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RESEARCH COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS: PRACTISES, CHALLENGES AND KEY INFLUENCING FACTORS

This study examines the research competence of rural teachers in Kazakhstani secondary schools, focusing on the challenges they face and the factors influencing their research practices. A survey was conducted with 95 teachers from two rural schools in the Almaty region. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the perceptions of factors influencing research competence, revealing that access to resources, support from administration, and time availability were key factors. Correlation analysis showed significant relationships between confidence in using research methods, teaching experience, familiarity with modern pedagogical approaches, and frequency of research activities. Most teachers reported moderate confidence in research methods, with a positive correlation between research frequency and publication output. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses identified key challenges, including time constraints, lack of resources, language barriers, and insufficient practical experience. Thematic analysis of suggestions for improving research activity revealed that monetary incentives, professional development opportunities, better resources, and reduced administrative workload could enhance teachers' research engagement. These findings provide valuable insights into the factors that support or hinder research competence in rural educational settings, offering recommendations for improving teachers' research practices and professional development.

Keywords: research competence, rural teachers, pedagogical development, research challenges, continuous professional development.

Introduction

The development of research competence among teachers is a growing concern in the educational field, particularly in countries with diverse educational settings, such as Kazakhstan, where significant differences exist between urban and rural schools regarding resources, infrastructure, and access to professional development opportunities. Research competence refers to the ability of educators to conduct, analyze, and apply research to improve their teaching practices and contribute to the broader educational community. Research has shown that teacher research competence is influenced by various factors, including access to resources, professional development opportunities, and institutional support [1; 2; 3].

In rural settings, teachers often encounter challenges that hinder their engagement in research. Limited access to resources such as libraries, online journals, academic databases, and internet connection is a significant barrier [4; 5]. Studies have also highlighted the impact of time constraints, as teachers are often overburdened with administrative duties and teaching responsibilities, leaving little time for research activities [6; 7]. Furthermore, rural teachers may have fewer opportunities for professional development due to geographic isolation and a lack of local workshops, seminars, and research networks [8].

Language barriers also play a crucial role in research competence, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries like Kazakhstan. Research materials are often available in English or other foreign languages, creating a linguistic divide that limits access to academic resources [9; 10]. Research shows that a lack of access to research materials in languages other than English can have various negative impacts [11]. Therefore, we reasoned that in rural areas of Kazakhstan, where Kazakh is the predominant language, teachers may struggle to access relevant research in languages other than Kazakh, further complicating their ability to engage in research activities.

Despite these challenges, several studies have emphasized the importance of institutional support and professional development programs in fostering research competence [12; 13]. School administration support, access to training opportunities, and collaboration with colleagues have been identified as key factors that enable teachers to develop research skills [14].

In Kazakhstan, previous studies have focused on teacher professional development and the quality of education in rural schools [5; 12; 15]. However, limited research explicitly addresses the factors influencing research competence among rural teachers in Kazakhstan. This gap in the literature highlights the need for studies exploring the challenges and opportunities for enhancing research competence in rural educational settings within the context of Kazakhstan's education system.

This paper aims to fill this gap by examining the factors that influence the research competence of rural teachers in Kazakhstan, focusing on the role of resources, administrative support, language barriers, and professional development opportunities. Through this investigation, the study seeks to provide practical recommendations for improving research practices in rural schools and enhancing the overall quality of education in Kazakhstan.

Materials and methods

In order to fill the gap in the existing literature, this study aims to evaluate the current level of research competence among rural teachers in Kazakhstani schools, assess their engagement in research activities and publication practices, examine their confidence and use of various research methods, identify influencing factors and resources that enhance or hinder their research competence, and provide recommendations to improve their research skills and practices.

Thus, we reasoned the following research questions for our study: What are the key challenges and factors influencing the research competence of rural teachers in Kazakhstan?

