EMPOWERING TEACHERS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: INSIGHTS FROM THE VOCCENT ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

ПІДТРИМКА ВИКЛАДАЧІВ У ЧАСИ НЕВИЗНАЧЕНОСТІ: ДОСВІД ОНЛАЙН-НАВЧАННЯ НА ПЛАТФОРМІ VOCCENT

Devitska A.I.,
orcid.org/0000-0002-7575-5390
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of Applied Linguistics
Uzhhorod National University

Bilyk O.I.,
orcid.org/0000-0002-3973-0700
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of English Philology
Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University

This study examines the creation and implementation of an innovative online professional development course designed to empower English language teachers who work in uncertain and crisis-affected educational environments. The research analyzes the "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" course delivered through the *Voccent* platform, and it carefully explores how thoughtfully integrated digital learning technologies can effectively support educator resilience and pedagogical adaptation during challenging circumstances. This study reveals critical insights into professional development course design by examining the four-module framework which encompasses emergency teaching contexts, trauma-informed pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and teacher wellbeing. The course has been developed and implemented on the modern online platform *Voccent*. This platform functions as a comprehensive educational environment integrating access to electronic resources, tools for both synchronous and asynchronous interaction, as well as analytical mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the educational process. The course also incorporates expert insights from educators with firsthand experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war, which provides authentic perspectives and makes the training particularly valuable for teachers facing similar challenges. Special attention is given to the practical learning outcomes, particularly the ability of teachers to apply the acquired strategies in their own educational settings and adapt them to students' needs. The findings demonstrate that comprehensive online training programs that combine theoretical frameworks with practical tools and personal experiences significantly enhance teachers' capacity to maintain educational quality while supporting both student and educator mental health during periods of instability. This research contributes to educational technology and teacher training literature by establishing evidence-based approaches for developing resilient educational communities through targeted professional development interventions, particularly relevant for educators working in conflict-affected regions and resource-constrained environments.

Key words: teacher empowerment, online professional development, trauma-informed education, social-emotional learning, educational resilience.

Запропоноване дослідження розглядає розробку та впровадження інноваційного онлайн-курсу професійного розвитку, призначеного для викладачів англійської мови, які працюють у невизначених та кризових освітніх середовищах. У статті проаналізовано курс «Викладання у часи невизначеності», що подається через платформу *Voccent*, і досліджено, як цифрові навчальні технології можуть ефективно підтримувати стійкість педагогів та педагогічну адаптацію у складних обставинах. У статті висвітлюються важливі аспекти розробки курсів професійного розвитку на основі аналізу чотиримодульної структури, що охоплює навчання в надзвичайних ситуаціях, педагогіку з урахуванням травматичного досвіду, соціально-емоційне навчання та благополуччя вчителів. Курс розроблений і впроваджений на сучасній онлайн-платформі *Voccent*, яка функціонує як комплексне освітнє середовище і поєднує доступ до електронних ресурсів, інструменти для синхронної та асинхронної роботи, а також аналітичні механізми моніторингу та оцінювання ефективності навчання. Курс також містить експертні поради від освітян, які мають безпосередній досвід викладання під час пандемії COVID-19 та під час війни, що робить навчання особливо цінним для вчителів, які стикаються з подібними викликами. Особлива увага приділяється практичним результатам навчання, зокрема здатності педагогів застосовувати отримані стратегії у власному освітньому середовищі та адаптувати їх до потреб учнів. Результати дослідження показують, що сучасні комплексні онлайн-програми навчання, які поєднують теоретичні засади з практичними інструментами та особистими досвідом, значно підвищують здатність вчителів впроваджувати якісну освіту, а також підтримувати свій моральний стан та психічне здоров'я учнів у періоди нестабільності. Це дослідження робить внесок у літературу про сучасні освітні технології, професійний розвиток вчителів, соціально-емоційне навчання та впровадження травмообізнаних практик, що є особливо актуальним для освітян, котрі працюють у регіонах, які постраждали від конфліктів, кризи, та в умовах обмежених ресурсів.

Ключові слова: підтримка викладачів, онлайн професійний розвиток, травмо-інформована освіта, соціально-емоційне навчання, освітня стійкість.

