Developing Evaluation Competence in Initial and Continuing Teacher Education: An Integrative Framework for Educational Projects

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Abstract: Objective. Developing evaluation competence has become an important priority in teacher education. However, the literature continues to address assessment literacy, evidence use, professional learning, and organizational evaluation capacity as largely separate domains. Addressing this conceptual fragmentation, this article proposes an integrative framework that explains how evaluation competence develops through teachers' engagement in educational projects. **Methodology.** The study combines a critical review of the literature with a descriptive analysis of data collected through a questionnaire from 68 teachers and school managers in the Republic of Moldova who took part in training programs on the management and evaluation of educational projects. The empirical findings were used to examine the correspondence between existing models and the professional experiences reported, as well as to ground a new conceptual model. **Results.** The data reveal a high level of teacher participation in educational projects, but limited involvement in their design and evaluation, together with a need for training oriented toward practical evaluation experiences. Building on these findings, the study proposes the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC), built around four interdependent domains: conceptual knowledge, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based professional judgment. **Conclusions.** By integrating previously fragmented perspectives on evaluation competence, this article proposes an explanatory framework that accounts for its development across initial teacher education, continuous professional development, and participation throughout the full cycle of educational projects. The IFEC provides both a conceptual foundation for understanding how evaluation competence develops and a practical reference for designing teacher education programmes, strengthening evaluation practices, and informing future empirical research.

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Keywords: assessment competence; teacher training; educational projects; professional development; evidence use

1. Introduction

Recent transformations in education systems have extended the teacher's role beyond instructional activity to include participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of increasingly complex educational interventions. In numerous education systems, teachers are involved in projects addressing curricular innovation, inclusion, digital transformation, student well-being, or organizational development. In these contexts, evaluation is no longer merely a mechanism for assessing learning outcomes, but a process through which the evidence needed to ground decisions and improve interventions is generated. This shift has changed the way assessment competence is viewed, with it increasingly analysed as an essential component of teaching professionalism (DeLuca et al., 2016b; Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Over the past two decades, the literature has developed complementary perspectives on this field. Research on assessment literacy highlights the knowledge and practices required to design and interpret evaluation (DeLuca et al., 2016b; Xu & Brown, 2016); studies on data use analyse how evidence is transformed into educational decisions (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021); and the literature on evaluation capacity development explains how organizations develop the capacity to conduct and use evaluations (Labin et al., 2012; Nielsen et al., 2023). Although these strands have contributed significantly to understanding evaluation in education, they have largely evolved independently and capture only part of the process through which teachers develop assessment competence. This fragmentation becomes especially apparent in the case of educational projects. Evaluating a project requires competencies that go beyond assessing classroom learning and involve identifying needs, formulating evaluation questions, designing instruments, interpreting evidence, and using results to improve interventions. Research on the development of these competencies nevertheless remains limited. The systematic review conducted by McFadden and Williams (2020) shows that studies explicitly addressing the development of teachers' evaluative competencies are scarce, and that the relationship between initial training, continuous professional development, and experience gained through educational projects is insufficiently explained.

Building on this gap, the article seeks to answer the following research question: *how does teachers' assessment competence develop through the interaction between*

initial training, continuous professional development, and participation in educational projects?

To answer this question, the study pursues three objectives: (1) a critical review of the main theoretical perspectives on evaluation competence; (2) an examination of the extent to which experiences reported by teachers and school managers support or challenge these perspectives; and (3) the development of the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC).

The article's contribution consists of proposing a conceptual model that explains the development of evaluation competence through the integration of four interdependent domains: conceptual knowledge, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based professional judgment. Unlike existing approaches, which analyze these dimensions separately, IFEC explains how their interaction sustains the development of assessment competence throughout training and professional practice.