The study was conducted using a survey research method, explicitly using a Google Form with 16 survey items, two of which were designed to elicit qualitative data. Close-ended questions (provided in Kazakh and English to the respondents) were analyzed via SPSS, version 29.0.0.0. The data analysis process involved descriptive statistical techniques, specifically Pearson correlation analysis and frequencies, to summarize the characteristics of the survey respondents. Also, frequencies and percentages were calculated to represent the distribution of participants across different demographic variables. The qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis within an inductive approach [16]. The reliability of the survey was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.809, indicating high internal consistency.

Results and discussion

The first part of the survey was dedicated to eliciting demographic information, in particular age, English language proficiency level, teaching experience, and subjects taught, as well as current qualification categories (Table 1). The sample comprised 95 teachers from two rural schools located in Almaty region. Data analysis revealed that among the qualification categories, the largest share was teacher-moderators at 36.8 %, followed by teachers (28.4 %), teacher-experts (18.9%), and teacher-researchers (15.8 %). For subjects taught, the most frequently taught was English, encompassing 28.4 % of respondents, followed by primary school teaching (18.9 %), math (13.7 %), and Russian language and literature (12.6 %). Other subjects, such as Kazakh language, biology, ICT, and history, were represented by smaller percentages, typically below 8.4 %. When

examining teaching experience, it ranged broadly, with a significant portion (11.6 %) having 7 years of experience. Most teachers (approximately 59 %) reported having between 3 and 15 years of experience, while a smaller fraction had over 20 years. Regarding age, the respondents varied from 21 to 62 years old, with the most frequent ages grouped in the 30–44 range (constituting around 35%). Teachers aged 44 were the most represented, making up 8.4 % of respondents. Regarding English proficiency, 45.3 % of respondents identified as beginners, 26.3 % as pre-intermediate or intermediate, and only 7.4 % as upper-intermediate or advanced. Interestingly, 21.1 % of teachers reported having no English proficiency at all. This demographic overview illustrates a diverse group of educators with varying qualifications, subject expertise, years of experience, age distributions, and language capabilities.

Table 1 – Demographics information

Demographics item	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21-29	14	14.7 %
	30-39	36	37.9 %
	40-49	25	26.3 %
	>50	20	21 %
Qualification categories	Teacher	27	28.4 %
	Teacher-moderator	35	36.8 %
	Teacher-expert	18	18.9 %
	Teacher-researcher	15	15.8 %
Subjects taught	English as a foreign language	27	28.4 %
	Mathematics	13	13.7 %
	Russian language & literature	12	12.6 %
	Kazakh language	8	8.4 %
	History	2	2.1 %
	Biology	3	3.2 %
	Chemistry	3	3.2 %
	Physics	1	1.1 %
	ICT	3	3.2 %
	Music	1	1.1 %
	Physical culture	2	2.1 %
	Art	2	2.1 %
	Primary school teacher	18	18.9 %

English language proficiency	No proficiency	20	21.1 %
	Beginner	43	45.3 %
	Pre-Intermediate & Intermediate	25	26.3 %
	Upper-intermediate & Advanced	7	7.4 %
Teaching experience	0-5 years	24	25.2 %
	6-10 years	22	23.2 %
	11-15 years	15	15.8 %
	16-20 years	10	10.5 %
	21-25 years	8	8.4 %
	26-30 years	7	7.4 %
	>30 years	9	9.5 %

The next step was providing a detailed view of the relationships between different factors related to research practices and confidence via Pearson's correlation analysis. The data in Table 2 shows that a significant positive correlation exists between the level of confidence in using research methods and the level of difficulty respondents experience when using research methods ($r = .425, p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals who find research methods more challenging tend to have lower confidence levels. Confidence in using research methods also correlates significantly with assessing respondents' knowledge of modern approaches in pedagogy and psychology ($r = .544, p < 0.001$) and the frequency with which teachers conduct research in their educational practice ($r = .464, p < 0.001$), suggesting that increased familiarity with modern pedagogical approaches and regular research activities boost confidence.