Teachers play a central role in maintaining continuity of learning during times of crisis. When schools face disruption due to war, pandemics, or other emergencies, educators are expected to adapt quickly while supporting both academic progress and emotional stability in their classrooms. These circumstances place additional pressure on teachers, who must balance professional responsibilities with their own wellbeing. Professional development opportunities that address these unique challenges are therefore crucial for sustaining effective teaching practices and fostering resilience in educational communities.

Problem Statement. Recent global events have highlighted the urgency of preparing teachers to work in uncertain and crisis-affected contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic forced an abrupt transition to remote learning, exposing gaps in digital readiness and increasing the need for flexible pedagogical strategies. At the same time, the war in Ukraine and other conflict situations worldwide have created unstable environments where educators must continue their work despite trauma, displacement, and limited resources. Recent research emphasizes that resilience in the Ukrainian education system depends not only on digital access but also on strategies that combine psychosocial support with innovative teaching practices [1]. These realities call for training programs that integrate practical tools with psychological and social support strategies tailored to the lived experiences of teachers.

This study examines the creation and implementation of the online professional development course "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" delivered through the *Voccent* platform. The course was designed to empower English language teachers by providing knowledge, strategies, and peer insights relevant to emergency teaching contexts. The integration of digital learning technologies in teacher professional development represents a critical response to these challenges, offering accessible solutions that can reach educators regardless of geographical constraints or security limitations.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. Recent scholarship in educational resilience and crisis pedagogy has established theoretical foundations for understanding how educators can maintain effectiveness during challenging circumstances. Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters' comprehensive framework for trauma-informed teaching practices provides crucial guidance for educators working with students affected by adverse experiences, emphasizing the importance of safety, connection, and emotional regulation in learning environments [2, p. 234]. This framework has gained particular relevance as educators worldwide have confronted increased rates of student anxiety, depression, and behavioral challenges following global disruptions.

The integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) principles into teacher preparation has emerged as another critical area of investigation. Durlak and Weissberg's meta-analysis of SEL interventions demonstrated significant positive effects on both student academic achievement and social-emotional competence, while highlighting the essential role of teacher competence in SEL implementation [3, p. 167]. Their research underscores the necessity of preparing educators not only to deliver SEL curricula but also to model emotional intelligence and self-regulation in their professional practice.

Ukrainian scholarship has made significant contributions to SEL research and implementation. Devitska's comprehensive study of modern SEL techniques in EFL classrooms provides crucial insights into adapting social-emotional learning principles for English language teaching contexts, particularly relevant for educators working with linguistically diverse student populations [4]. Her work demonstrates that effective SEL implementation requires cultural adaptation and multilingual considerations that account for students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds while supporting both language acquisition and emotional development.

The international perspective provided by Penton Herrera's work on social-emotional learning in diverse classrooms complements these regional insights with comprehensive approaches for multicultural educational settings [5, p. 156]. His framework for SEL implementation across diverse populations provides practical strategies that prove particularly relevant for educators working with refugee populations and students from various cultural backgrounds during times of uncertainty.

Professional development research has increasingly focused on the effectiveness of online learning modalities for educator training. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner's synthesis of effective professional development characteristics identified key elements including active learning, collaboration, coherence, duration, and content focus as critical for successful teacher learning outcomes [6, p. 145]. Their findings suggest that well-designed online professional development programs can achieve comparable or superior results to traditional face-to-face training when these principles are appropriately integrated.

Technology integration in crisis education contexts has received growing attention from educational researchers. Reich and Mehta's analysis of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

revealed both the potential and limitations of digital tools in maintaining educational continuity, emphasizing the importance of teacher technological pedagogical content knowledge in effective implementation [7, p. 198]. Their work highlights the need for professional development programs that address not only technical skills but also pedagogical adaptation strategies for online and blended learning environments.

Mindfulness and wellbeing research in educational contexts has demonstrated significant promise for supporting teacher resilience and preventing burnout. The value of mindfulness practices in supporting teacher wellbeing, particularly in times of crisis, is of great value. For example, Song et al. reported that a four-day intensive mindfulness training for teachers can significantly reduce stress and enhance emotional wellbeing [8]. Compared to colleagues without such training, these teachers showed lower levels of emotional distress, greater emotional regulation, and higher engagement during the pandemic [9].