2. From Assessment Literacy to Integrated Evaluation Competence

2.1. Expanding the Object of Evaluation

Evaluation competence has traditionally been associated with the design of assessment instruments, the appraisal of student performance, and the certification of learning outcomes. Over the past two decades, however, the emergence of formative assessment and the evolution of the concept of assessment literacy have substantially expanded this understanding. Contemporary perspectives emphasize that teachers must not only know how to conduct evaluations but also understand why evaluation is undertaken, how evidence is generated and interpreted, and how its findings inform educational decisions and improvement (DeLuca et al., 2016b; Xu & Brown, 2016). This perspective remains incomplete when evaluation extends beyond classroom assessment to educational projects and interventions. Unlike the evaluation of student learning, project evaluation requires teachers to examine the coherence between identified needs, intended objectives, implemented activities, achieved outcomes, and longer-term impacts. It also demands the capacity to formulate meaningful evaluation questions, select appropriate indicators, interpret multiple sources of evidence, and translate findings into informed decisions that support the refinement of educational interventions. Consequently, evaluating

educational projects requires a broader and more integrated form of evaluation competence than that described in conventional models of assessment literacy.

2.2. Assessment Competence as Professional Expertise

Contemporary literature treats evaluation competence as a form of professional expertise, built progressively through the integration of knowledge, experience, and reflection on practice (Timperley et al., 2007). From this perspective, teachers do not mechanically apply standardized procedures but formulate context-adapted judgments and use evaluation to support learning and change. This perspective is especially relevant to educational projects, where each intervention generates different contexts, actors, and sources of information. Developing competence therefore involves more than accumulating evaluation techniques; it entails developing the capacity to adapt methods, critically interpret results, and ground decisions in relevant evidence.

2.3. Professional Learning and Competence Development

Research on professional development shows that teachers learn more effectively when training is connected to authentic problems, extends over the long term, and includes opportunities for application, collaboration, and reflection (Timperley et al., 2007). From this perspective, educational projects can serve as privileged contexts for professional learning. However, experience alone does not automatically produce competence development. Participation in projects contributes to learning only when experiences are critically analyzed, discussed, and transformed into professional knowledge. This idea shifts the emphasis from mere participation in projects toward the quality of participation in the evaluative process.

2.4. From Data to Evidence

The literature on data use shows that simply collecting information does not guarantee improvements in educational practice. The value of data depends on how it is interpreted, contextualized, and used in the decision-making process (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021; Vanlommel & Schildkamp, 2019). In educational projects, this transformation involves moving from producing data to formulating professional judgments grounded in evidence. Evaluation thus becomes a process of meaning-making and decision-grounding, not merely a reporting activity.

2.5. The Conceptual Gap

Although the literature on assessment literacy, data use, professional learning, and evaluation capacity development offers valuable explanations of certain dimensions of assessment competence, these perspectives remain insufficiently integrated. Each explains part of the phenomenon, but none describes how teachers develop evaluation competence through participation in educational projects and through the interaction among initial training, continuous professional development, and practical experience. The systematic review by McFadden and Williams (2020) confirms that the development of teachers' evaluative competencies remains an insufficiently explored field. This gap justifies the need for a conceptual model capable of explaining the relationships among these dimensions and the mechanisms through which assessment competence develops over time.

2.6. Positioning the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC) Relative to Existing Models

Building on this gap, IFEC is proposed not as an alternative to existing models but as an integrative framework that draws on their contributions. The model incorporates the conceptual foundations of assessment literacy, the organizational perspective of evaluation capacity development, and the evidence-based decision-making approach, but brings them together into a unified explanation of how teachers' assessment competence develops within the context of educational projects. From this perspective, the emphasis shifts from describing the components of competence to explaining the relationships among them and how they jointly contribute to professional development. Table 1 summarizes this conceptual positioning, highlighting both what each model explains and its limitations, including those of the integrative framework itself.

Table 1. Existing Models Compared with the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence

Model	What it explains	What it does not explain
Assessment literacy (DeLuca et al., 2016b; Xu & Brown, 2016)	The design, interpretation, fairness, and	The evaluation of programs, institutional

	communication of classroom assessment	initiatives, and educational projects
Organizational evaluation capacity (Labin et al., 2012; Nielsen et al., 2023)	How organizations build the resources and routines needed to conduct and use evaluations	How an individual teacher's own evaluative competence develops
Evidence/ data-based practice (Vanlommel & Schildkamp, 2019; Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021)	How data is collected, interpreted, and used in decisions	The mechanism through which the competence to do this well is formed and transferred
Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence	The generative mechanism through which project-evaluation competence is formed, transferred, and consolidated, integrating knowledge, method, reflection, and judgment	Precise, validated thresholds between developmental levels; generalization beyond the context of educational projects