Similarly, the frequency with which respondents conduct research in their educational practice is positively correlated with the frequency with which teachers publish the results of their research ($r = .640, p < 0.001$), emphasizing the link between regular research activities and publication frequency. Respondents' qualification category shows a strong positive correlation with their teaching experience ($r = .586, p < 0.001$), reflecting how qualifications generally align with accumulated experience. There is also a moderate positive correlation between the frequency of conducting research and familiarity with modern pedagogical approaches ($r = .460, p < 0.001$), highlighting that educators more engaged with new teaching methodologies tend to conduct research more frequently. Overall, the data suggests that confidence in research, engagement in research activities, and support systems are interlinked and positively influence educators' research practices and outputs:

Table 2 – Correlation analysis results

	Teachers' level of confidence in using research methods	Teaching Experience	Level of difficulty teachers experience when using research methods	Qualification category	Teachers' evaluation of knowledge of modern approaches in pedagogy and psychology	Frequency of conducting research in the educational practice
Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	.154	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.135				
Level of difficulty teachers experience when using research methods	N	95	95			
	Pearson Correlation	.425**	-.052	--		
Qualification category	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.619			
	N	95	95	95		
Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	.068	.586**	.156	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.516	<.001	.132		
Level of difficulty teachers experience when using research methods	N	95	95	95	95	95

Teacher's self-evaluation of knowledge of modern approaches in pedagogy and psychology	Pearson Correlation	.046	.497**	.106	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.656	<.001	.307		
Frequency of conducting research in the educational practice	Pearson Correlation	-.034	.392**	.031	.460**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.744	<.001	.762	<.001	
Frequency of research results publication	Pearson Correlation	.007	.448**	.121	.474**	.640**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.947	<.001	.244	<.001	<.001
	N	95	95	95	95	95

Further, we elicited respondents' perceptions on various factors influencing research competence. As can be seen from Table 3 below, among them, «Access to resources (libraries, online resources, etc.)» has the highest mean ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .944$), indicating that access to resources is perceived as a key influence on research competence. «Support from the administration» ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .935$) and «Availability of free time» ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.033$) also rank highly. Factors like «Proficiency in English» ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.171$) and «Possibility of earning a high income» ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.127$) have relatively lower means but with higher standard deviations, suggesting more variability in how respondents perceive their impact. Overall, the results highlight the significant influence of resource accessibility, administrative support, and time availability on perceived research competence:

Table 3 – Factors influencing research competence

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Level of education	3.49	1.009
Experience in the field of research	3.51	1.020
Support from colleagues	3.60	.904
Support from the administration	3.63	.935
Access to resources (libraries, online resources, etc.)	3.64	.944
Motivation for research	3.59	.940
Possibility of earning a high income	3.44	1.127
Availability of free time	3.62	1.033
Proficiency in English	3.40	1.171
Opportunities for continuous professional development	3.56	1.059

Building on resource availability as a key factor influencing research competence, further data analysis provides more detailed insights into the research practices and resource utilization among participants (Table 4 below). In terms of research methods, a plurality of respondents use mixed methods (38.9%), followed by qualitative (29.5%) and quantitative methods (28.4%). Regarding resources to enhance research competence, the most commonly utilized are workshops (53.7%) and colleagues' advice and support (46.3%), with online courses (41.1%) and books (31.6%) also frequently mentioned, whereas peer-reviewed research journals are less commonly used (10.5%). When it comes to reading materials for conducting research, most respondents read in Kazakh (86.3%), while a smaller proportion utilize Russian (33.7%) and English (18.9%). This highlights a strong reliance of rural teachers on local resources and languages for professional development and research practices:

Table 4 – Research practices and resources utilization

Survey items		N of responses	%
Which research methods do you use in your practice?	Qualitative	28	29.5%
	Quantitative	27	28.4%
	Mixed methods	37	38.9%
What resources do you use to enhance your research competence?	Books	30	31.6%
	Online courses	39	41.1%
	Workshops	51	53.7%
	Colleagues' advice and support	44	46.3%
	Peer-reviewed research journals	10	10.5%
In which language(s) do you read information when conducting research?	Kazakh	82	86.3%
	Russian	32	33.7%
	English	18	18.9%

