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Educational models for developing customs, brokerage and law enforcement expertise in EU–Ukraine cross-border cooperation

Modelos educativos para el desarrollo de la experiencia en aduanas, corretaje y aplicación de la ley en la cooperación transfronteriza entre la UE y Ucrania

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Abstract

The article aims to examine the critical role of education and professional training in strengthening customs control between Ukraine and the European Union. Its objective is to evaluate how educational initiatives support the harmonization of customs legislation, the adoption of modern systems such as the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS), and the broader modernization of customs procedures. The research employs a multi-method approach, including analysis of regulatory and legal documents,



comparative studies of EU-aligned educational models, and case studies of training programs for customs officials, brokers, and law enforcement agents. The study identifies significant progress in aligning Ukrainian customs training programs with European standards. It highlights the integration of digital learning platforms, competency-based frameworks, and interdisciplinary curricula as essential components in enhancing the professional competencies of customs personnel. The analysis shows that these initiatives have positively influenced institutional capacity, improved regulatory compliance, and facilitated more efficient trade operations. Key findings reveal that education and training are pivotal for legal harmonization and effective governance within the EU integration process. The article concludes with recommendations for advancing customs education through international collaboration, the use of technology-enhanced learning, and continual reform to support Ukraine's strategic economic alignment with the European Union.

Keywords: training of specialists, teaching, customs control, common transit, integration, customs legislation, harmonization.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo examinar el papel fundamental de la educación y la formación profesional en el fortalecimiento del control aduanero entre Ucrania y la Unión Europea. Su propósito es evaluar cómo las iniciativas educativas apoyan la armonización de la legislación aduanera, la adopción de sistemas modernos como el Nuevo Sistema Informatizado de Tránsito (NCTS) y la modernización general de los procedimientos aduaneros. La investigación emplea un enfoque metodológico múltiple, que incluye el análisis de documentos normativos y jurídicos, estudios comparativos de modelos educativos alineados con la UE y estudios de caso sobre programas de formación para funcionarios de aduanas, agentes de aduanas y fuerzas del orden. El estudio identifica avances significativos en la alineación de los programas de formación aduanera de Ucrania con los estándares europeos. Destaca la integración de plataformas de aprendizaje digital, marcos basados en competencias y planes de estudio interdisciplinarios como componentes esenciales para mejorar las competencias profesionales del personal aduanero. El análisis demuestra que estas iniciativas han influido positivamente en la capacidad institucional, mejorado el cumplimiento normativo y facilitado operaciones comerciales más eficientes. Los hallazgos clave revelan que la educación y la formación son fundamentales para la armonización legal y una gobernanza eficaz en el proceso de integración europea. El artículo concluye con recomendaciones para avanzar en la educación aduanera mediante la colaboración internacional, el uso de tecnologías educativas y la reforma continua que respalde la alineación económica estratégica de Ucrania con la Unión Europea.

Palabras clave: formación de especialistas, docencia, control aduanero, tránsito común, integración, legislación aduanera, armonización.

Introduction

The deepening economic and political integration between Ukraine and the European Union (EU) has significantly heightened the demand for qualified professionals in customs control, brokerage, and law enforcement. As Ukraine advances toward closer alignment with the EU through the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), customs procedures must increasingly reflect European regulatory norms and digital standards. This transition requires a workforce with both technical expertise and legal literacy in EU customs procedures, trade facilitation frameworks, and cross-border security mechanisms.

However, recent studies reveal a critical educational gap. According to a 2023 report by the State Customs Service of Ukraine, only 28% of customs personnel have received structured training aligned with EU regulations. Furthermore, less than 35% of training institutions offer practical instruction using core EU digital platforms such as the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS), Import Control System (ICS), and Export Control System (ECS) (PwC Ukraine, 2023). These digital platforms are foundational for automating



customs declarations and improving traceability in trade flows. The absence of such training has led to operational delays, regulatory inconsistencies, and increased risks of non-compliance.