Source: author's own elaboration

3. Methodology

The study adopts an empirically grounded conceptual development design aimed at constructing an explanatory framework of how teachers' evaluation competence develops. Rather than testing causal relationships or validating a measurement instrument, the research refines a conceptual model through an iterative dialogue between theory and empirical evidence. The study combines a critical review of the literature with a descriptive analysis of empirical data. The theoretical foundation draws on four complementary strands of research: assessment literacy, teacher professional development, evidence-informed decision-making, and evaluation capacity development. Together, these perspectives informed the identification of the framework's conceptual domains and the relationships among them.

The empirical component is based on a questionnaire administered to 68 participants (58 teachers and 10 school managers) from three localities in the Republic of Moldova who attended professional development seminars on the management and

evaluation of educational projects between October and November 2024. The instrument explored participants' experience with educational projects, their involvement across different stages of the project cycle, previous training in evaluation, the use of evaluation tools and criteria, perceived challenges, and the ways in which evaluation findings were applied in professional practice. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), consistent with the exploratory purpose of the study. Rather than providing statistical validation of the proposed framework, the empirical evidence served to examine the alignment between its conceptual domains and the needs, practices, and professional experiences reported by participants. The findings were interpreted in relation to the four domains of the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (conceptual knowledge, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, evidence-based professional judgment) to assess the coherence of the framework and refine its explanatory structure. This iterative integration of theory and empirical evidence strengthened both the conceptual consistency of IFEC and its relevance for authentic educational practice.

4. Results

4.1. Professional Experience with Educational Projects

Exposure to educational projects was widespread among participants. Of the 68 respondents, 88.24% reported that their institution had implemented educational projects, while 80.88% had personally participated in at least one project during the previous five years. However, participation was unevenly distributed across the project cycle. Most respondents reported involvement in project implementation (74.55%), whereas substantially fewer had participated in needs assessment (50.91%), project design (47.27%), interim evaluation (21.82%), or final evaluation (27.27%). These findings indicate that teachers' engagement remains concentrated in operational activities, with considerably fewer opportunities to participate in the evaluative stages of educational projects. Such an imbalance may limit the development of evaluation competence, as teachers are less frequently involved in defining evaluation questions, interpreting evidence, and using evaluation findings to inform educational decisions. From this perspective, the results support the need for an integrative framework that conceptualizes evaluation competence as developing through active participation across the entire project cycle, rather than through implementation alone.

4.2. Training in Project Evaluation

The findings point to important gaps in teachers' preparation for evaluation within educational projects. Only 35.29% of respondents considered themselves adequately prepared to perform evaluation tasks across all stages of the project cycle, while 41.18% reported having previously participated in training on project evaluation. The lack of specialized training emerged as the most frequently reported challenge (72.06%), followed by insufficient financial resources (66.18%) and limited time (55.88%). Consistent with these findings, 79.41% of respondents expressed the need for a dedicated curricular component focused on the evaluation of educational projects. Participants also demonstrated uneven familiarity with evaluation criteria. While effectiveness (88.24%), efficiency (83.82%), and relevance (76.47%) were widely recognized, substantially lower levels were reported for sustainability (67.65%), equity (48.53%). A similar pattern emerged with respect to methodological competence. Data analysis and interpretation (76.47%) and the use of evaluation instruments (72.06%) were identified as essential professional competencies; however, only 30.88% of respondents reported having fully used an evaluation rubric in practice. These findings suggest a persistent gap between conceptual awareness and the practical application of evaluation approaches, highlighting the need for professional learning opportunities that integrate theoretical understanding with authentic evaluation practice.