Finally, the responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed. The responses to the non-mandatory question about difficulties teachers encounter during research (37 answers) highlighted the following themes: time constraints, lack of resources, language barriers, lack of practical experience, difficulty in data collection and analysis, and misunderstanding/confusion in research:

a) Time constraints: Many responses mention time issues, such as «Уақыт тапшылығы» (time shortage) and «Мектеп, сынып жетекшілік жұмыстарымен уақыт таппаймын зерттеуге» (lack of time due to school and classroom teacher duties). These concerns reflect the struggle of balancing research with other professional responsibilities.

b) Lack of resources: Several responses point to insufficient resources, such as «Ресурстардың аз» (lack of resources) and «Кұралдарың жетіспеуі» (lack of tools). Additionally, the absence of proper infrastructure, like «Электронды тақта, интернет желісінің жоқтығы» (lack of electronic boards and internet access), further complicates the research process.

c) Language barriers: A notable number of responses mention the limited availability of research materials in Kazakh, such as «Қазақ тілінде материал аздығы» (lack of materials in Kazakh). This language barrier restricts access to relevant literature and data, posing additional challenges for researchers.

d) Lack of practical experience: Some responses touch on the difficulty of applying theoretical knowledge due to a lack of hands-on experience: «Тәжірибенің аздығы» (lack of experience) and «Практикалық бөлігі» (practical part). These responses suggest that theoretical research may not always be easily translatable into practice.

e) Difficulty in data collection and analysis: A few responses focus on the challenges related to gathering original data and performing statistical analyses, such as «Gathering original data and SPSS analyses.» This indicates difficulty in both the practical and analytical aspects of the research process.

f) Misunderstanding or confusion: A couple of answers mentioned issues like «Түсінбеушілік» (misunderstanding) and «Зерттеудің этаптарын толық түсінбеу» (lack of understanding of research stages), pointing to a need for better guidance or clarification of the research process.

In summary, the key difficulties reported by participants are related to time management, limited access to resources (especially in the Kazakh language), lack of practical experience, and challenges in data collection and analysis. Addressing these issues could significantly improve the research experience for educators and researchers in this context.

The responses to the final question regarding additional incentives to enhance research activity highlighted a variety of suggestions, which are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5 – Teachers’ suggestions on incentives to enhance research activity

Theme	Number of responses	Examples of responses
Monetary Incentives / Rewards	23	«Табыс» (income), «Қосымша жалақы» (additional salary), «Зерттеу жұмыстары арқылы табысты арттыратын болса» (if research work could increase income), «Ай сайын 1000000 теңге беріп тұрса» (if 1,000,000 tenge is given monthly), «Премия берілу» (awards given)
Professional Development and Support	15	«Зерттеу жүргізу, ғылыми жұмыс жасауды үйрететін курстар болса» (courses that teach how to conduct research and scientific work), «Коучингтер» (coaching sessions), «Әкімшілік тарапынан қолдау болса» (support from administration), «Семинар» (seminars), «Конференциялар» (conferences)
Recognition and Appreciation	9	«Еңбектің бағалануы» (recognition of work), «Мадақтау» (praise), «Қолдау» (support), «Марапаттар» (rewards)
Better Resources	7	«Мектепте интерактивті тақта, интернет жақсы жұмыс жасап, мүмкіндіктер туғызылса» (if interactive boards and the internet worked well at school and created opportunities), «Қажетті құралдар» (necessary tools), «Шексіз дерек көздері» (unlimited sources)

Reduction in Administrative Tasks	5	«Мектептегі артық қағаз жұмыстары алынып тасталса» (if unnecessary paperwork at school was removed)
Peer Support and Collaboration	4	«Әріптестер қолдауы» (support from colleagues), «Тәжірибемен бөлісу» (sharing experiences)
Practical Experience and Application	4	«Практика» (practice), «Оқушы жетістігі» (student success), «Тиімді әдіс-тәсілдер» (effective methods)
Online Learning and Courses	3	«Онлайн курстар» (online courses)
Interest and Engagement	3	«Қызығушылықты арттыру» (increase interest), «Қызықты платформа» (interesting platforms)