Research Objectives. Despite growing recognition of the need for crisis-responsive teacher preparation, several critical gaps remain in current research and practice. First, most existing professional development programs address crisis education as a temporary deviation from normal practice rather than recognizing uncertainty as an inherent characteristic of contemporary educational environments. This approach fails to prepare educators for the ongoing adaptability and resilience required in modern teaching contexts. Scholars increasingly argue that uncertainty is not a temporary disruption but a defining feature of contemporary education. Seddon stresses that teacher education must explicitly prepare educators to navigate crises as part of their ongoing professional reality, rather than treating them as short-term anomalies [10]. Similarly, White highlights how teaching in uncertain times requires pedagogical flexibility, resilience, and adaptive professional development [11]. Together, these perspectives suggest that crisis-responsive teacher preparation should move beyond episodic solutions toward embedding adaptability as a core professional competency.

Second, while individual components such as trauma-informed teaching, technology integration, and mindfulness practices have received separate attention in research literature, few studies have examined the synergistic effects of comprehensive programs that integrate these elements systematically. While trauma-informed teaching, technology integration, and mindfulness have been studied separately, researchers are beginning to explore the benefits of integrating these approaches. Kim, Chang, and Cho demonstrate how trauma-informed training combined with mindfulness practices can enhance teacher well-being and classroom relationships [12]. The potential for holistic professional development approaches that address multiple dimensions of crisis teaching simultaneously remains underexplored.

Third, existing research on online professional development for educators has primarily focused on traditional academic subjects and stable teaching contexts, with limited attention to the unique requirements of training teachers for crisis-affected environments. But a case study by Childhood Education International emphasizes how online PD can be adapted to meet the needs of teachers working under displacement and instability. These emerging studies suggest the need for further investigation into design principles and pedagogical strategies that make online crisis-focused PD effective [13].

This research *aims* to examine the development, implementation, and effectiveness of the "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" online course delivered through the Voccent platform as a model for empowering educators in crisis-affected environments. The study looks at the key ideas and principles behind crisis-responsive teacher development, evaluates how online learning can be used to provide trauma-informed and resilience-focused training, and highlights practical strategies for helping educators adapt and grow through digital professional development.

Presentation of the Main Material. The development of the "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" course builds upon multiple theoretical frameworks that collectively address the complex needs of educators working in challenging environments. The integration of Trauma-Sensitive Teaching principles, originally developed by Craig, provides foundational understanding of how adverse experiences affect learning processes and classroom dynamics [14]. This framework emphasizes three core principles: safety (physical and emotional), connection (authentic relationships), and regulation (emotional and behavioral), which serve as organizing principles for all course content and activities.

The incorporation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks draws from multiple scholarly sources, including the foundational CASEL competency model and recent adaptations for diverse learner populations. Penton Herrera's comprehensive approach to SEL in diverse classrooms provides practical frameworks for supporting students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds [5]. His work emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness in SEL implementation, particularly crucial when working with students who may have experienced displacement or cultural disruption.

Devitska and Bilyk examine modern Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) techniques in EFL classrooms, offering practical strategies for merging emotional development with language learning objectives. Their findings demonstrate that effective SEL implementation supports language acquisition, strengthens resilience and emotional well-being, creating a synergistic effect that enhances both linguistic and social-emotional competencies. Importantly, this approach has proven especially relevant in times of crisis, when learners face heightened emotional challenges alongside their academic goals [15].

Backward Design methodology, promoted by Wiggins and McTighe, provides the pedagogical structure for course development, ensuring that all learning activities align with clearly defined outcomes and assessment criteria [16]. This approach proves particularly valuable in crisis education contexts, where clarity of purpose and efficient use of limited time and resources become paramount concerns.

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) emphasizes the use of learners' own experiences and cultural backgrounds as the foundation for language learning activities, supporting both linguistic development and cultural validation in uncertain times [17].

The "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" course employs a four-module structure designed to build comprehensive competency in crisis education pedagogy.

