



THE COMPETENCY AND ROLE OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN SHAPING HEALTH-ORIENTED THINKING AMONG STUDENTS

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Abstract:

This article explores the fundamental role and professional competencies of university teachers in developing health-oriented thinking among students. In the context of growing health challenges faced by youth, such as stress, sedentary lifestyles, and mental health issues, the formation of a conscious, responsible attitude toward health is becoming a core objective of modern higher education. The study emphasizes that teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also key figures in modeling healthy behavior, designing inclusive and engaging learning environments, and guiding students toward reflective, socially responsible lifestyles. The article examines various aspects of pedagogical competence required for this role, including emotional intelligence, interdisciplinary integration, technological fluency, and cultural responsiveness. It also highlights the importance of collaboration between educators, health professionals, and institutions in creating a sustainable health-promoting academic ecosystem.

Keywords: Teacher competence, health-oriented thinking, higher education, student well-being, pedagogical responsibility, inclusive education, emotional intelligence, digital health tools, reflective pedagogy, social responsibility, educational transformation.

The modern higher education environment demands not only the transfer of academic knowledge and professional competencies, but also the development of a responsible, conscious attitude toward health among students. One of the key figures in this mission is the university teacher. In the formation of health-oriented thinking among students—a mindset that involves valuing, understanding, and maintaining health as a life priority—the competence and role of the teacher are indispensable [1].

The concept of competence, rooted in the Latin word *competere*, implies "to strive for, to be suitable, or to match." In the educational context, it refers to the integrated set of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, values, and behaviors that enable a person to perform their professional tasks effectively. The notion of competence, having gained popularity in the late 20th century, is now one of the foundational principles of



education systems worldwide. It aligns the capabilities of educators with societal expectations and the strategic goals of national development.

In the context of developing health-conscious thinking in students, teacher competence involves much more than subject expertise. It requires psychological, pedagogical, communicative, motivational, and technological readiness to lead students in adopting a health-oriented worldview. Such competence is expressed not only in how a teacher delivers lessons, but also in how they model behavior, build relationships, and create an environment where health is prioritized as a social and personal responsibility [2].

A teacher's influence on student thinking and behavior is profound. They serve as role models who display professionalism, emotional stability, ethical conduct, and a balanced lifestyle. Their daily conduct—speech, appearance, energy, organization, and interaction style—has a direct impact on student attitudes. This is especially relevant to young adults in universities, who are in a formative stage of personality development and are highly impressionable. Therefore, the teacher's embodiment of a health-oriented philosophy can be as impactful as any formal instruction.

Competency-based approaches in education offer effective frameworks for shaping such pedagogical influence. These approaches emphasize [3]:

Encouraging critical thinking and autonomy: Teachers must help students assess the value of health from multiple perspectives—scientific, ethical, social, and personal. By creating space for debate, discussion, and reflection, educators empower students to make informed decisions regarding their physical and mental well-being.

Building social responsibility: Teachers are instrumental in nurturing students' understanding that personal health is interconnected with community health. This includes promoting civic participation in health-related activities, organizing group projects centered on community wellness, and instilling empathy through service learning [4].

Creating inclusive and engaging learning environments: Today's student population is diverse in terms of physical, psychological, and emotional needs. Teachers should be skilled in adapting learning environments to ensure all students feel included and empowered to prioritize their well-being.

Utilizing modern pedagogical and digital tools: Teachers must be proficient in leveraging technology to enhance health education—using e-learning platforms, wellness tracking apps, digital journals, virtual health simulations, and online counseling tools. These tools create opportunities for personalization and engagement, supporting sustainable behavioral change [5].



Facilitating experiential and value-based learning: The development of health-oriented thinking is best achieved through experiential practices. Teachers should guide students through activities like stress management workshops, guided meditation, fitness routines, nutritional planning exercises, and reflective storytelling. These immersive methods help translate abstract health concepts into tangible life habits.

Implementing reflective assessment and feedback: Competent teachers not only evaluate student knowledge but also provide meaningful feedback on attitudes, behaviors, and emotional awareness related to health. This holistic assessment approach ensures that health education is understood not just as information, but as transformation [6].

Furthermore, the teacher's role must be seen within a broader institutional framework. Higher education institutions need to invest in professional development programs that enhance faculty competencies in health pedagogy. These might include certification in health psychology, emotional intelligence, trauma-informed teaching, inclusive physical education, and digital well-being.

Another dimension of teacher competence lies in their interdisciplinary collaboration. Educators should actively cooperate with psychologists, counselors, healthcare workers, and even students' families to create a network of support. Such cooperation not only reinforces pedagogical strategies but ensures that the health promotion message is echoed across all areas of student life.

The integration of health topics into all disciplines also reflects a highly competent educator's approach. Health-oriented thinking should not be limited to physical education or biology classes. For example, in literature, themes of mental health and personal resilience can be explored through characters and narratives. In sociology, students can study the impact of social inequality on health outcomes. In mathematics or economics, data on public health trends can be used to build analytical skills. Such interdisciplinarity enhances students' ability to see health as a multifaceted concept rooted in all spheres of life [7].

In conclusion, the role and competency of the teacher in the development of health-oriented thinking among students of higher education institutions must be viewed as one of the central pillars of contemporary pedagogical strategy. In a world increasingly affected by stress, sedentary lifestyles, mental health challenges, and poor health habits among youth, the educational system—through its educators—carries the responsibility not only of knowledge transmission, but of life preservation and well-being cultivation. The teacher, as a mentor, model, guide, and strategist, holds



exceptional power to influence how students perceive, value, and care for their physical and mental health.

Health-oriented pedagogical thinking is not formed through passive learning or occasional exposure to health-related topics. It is developed through consistent, meaningful engagement, reflective experiences, and behavioral modeling, all of which require a highly competent teacher. Such a teacher must possess a rich blend of subject-matter expertise, psychological insight, emotional intelligence, ethical awareness, and digital fluency. They must not only deliver content but embody the very principles they aim to instill—demonstrating through action what it means to live and learn in a balanced, health-conscious way [8].

The teacher's competencies in this context extend beyond the classroom. They include the ability to design and implement inclusive, interdisciplinary curricula that integrate health education across various subjects; to apply interactive and experiential teaching methods that make health relevant and applicable; to create emotionally supportive environments where students feel safe to explore personal challenges; and to use modern technological tools that enhance student engagement, self-assessment, and motivation.

Furthermore, a competent teacher understands the sociocultural dimensions of health. They recognize that students come from diverse backgrounds with differing experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward health. As such, they employ culturally responsive pedagogies, ensuring that every student's voice is respected and every perspective is acknowledged in the dialogue on health and wellness. This promotes not only equity in education but also the development of inclusive, empathetic citizens [9].

Finally, it must be emphasized that promoting health-oriented thinking is not a temporary pedagogical trend but a long-term investment in the intellectual, emotional, and physical sustainability of future generations. Teachers who are empowered and equipped to take on this role become agents of transformation. They help produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also resilient, self-aware, and socially responsible—capable of maintaining their own health while contributing to the well-being of others. This, in turn, supports broader societal goals such as reducing healthcare burdens, increasing productivity, and fostering healthier communities.

Thus, in the formation of health-oriented pedagogical thinking, the teacher stands as a cornerstone—a key figure whose influence can extend far beyond the university walls and deep into the personal lives and futures of students. Investing in teacher competence is therefore not just an educational imperative—it is a societal one.



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