The final question reveals that enhancing rural teachers' research competence and motivation requires a multifaceted approach. Monetary incentives were frequently cited, with responses indicating that financial recognition, salary bonuses, and awards could act as powerful motivators. Beyond financial aspects, respondents emphasized the need for professional development and administrative support, reflecting their desire for courses, coaching, and structural backing to navigate the challenges of research. Recognition of their efforts and improved access to better resources, such as interactive tools and the internet, emerged as important factors. Reducing administrative burdens, promoting peer collaboration, and offering practical research applications were also underscored. Collectively, these insights suggest that creating a supportive, resource-rich, and financially rewarding environment for teachers could substantially enhance their engagement in research and professional development activities, ultimately contributing to the educational landscape of rural schools.

This study provides critical insights into the research competence of rural teachers in Kazakhstan, highlighting the interplay between systemic barriers and enabling factors. Specifically, time constraints emerged as the most frequently reported challenge, aligning with global studies emphasizing the excessive workload of teachers in rural areas, which leaves little time for research [6; 7]. Administrative duties often take precedence over research activities, a finding consistent with studies highlighting the overburdened nature of teaching roles in under-resourced settings [8].

Language barriers also present a critical issue, particularly in Kazakhstan, where English language proficiency remains limited among rural educators. This finding aligns with prior research by Yaman [9], as well as Kralisch [10], indicating that limited access to academic materials in local languages restricts research engagement. While most teachers reported reading research in Kazakh,

the lack of Kazakh-language academic resources reinforces systemic inequities, as discussed in studies on the linguistic divide in access to educational materials [11]. Addressing this issue could involve the development of local-language academic journals.

Insufficient access to resources, including libraries, online journals, and technical infrastructure, mirrors findings in similar rural contexts globally [4; 5]. Without adequate resources, teachers struggle to develop research competence or integrate innovative pedagogical approaches into their practices. This reinforces calls for policy interventions to bridge the urban-rural gap in educational infrastructure [12].

Despite the challenges mentioned, the study highlights the potential for institutional and professional development programs to mitigate barriers. Support from school administrations and peer collaboration emerged as significant enablers, reflecting the importance of a supportive environment for fostering research culture [14]. Professional development opportunities, such as workshops and training on research methods, were identified as critical to building confidence and competence. These findings echo prior research emphasizing the role of continuous professional development in enhancing teacher efficacy and engagement in research [13].

Monetary incentives were also cited as a motivating factor, aligning with studies that show financial recognition can improve teacher retention and engagement in professional development activities [12]. Additionally, the correlation between research frequency and publication output suggests that creating opportunities for teachers to publish their work can further motivate research engagement, a finding supported by Kanwal et al. [6].

The novelty of this research is highlighted by the correlation analysis that reveals important dynamics between research confidence, knowledge, and practice. A significant positive correlation between confidence in research methods and knowledge of modern pedagogical approaches suggests that familiarity with contemporary educational theories and methods fosters greater self-assurance. Furthermore, the relationship between research frequency and publication output indicates that active engagement in research directly translates to higher academic dissemination. However, the moderate correlation between teaching experience and research frequency points to potential gaps in support systems that could enable seasoned educators to transition from classroom-focused activities to broader scholarly contributions.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the complex interplay between demographic factors, confidence, practice, and systemic influences on research competence among rural

teachers in Kazakhstan. Findings emphasize that while demographic diversity and willingness to engage in research are present, significant barriers, including resource accessibility, workload, and language limitations, persist. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development, language support, access to comprehensive resources, and reducing administrative burdens can enhance teachers' ability to contribute meaningfully to educational research.

Promoting a research culture in rural schools will require multifaceted strategies involving not just individual capacity building but systemic support through policies, incentives, and infrastructure. Administrative support, recognition, and collaborative initiatives can create a positive feedback loop where increased research engagement leads to better educational practices and outcomes. By addressing time, resource, and language constraints, rural teachers can better realise their potential as contributors to educational innovation and knowledge production.