Module 1 "Education in Times of Crisis" establishes foundational knowledge about the nature and impact of uncertain conditions on learning environments. This module examines how trauma influences children's brain development, emotional regulation and learning. Participants explore the ways traumatic experiences can affect attention, memory, language and behaviour and discover approaches to better support students. This module also integrates research from educational psychology, neuroscience, and trauma studies to help participants understand how uncertainty affects both cognitive and emotional functioning in educational settings.

Module 2 "Supporting Students with Social-Emotional Learning During Times of Uncertainty" introduces the core competencies of social-emotional learning (SEL) and their importance for teaching in uncertain times. Through lectures, activities, and expert insights from Ukrainian educators, learners explore practical ways to strengthen SEL in classroom and reflect on strategies they can apply in their own teaching context. Participants engage with case studies, reflective activities, and practical tool development exercises that build capacity for social-emotional classroom management and instructional adaptation.

Module 3 "Resilient Teaching: Blending Low-Tech and High-Impact Practices" addresses the practical challenges of maintaining educational quality when traditional resources are unavailable or compromised. The module covers artificial intelligence applications for language learning, virtual reality tools for creating immersive learning experiences, and interactive platforms that support student engagement in remote or hybrid learning environments. Emphasis is placed on sustainable and accessible technology solutions that can function effectively despite infrastructure limitations.

Module 4 "Wellbeing and Mindfulness" addresses the dual focus on student support and educator self-care. This module recognizes that teacher wellbeing directly impacts instructional effectiveness and student outcomes, particularly in high-stress environments. Content includes mindfulness practices adapted for educational settings, strategies for preventing compassion fatigue and secondary trauma, and techniques for building emotional resilience in both individual and community contexts.

A distinguishing characteristic of the course design is the integration of authentic experiences from educators who have taught in crisis conditions since 2014 in Ukraine. This experiential component provides participants with concrete examples of successful adaptation strategies, realistic case studies, and culturally relevant applications of theoretical frameworks. The inclusion of first-hand narratives serves multiple pedagogical functions: it increases content credibility, provides emotional validation for participants facing similar challenges, and offers practical insights that might not emerge from purely theoretical presentations.

The course incorporates reflective practice protocols that encourage participants to connect theoretical content with their own professional experiences and contexts. Participants engage in guided self-assessment, peer dialogue, and action planning activities that facilitate the transfer of learning to their specific teaching contexts.

The selection of the *Voccent* platform for course delivery reflects careful consideration of accessibility requirements and technological constraints common in crisis-affected regions. The design of *Voccent* emphasizes mobile compatibility, low bandwidth optimization, and offline functionality, addressing practical barriers that might prevent educator participation in professional development. The platform's asynchronous delivery model accommodates the irregular schedules and competing demands that characterize teaching in uncertain times.

The course employs authentic assessment strategies aligned with the practical needs of crisis edu-

cation contexts. Rather than traditional testing approaches, participants demonstrate competency through portfolio development, case study analysis, and practical tool creation that can be immediately applied in their teaching environments. This assessment approach recognizes that effective crisis education requires adaptive application of principles rather than rote memorization of procedures.

Preliminary evaluation data suggests significant positive impacts on participant confidence, stress management, and pedagogical adaptation capacity. Participants report increased awareness of trauma impacts on learning, improved self-care practices, and enhanced ability to support student emotional needs while maintaining educational objectives. The integration of mindfulness practices and community support structures appears particularly effective in preventing burnout and secondary trauma among educators working in high-stress environments.

The course emphasis on practical tool development and immediate application supports the transfer of learning to authentic teaching contexts. Participants create personalized resource collections, adaptation strategies, and support network protocols that continue to serve them beyond the course completion. This sustainable approach to professional development proves especially valuable in contexts where ongoing professional support may be limited or interrupted.

The success of the *Voccent*-delivered course model demonstrates the potential for professional development solutions that can reach educators regardless of geographical or security constraints. The combination of high-quality content, accessible technology, and community support creates a replicable framework that could be adapted for various crisis contexts and cultural settings. The course design principles offer guidance for developing similar programs that address local needs while maintaining evidence-based pedagogical foundations.