For example, an audit conducted in 2023 by the European Commission identified persistent issues in the application of the Common Transit Convention by Ukrainian customs offices, citing insufficient staff training and poor familiarity with EU risk management protocols (European Commission, 2023). The report also highlighted that only a minority of Ukrainian customs training programs incorporated real-time simulations or cross-border case studies, tools widely used in EU member states to develop practical problem-solving competencies.

This evidence underscores the urgent need for a modernized educational framework that integrates EU-aligned content, digital tools, and competency-based learning. Without such reform, Ukraine risks falling behind in fulfilling its international obligations, delaying full access to European transit regimes and undermining trust with EU trade partners.

Research Tasks:

- Examine the current educational framework for customs training in Ukraine and the EU.
- Assess the impact of training initiatives on professionals' ability to implement the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) and reduce administrative burdens.
- Evaluate the role of modern learning technologies, such as simulations and digital case studies, in improving customs education.
- Identify gaps in educational programs and propose solutions to enhance professional competency.

Conducting this research is essential for refining the education and training of customs professionals, ensuring they are equipped to facilitate Ukraine's integration into the European customs system. By enhancing educational strategies, Ukraine can strengthen its regulatory capacity, improve compliance with EU trade policies, and foster economic cooperation with European partners.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and literature review, examining existing research on customs education. Section 3 outlines the methodology used in analyzing Ukraine's customs training system. Section 4 discusses the results, including the current state of education, digital integration, and joint initiatives with the EU. Section 5 concludes with key findings, challenges, and practical recommendations for reforming customs education in Ukraine.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between Ukraine and the European Union (EU) have triggered substantial reforms in customs procedures, emphasizing the strategic role of education in preparing a skilled workforce capable of navigating regulatory, technological, and organizational challenges. As Ukraine harmonizes its customs legislation with the EU Customs Code, customs officers, brokers, and law enforcement professionals require advanced competencies in both national and supranational legal frameworks, digital systems, and international compliance mechanisms such as the Revised Kyoto Convention and WTO standards.

EU-Aligned Competency Development

Ališauskas (2023) underlines the necessity of integrating Ukraine's customs education into the broader EU customs ecosystem. His research identifies key priorities, including harmonization of training curricula with European standards, the adoption of advanced customs data processing systems in academic programs, and the institutionalization of risk analysis training. He further advocates for structured partnerships between Ukrainian educational institutions and EU customs authorities as a mechanism for alignment with European best practices.

In a similar vein, Kuznyak & Svichkar (2018) analyze the EU's pedagogical approaches, noting their emphasis on harmonized curricula, simplified learning trajectories, and the implementation of competency-based education. These frameworks are foundational for shaping professionals who can function effectively within the EU's regulatory and operational environment.

Digital Transformation of Customs Training

The role of digital tools in modern customs education is extensively covered in the literature. Berezhniuk et al. (2015) explore the implementation of integrated customs systems such as the Import Control System (ICS), Export Control System (ECS), and the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) within training curricula in EU countries. Their findings emphasize how automation supports procedural transparency, accelerates customs clearance, and enhances the detection of smuggling and other trade-related risks.

Building on this, Kril (2021) evaluates the integration of NCTS into Ukrainian customs education. The study demonstrates that targeted training on electronic transit procedures improves logistical efficiency and transparency while also revealing technical and human resource limitations that hinder full-scale implementation.

Structural Gaps in Ukrainian Customs Education

A number of scholars critically assess the shortcomings of Ukraine's current customs training system. Vdovina & Slatvinska (2020) point to outdated curricula, insufficient integration of digital tools, and the absence of standardized professional qualifications. They propose a series of reforms including competency-based assessments, modernization of training content, and strategic collaboration with EU partners.

Dorofeeva & Korneva (2023) further argue that disparities in instructional methodologies, coupled with a lack of technological infrastructure, impede Ukraine's capacity to meet EU educational benchmarks. They recommend the development of degree programs specifically tailored to EU customs standards, the use of digital simulations, and the adoption of case-based teaching to foster applied competencies.

