowledge and abilities to effectively convey information and manage training sessions."* Moreover, respect for individual differences is a fundamental competency through which trainers *"Should demonstrate understanding and appreciation for diverse learning styles, backgrounds, and perspectives among trainees."* The need for the latter competence seems inevitable in the Lebanese culture, which is characterized by a rich diversity of citizens from various religions, sects, political affiliations and backgrounds.

Finally, trainees stressed that organization and time management skills represent essential core competencies as one trainee claimed *"Trainers should be structured and organized; they should efficiently allocate time during training sessions, balancing content delivery with activities and discussions to maximize learning within designated time frames."* Certain competencies emerged as dominant in the Lebanese CERD context due to the unique combination of institutional, cultural, and policy factors influencing training practices. Institutionally, CERD operates within a structured training framework that emphasizes best practices

and accountability. This creates a strong need for competencies such as knowledge mastery, problem solving, and teaching experience, as trainers are required to deliver high-quality training that aligns with organizational standards and outcomes.

Culturally, Lebanon's social and educational context places a high value on interpersonal relationships, respect for diversity, and collaborative interactions. Consequently, competencies like communication, collaborative interaction, and respect for individual differences are particularly salient, as trainers must navigate diverse learner backgrounds, foster engagement, and maintain trust within a collective environment. Policies also shape the prominence of certain competencies. Ongoing educational reforms and the integration of digital tools into educational programs can be directly linked to the use of visual aids and technology, and self-development trainers' competencies. Trainers are expected not only to stay current with technological advances but also to adapt to evolving pedagogical policies that encourage modern approaches. In summary, the dominant competencies in CERD's context reflect the intersection of institutional rigor, cultural expectations for collaboration and respect, and policy-driven modernization of training practices. These factors collectively shape which skills are prioritized and deemed essential for effective training transfer and adult learning engagement.

4.3. Discussion

The core of teaching and learning quality lies in enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills through continuous professional development programs. Teachers' professional development is fundamental in raising the standards of teachers' instructional delivery as well as students' achievement. The key to teachers' professional development is the trainer whose competencies and qualifications render training effective and fruitful. Rather than viewing trainer competencies as isolated skills, the findings suggest three interconnected domains that explain how competencies function in practice: i) competencies supporting training transfer; ii) competencies enabling adult learning engagement; and iii) competencies shaped by digital and reform contexts.

First, competencies supporting training transfer include skills that directly enhance the transfer of abstract learning into classroom practice, such as the trainers' knowledge mastery, teaching experience, problem solving, and use of practical activities. These competencies ensure that trainees not only understand the content but also implement it effectively in their professional context. Second, competencies enabling adult learning engagement are those that foster active participation and meaningful interaction within the learning environment, including competencies of collaborative interaction, communication, respect for individual differences, organization, time management, confidence and creativity. These skills create an atmosphere that motivates engagement and facilitates deeper interactions. Finally, competencies shaped by digital and reform contexts are those that reflect the evolving demands of modern education and training, particularly the integration of technology and responsiveness to reform. These include the trainers' use of visual aids and technology as well as the self-development competencies, which prepare trainers to adapt to changing environments and continuously enhance their professional skills.

The findings of this study concerning trainers' competencies are crucial and can be aligned with the existing literature. Findings show that trainers' competencies supporting training transfer, such as knowledge mastery, problem solving, and teaching experience, are central in the CERD context. This aligns with research findings highlighting the importance of these competencies in enhancing practical application and professional effectiveness [8], [13], [17], [19]. For instance, trainers who demonstrate solid pedagogical content possess expertise in the subject matter, helping them facilitate practical real-based training [17], [19], [23].

Furthermore, other research studies have found that trainers' competencies enabling adult learning such as collaborative interaction, communication, respect for individual differences, confidence, organization, time management and creativity lead to achieved objectives and better outcomes [17], [23], [24]. Research further elaborates that the competence of "communication: dealing with people" is what determines the future image of the ideal trainer [17], [23]. Moreover, the personal competencies of trainer expressiveness, charismatic behavior, self-confidence, professionalism and morals, body language, voice tone, coaching skills as well as dealing with group dynamics affect significantly trainees' engagement levels [17], [23], [24].

In parallel to the above, research revealed that training competencies shaped by digital and reform contexts such as the use of visual aids and technology facilitate the transfer of the training content [2], [13]. Further research has found that technology is regarded as a main component of training delivery helping teachers to become better designers of their instructional practices inside their classrooms [23], [25], [26]. These findings highlight the importance of integrating technology effectively into professional development programs to enhance teachers' engagement and learning, so that trainers are equipped to use digital tools and visual resources to support learning transfer to classroom instruction.

5. CONCLUSION

It is to be concluded that trainers' competencies, which are vital to training transfer and effectiveness, include professional and personal traits. This study found that professional trainers' competencies include knowledge mastery, teaching experience, self-development, collaborative interaction, use of practical activities and hands on, as well as the use of visual aids and technology. Whereas the personal trainers' competencies include confidence, communication, organization, time management, problem solving, creativity, and respect for individual differences. Moreover, the study shows that these competencies can be grouped into three categories: i) competencies supporting training transfer; ii) competencies enabling adult learning engagement; and iii) competencies shaped by digital and reform contexts. Taken together, the findings suggest that effective teachers' trainers operate at the intersection of pedagogical expertise, relational competence, and adaptive professionalism, underscoring the need for integrated competency development rather than isolated skill enhancement.

This study has implications on professional development programs which should take into consideration enhancing trainers' qualifications with an emphasis on continuous personal and professional upskilling within training programs. Moreover, policy makers and stakeholders should design competency-based framework which includes the ideal competencies to assess and develop trainers' qualifications. Limitations of this study include the limited sample size of participants which may not provide a comprehensive representation limiting by this the generalizability of findings. From the study conclusions on trainers' competencies, we propose several recommendations for practice and future research. For research, a framework for trainers personal and professional competencies need to be further investigated and developed. Second, further research is required to explore the impact of trainers' competencies on the training quality and outcomes. Third, future research should examine other factors that may affect transfer such as training context, structure, content as well as leadership support. Fourth, further studies may be employed to compare between the ideal trainers' competencies in Lebanon and other countries. Fifth, additional studies that employ a larger sample may be conducted.

At the practical level, to establish quality standards, it is recommended that training institutions reinforce the professionalization of training programs. For instance, organizations should offer learning opportunities for trainers and involve them in the training of trainers (TOT) programs whose content should be designed based on modern training methodologies and research. For example, it is essential to prioritize incorporating technology and visual aids when designing training. Add to this, human resource personnel should be selective when hiring trainers, requiring trainers to display personal and professional competencies focusing on their qualifications and professional expertise. Creating a database of trainers who possess such competencies is also an added value. Finally, organizations should maintain high standards by evaluating their training programs continuously. This can be achieved by observing trainers in practice during training sessions.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft

E : Writing - Review & **E**editing

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [NAS], upon request.

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