The economic efficiency of online delivery combined with the comprehensive nature of the content suggests possibilities for sustainable professional development systems that can serve large numbers of educators at relatively low per-participant costs. This scalability becomes particularly important for addressing the widespread nature of global educational challenges and the universal need for crisis-responsive teaching competencies.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that crisis-responsive professional development requires more than short-term adjustments; it calls for embedding adaptability, resilience, and trauma-awareness as core competencies of modern teaching. The "Teaching in Times of Uncertainty" course illustrates how integrating trauma-informed pedagogy, social-emotional learning, mindfulness, and technology within one framework equips educators to meet the realities of uncertain and unstable environments.

A key strength of the course lies in its authentic design. By combining theoretical models with first-hand narratives from educators who have worked in crisis conditions, the program ensures that participants gain both evidence-based strategies and practical insights. This blend of scholarly grounding and experiential learning enhances its credibility and supports immediate application in real classrooms.

Equally important is the role of technology. The *Voccent* platform has an accessible, mobile-friendly, and low-bandwidth design, which makes professional development possible for educators facing displacement, instability, or infrastructure limitations. This case underscores how thoughtful online delivery can make professional growth both scalable and sustainable across diverse contexts.

At the same time, the research highlights areas for further investigation, particularly the long-term impact of such programs and their adaptability to different disciplines, cultural settings, and crisis types. Future studies should also explore how emerging technologies and institutional support systems can expand and sustain these efforts. Taken together, the findings point toward online professional development as a powerful tool for building resilient teaching communities capable of sustaining quality education in times of profound uncertainty.

REFERENCES:

1. Shulha, I., Shulha, L. Education and resilience in the context of war: Challenges and solutions in Ukraine. *Futurity Education*, 2024, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 42–53. DOI: 10.57125/FED.2024.03.11.42.

2. Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., Waters, L. Trauma-informed flexible learning: Classrooms that strengthen regulatory abilities. *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 2016, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 218–239. DOI: 10.18357/ijcyfs72201615719.

3. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P. The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills. Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2021, 156 p.

4. Devitska, A. I. Modern SEL techniques in an EFL classroom. DOI: 10.32782/tps2663-4880/2023.29.1.21.

5. Penton Herrera, L. J. Social-emotional learning in diverse classrooms: A comprehensive approach. Miami : International Education Press, 2021, 234 p.

6. Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. Effective teacher professional development. Palo Alto : Learning Policy Institute, 2020, 234 p.

7. Reich, J., Mehta, J. Failure to disrupt: Why technology alone can't transform education. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2020, 298 p.

8. Song, Y., Zhao, G., Lei, L. The effects of mindfulness training on teachers' well-being: A randomized controlled trial in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2020, vol. 11, article 2063.

9. Berger, R., Gelkopf, M., Heineberg, Y. A school-based mindfulness and compassion program (Call2Care-Israel) for reducing teachers' stress and burnout during COVID-19. *Mindfulness*, 2022, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 1–12.

10. Seddon, T. Teacher education through uncertainty and crisis. London: Routledge, 2022.

11. White, P. J. Teaching and learning in uncertain times: Implications for pedagogy and teacher education. *Teaching Education*, 2024, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 245–260.

12. Kim, S., Chang, Y., Cho, H. Impact of trauma-informed training and mindfulness on teacher well-being and classroom practices. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2021, vol. 18, no. 21.

13. Childhood Education International. Supporting teachers through online professional development in crisis and displacement contexts: Ukraine case study. 2023.

14. Craig, S. E. Trauma-sensitive schools for the adolescent years: Promoting resiliency and healing, grades 6–12. New York: Teachers College Press, 2020, 267 p.

15. Devitska, A., Bilyk, O. New Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching EFL in Times of Uncertainty. In: *Актуальні проблеми філології та методики викладання іноземних мов у сучасному мультилінгвальному просторі*: матеріали Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції (Вінниця, 18 жовтня 2023 р.) / гол. ред. О. М. Ігнатова. Вінниця: ТВОРИ, 2023, pp. 19-21.

16. Wiggins, G., McTighe, J. Understanding by design. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2019, 289 p.

17. Orner, R. Language Experience Approach (LEA). *EBSCO Research Starters*. EBSCO, 2025.

18. Voccent. Available at: https://voccent.com