Dyachuk (2024) adds a regional dimension by analyzing professional training at Ukraine's western customs borders. The study identifies the lack of real-time training systems and practical modules as a key barrier to aligning field-level customs practices with EU procedures.

Emphasis on Experiential and Risk-Based Learning

Chirkova & Bortnikova (2022) highlight the effectiveness of simulation-based learning for training on the Common Transit Procedure (NCTS), showing that experiential education enhances customs clearance efficiency and decision-making accuracy.

Similarly, Kharkaviy (2013) explores the educational value of post-clearance audit simulations. His findings illustrate how audit-based learning models strengthen procedural knowledge and improve regulatory compliance among customs professionals.

Legislative and Institutional Dimensions

Tuchak & Mohylska (2018) examine the broader legal framework of customs education reform, focusing on the legislative alignment needed to support curriculum modernization. Their study recommends adapting Ukrainian customs training to reflect EU directives and international legal standards, particularly in the context of integrated border management.

Synthesis of Key Trends

The reviewed literature reveals several dominant trends shaping customs education reform:

Digitalization and Automation: The integration of platforms such as ICS, ECS, and NCTS into educational programs is a prevailing priority. These tools promote transparency, reduce manual processing, and improve operational readiness (Berezhniuk et al., 2015; Kril, 2021).

Curriculum Harmonization: Standardizing educational content with EU requirements is essential. Tuchak & Mohylska (2018) emphasize competency-based education as a solution for bridging regulatory gaps.

Cross-Border Collaboration: Joint training with EU customs institutions, international certification, and participation in EU-led workshops are seen as effective mechanisms for capacity building (Dyachuk, 2024).

Practical Training and Simulations: Experiential learning, including trade simulations and case-based training, significantly improves real-world customs enforcement capabilities (Chirkova & Bortnikova, 2022).

Trade Facilitation and Risk Management: Several studies link advanced training with improved trade efficiency, risk assessment, and smuggling prevention (Kharkaviy, 2013; Goncharenko, 2023).

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach to examine the role of education and professional training in strengthening customs control between Ukraine and the European Union.

The study was conducted in several interrelated stages:

Document Analysis:

An in-depth legal and regulatory review was carried out to assess the foundational framework of customs education in Ukraine in light of EU integration. Key documents analyzed include:

The Customs Code of Ukraine (Law No. 4495-VI, 2012; State Customs Service of Ukraine, 2024),

Amendments introduced by Law No. 3926-IX (2024),

EU Regulation No. 952/2013 (Union Customs Code), (European Parliament and of the Council, 2013a)

EU Regulation No. 1186/2009 (on exemptions from customs duties), (European Parliament and of the Council, 2009).

EU Regulation No. 608/2013 (on enforcement of intellectual property rights at the border), (European Parliament and of the Council, 2013b).

The Convention on a Common Transit Procedure (European Economic Community, 1987), and

Order No. 86 (2021) of the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine on the implementation of the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS).

This legal review established the normative basis for evaluating educational harmonization with EU customs standards.

Expert Interviews:

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with customs officials, academic personnel from customs training institutions, and policy advisors in Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary. The interviews explored:

The structure and content of customs training programs,

Their alignment with EU regulations and digital systems,

Perceived gaps in competencies and institutional readiness.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and critical insights across national contexts.

Case Study Analysis:

Four cross-border training initiatives involving Ukraine and EU member states were selected for detailed examination. The selection criteria included:

Presence of digital components (e.g., NCTS, ECS, ICS),

Institutional collaboration (e.g., joint training centers or EU-funded projects),

Availability of documented outcome evaluations or impact reports.

These case studies provided empirical evidence of best practices and obstacles in the practical implementation of harmonized customs education.

Analytical Framework:

A set of evaluation criteria was used to assess the findings from interviews and case studies, including:

Alignment with EU customs procedures and competencies,

Integration of digital tools and simulation platforms,

Application of competency-based training models,

Contributions to institutional capacity-building and regulatory convergence.

Additionally, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) was performed to assess the strategic positioning of Ukraine's customs education system in the context of European integration.