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АУЫЛДЫҚ ОРТА МЕКТЕП МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ ЗЕРТТЕУ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІ: ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕР, ҚИЫНДАҚТАР ЖӘНЕ НЕГІЗГІ ӘСЕР ЕТУШІ ФАКТОРЛАР

Бұл зерттеуде Қазақстандағы ауыл мұғалімдерінің зерттеу құзіреттілігін дамыту мәселесі талданады, зерттеу барысында кездесетін қиындықтар және мұғалімдердің зерттеу тәжірибесіне әсер ететін факторларға назар аударылады. Сауалнама Алматы облысындағы екі ауыл мектебінің 95 мұғалімі арасында жүргізілді. Демографиялық ақпаратты және мұғалімдердің зерттеу құзіреттілік деңгейіне әсер ететін факторлар бойынша түсініктерін талдау үшін сипаттамалық статистикалық әдістер қолданылды. Нәтижелер ресурстарға қолжетімділік, әкімшілік қолдау және уақыт негізгі факторлар екенін көрсетті. Корреляциялық талдаулар зерттеу әдістерін пайдалануға сенімділік, оқыту тәжірибесі, қазіргі заманғы оқыту тәсілдерімен танысу және зерттеу жұмысының жиілігі арасындағы маңызды байланыстарды анықтады. Мұғалімдердің көпшілігі зерттеу әдістеріне орташа сенімділік танытты және зерттеу жиілігі мен жарияланымдар саны арасында оң корреляция болды. Ашық сұрақтарды сапалы талдау негізінде уақыт тапшылығы, ресурстардың шектеулілігі, тілдік кедергілер және практикалық тәжірибенің жоқтығы сияқты негізгі қиындықтарды анықтады. Ғылыми-зерттеу қызметін жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстардың тақырыптық талдауы ақшалай ынталандыру, кәсіби даму мүмкіндіктері, жақсартылған ресурстар және әкімшілік жүктемені азайту мұғалімдердің зерттеуге

қатысуын жақсартуға көмектесетінін көрсетті. Бұл тұжырымдар ауылдық білім беру орындарында зерттеу құзыреттілігін дамытуды қолдайтын немесе тежейтін факторлар туралы құнды ақпарат береді және мұғалімдер тәжірибесі мен кәсіби дамуын жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстар береді.

Кілтті сөздер: зерттеу құзыреттілігі, ауыл мұғалімдері, педагогикалық даму, зерттеу мәселелері, үздіксіз кәсіби даму.

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ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ СЕЛЬСКИХ СРЕДНИХ ШКОЛ: ПРАКТИКИ, ПРОБЛЕМЫ И КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ФАКТОРЫ ВЛИЯНИЯ

Данное исследование анализирует вопрос формирования исследовательской компетенции сельских учителей Казахстана, с фокусом на трудности, с которыми они сталкиваются, и факторы, влияющие на их исследовательскую практику. Опрос был проведен среди 95 учителей двух сельских школ Алматинской области. Для анализа демографической информации и восприятия факторов, влияющих на уровень исследовательской компетенции, использовались описательные статистические методы. Результаты показали, что доступ к ресурсам, поддержка со стороны администрации и наличие времени являются ключевыми факторами. Корреляционный анализ выявил значительные связи между уверенностью в использовании исследовательских методов, опытом преподавания, знакомством с современными педагогическими подходами и частотой научной работы. Большинство учителей продемонстрировали среднюю уверенность в исследовательских методах, при этом была выявлена положительная корреляция между частотой проведения исследований и количеством публикаций. Качественный анализ открытых вопросов выявил основные трудности, такие как нехватка

времени, ограниченность ресурсов, языковые барьеры и недостаток практического опыта. Тематический анализ предложений по улучшению исследовательской активности показал, что денежные стимулы, возможности для профессионального развития, улучшение ресурсов и сокращение административной нагрузки могут способствовать повышению вовлеченности учителей в научную работу. Эти результаты предоставляют ценную информацию о факторах, поддерживающих или препятствующих развитию исследовательской компетенции в сельских образовательных учреждениях, а также дают рекомендации по улучшению практик и профессионального развития учителей.

Ключевые слова: исследовательская компетенция, сельские учителя, педагогическое развитие, проблемы исследования, непрерывное профессиональное развитие.

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