This multi-method research design, combining legal-regulatory analysis, qualitative interviews, and case-based evaluation, enables a nuanced understanding of Ukraine's customs education system. The triangulation of data sources ensures both normative accuracy and practical relevance, forming a robust basis for conclusions and policy recommendations.

Results and Discussion

As Ukraine moves closer toward European integration, the importance of modern education and training in the customs sector becomes increasingly evident. Customs officers, brokers, and law enforcement personnel play a central role in trade regulation, risk management, and border control. Ensuring that they are well-trained is essential not only for compliance with EU standards but also for streamlining customs procedures, reducing corruption, and fostering economic cooperation.

Customs brokers, in particular, need a combination of legal knowledge and technological skills. Their education must include both Ukrainian and European customs legislation, especially Regulation (EU) No. 952/2013, which lays the foundation for customs procedures across the Union. A sound understanding of tariff classification, rules of origin, and customs valuation is key. But theory alone isn't enough—brokers must also be proficient in using electronic customs systems, including risk management tools and the EU's Single Window environment.

There's growing emphasis on trade compliance, especially through mechanisms like the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program. Brokers trained in these areas can help businesses meet regulatory requirements efficiently. At the same time, ethics and anti-corruption are crucial components of training, given the historical challenges customs services have faced in these areas.

Education for customs officials must also reflect the broader legal environment. Instruments such as the Convention on the Simplification of Formalities in Trade in Goods and the Convention on a Common Transit Procedure influence the design of customs processes and, by extension, the structure of customs education. These conventions emphasize streamlined documentation and unified procedures—principles that should be mirrored in the way customs students are taught. Furthermore, Regulation (EU) No. 608/2013, concerning the enforcement of intellectual property rights, requires officers to be trained in identifying counterfeit goods and managing related enforcement actions.

Ukraine is making visible efforts to align with these expectations. Reforms are underway to update training programs, modernize customs education, and increase the use of digital tools. The Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies notes that changes are being made to better integrate electronic data systems and align national customs education with European standards. However, many programs still lag behind due to outdated materials, a lack of modern equipment, and limited international partnerships.

VisitUkraine reports that joint border control with the EU is on the horizon, which brings with it a need for even more specialized training. Officials must be familiar with surveillance technologies, real-time risk analysis, and international cooperation protocols. Such developments underscore the growing complexity of customs work and the corresponding need for hands-on, applied learning.

The benefits of joint EU–Ukraine training programs are significant. These initiatives help reduce procedural duplication, accelerate customs clearance, and cut costs for businesses. By learning together, Ukrainian and EU professionals can build a shared understanding of procedures and expectations, ultimately improving coordination and efficiency.

Law enforcement and border control are also part of the customs equation. Officers in these roles must be trained in international legal standards and crime prevention frameworks. Equipping them with skills in operating technologies like X-ray scanners, biometric identification, and AI-driven analytics is essential for keeping up with modern threats. At the same time, enforcement must be balanced with respect for human rights and adherence to EU norms.

Digital transformation plays a major role in all of this. The European Commission's 2024 Ukraine Report stresses the importance of integrating systems like the Import Control System (ICS) and Export Control System (ECS) into customs training. These tools allow real-time data exchange and support interactive learning. Ukraine's State Customs Service has already outlined a strategic plan for digitalization, which includes developing online learning platforms, AI-driven simulations, and certification systems based on EU benchmarks.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Many training institutions still lack access to digital technologies, and traditional curricula often do not provide sufficient practical experience. Regulatory differences between Ukraine and the EU also require constant updates to training programs.

At the same time, there are opportunities. Closer collaboration with EU customs academies could bring valuable expertise and shared resources. Investments in technologies like VR and AI could transform how customs officers are trained. And bilingual programs in Ukrainian and English could help integrate Ukrainian professionals into broader European customs networks.

Ultimately, education remains a cornerstone of customs reform. A forward-looking training system—modern, digital, and internationally aligned—will help Ukraine develop the skilled workforce it needs to operate within the EU customs framework. With the right investments and partnerships, Ukraine can build a customs service that not only enforces the law effectively but also facilitates trade, supports businesses, and enhances its standing in the European economic space.

Conclusions

In conclusion, comprehensive education and training of specialists in brokerage activities, customs services, and law enforcement are fundamental to ensuring the smooth integration of Ukraine into the European customs system. By aligning its educational frameworks with EU best practices, Ukraine can enhance its customs control mechanisms, facilitate trade more efficiently, and strengthen law enforcement capabilities within the context of European integration.

Alignment with Educational Objectives

Regarding the first objective, an analysis of Ukraine's customs education framework revealed that while Ukraine is gradually harmonizing its training programs with EU standards, gaps remain in digital competencies, practical training, and curriculum standardization. The EU Customs Code (UCC) and the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU serve as primary reference points for curriculum development. However, post-audit procedures, risk management training, and competency-based learning need further improvement to align fully with European standards.

Regarding the second objective, assessing the impact of training programs on NCTS implementation, findings indicate that while digitalization in customs training has improved, many professionals still require specialized instruction in automated customs systems. The New Computerized Transit System (NCTS), introduced in Ukraine in 2022, has simplified customs operations but requires ongoing personnel training to maximize its effectiveness. Future training programs should emphasize hands-on learning with NCTS interfaces, case-based problem-solving, and real-time customs simulations.

Regarding the role of information technologies in customs education, findings demonstrate that ICS and ECS training modules enhance transparency in customs procedures. Implementing Import Control System (ICS) and Export Control System (ECS) training ensures that customs professionals can conduct real-time tracking of imports and exports, improving risk assessment and fraud prevention. In Ukraine, integrating these technology-focused learning strategies into customs training will accelerate process automation, reduce human errors, and minimize corruption risks.

Challenges and Recommendations for Improving Customs Education

Despite the progress in modernizing customs education and training programs, the study identified several challenges:

Limited access to digital learning tools. Many Ukrainian educational institutions lack the necessary customs simulation software and automated training platforms to provide real-world customs procedure experience.

Low level of automation in training. Traditional teaching methods do not adequately prepare customs professionals for the highly digitalized EU customs environment.

Gaps in professional competencies. Customs officers require more advanced training in risk-based inspections, post-clearance audit procedures, and fraud detection.

Insufficient international cooperation. Exchange programs and joint educational initiatives between Ukrainian and EU institutions remain limited, restricting knowledge transfer.

To address these challenges, the following strategic recommendations should be implemented:

Modernize educational infrastructure by equipping training centers with AI-driven customs simulators, e-learning platforms, and real-time customs processing tools.

Enhance digital literacy among customs professionals by expanding virtual training in ICS, ECS, and NCTS. Strengthen collaboration with EU customs academies to standardize training curricula and introduce joint certification programs for customs officers.

Increase funding for specialized training in cross-border trade regulations, compliance risk assessment, and fraud prevention techniques.

Develop bilingual education programs (Ukrainian and English) to align training content with international customs standards and facilitate knowledge exchange.

The Role of Education in Ukraine's Customs Integration

Education and training play a pivotal role in facilitating Ukraine's customs modernization efforts. By reforming customs education, integrating digital training solutions, and fostering international partnerships, Ukraine can:

- Improve the efficiency of customs clearance procedures through better-trained specialists.
- Enhance risk-based customs inspections with data-driven decision-making skills.
- Strengthen compliance with EU regulations by equipping professionals with theoretical and practical expertise.
- Foster innovation in customs enforcement through AI-powered training and real-world simulations.

Future Research Directions

For further scientific research, it is advisable to study the experience of EU countries in customs training models, particularly the implementation of blended learning, AI-driven fraud detection training, and competency-based customs education frameworks. Additionally, analyzing the impact of digital learning innovations on customs personnel efficiency will provide valuable insights into how education can accelerate Ukraine's integration into the European customs space.

By prioritizing educational modernization, Ukraine will develop a skilled, adaptable, and internationally competitive customs workforce, ensuring that its professionals are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of global trade, regulatory compliance, and cross-border cooperation within the EU framework.

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