4.3. Training Needs and the Use of Evaluation in Professional Practice

Respondents expressed a clear preference for practice-oriented forms of professional learning. Practical workshops (82.35%), specialized training courses (70.59%), experience-sharing activities (64.71%), and expert-led workshops (60.29%) were consistently preferred over conference-based formats (26.47%). These preferences indicate that teachers value learning opportunities that enable the direct application of evaluation concepts and methods to authentic professional contexts. At the same time, several barriers continue to constrain the development of evaluation competence. The most frequently reported challenges were limited time for professional learning (75.00%), insufficient opportunities for practical application (64.71%), difficulties in using evaluation instruments (54.41%), and restricted access to methodological resources (42.65%). Current professional practice reflects a similar pattern. Although most respondents reported using evaluation tools such as questionnaires (69.12%) and analysing project data (63.24%), substantially fewer prepared evaluation reports (45.59%) or used evaluation findings to adjust project

implementation (42.65%). Moreover, 17.65% indicated that they did not apply evaluation knowledge in their professional practice. Taken together, these findings suggest that the principal challenge lies not in recognizing the importance of evaluation, but in creating sustained opportunities to apply evaluation knowledge through authentic professional practice, a conclusion consistent with previous research on teachers' evaluation competence (McFadden & Williams, 2020).

4.4. Barriers to Developing Assessment Competence

Participants identified several persistent barriers to the development of evaluation competence. The most frequently reported challenges were limited time, insufficient experience with project evaluation, and restricted access to methodological resources. These findings suggest that the development of evaluation competence depends not only on individual knowledge and skills but also on the organizational conditions that enable teachers to engage in evaluation as a meaningful professional practice. When opportunities for collaboration, critical reflection, and the systematic use of evaluation findings are limited, competence development is likely to remain fragmented and dependent on individual initiative. This interpretation is consistent with the literature on evaluation capacity development, which emphasizes that sustainable evaluation competence emerges through the interaction between individual capabilities and organizational support (Labin et al., 2012).

4.5. Synthesis of Results

The empirical evidence points to a central conclusion: evaluation competence is not developed through participation in educational projects alone, but through active engagement in the full evaluation process. While respondents reported substantial involvement in project implementation, their participation in needs assessment, evaluation design, evidence interpretation, and the use of findings for decision-making remained considerably more limited. This uneven distribution of evaluative responsibilities restricts opportunities for competence development, even among teachers with project experience. Taken together, the findings suggest that evaluation competence is a developmental and integrative capability rather than the outcome of isolated knowledge, training, or experience. Its development depends on the continuous interaction between conceptual understanding, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based professional judgment within professional

contexts. The convergence between these empirical findings and the reviewed literature provides the conceptual foundation for the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC).

5. The Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC)

The empirical findings and the critical review of the literature converge on a common conclusion: teachers' evaluation competence cannot be adequately understood as the cumulative acquisition of knowledge, technical skills, or professional experience. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic professional capability that emerges through the continuous interaction of conceptual understanding, methodological action, reflective inquiry, and evidence-informed professional judgment within authentic educational contexts.

Responding to this conceptual gap, the present study proposes the IFEC as an explanatory model of how evaluation competence develops throughout teachers' professional trajectories. The framework conceptualizes competence as a developmental and recursive process, connecting initial teacher education, continuous professional learning, and participation in educational projects within a single explanatory architecture. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework. Rather than depicting evaluation competence as a collection of discrete domains, IFEC conceptualizes it as an integrated system in which four interdependent dimensions continuously influence one another through iterative cycles of evaluation, learning, and professional development.

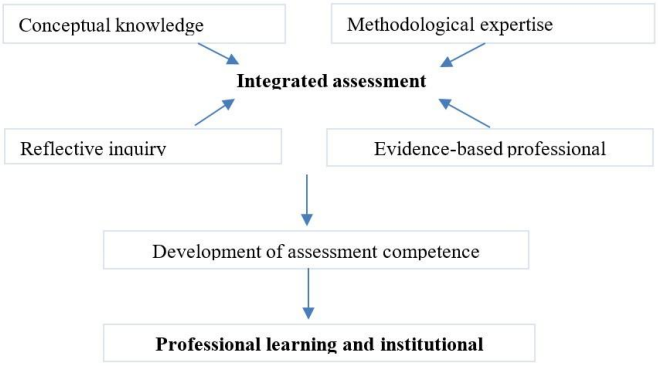


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC)

Source: author's own elaboration

The first domain of the model is **conceptual knowledge**, which provides the theoretical foundation of evaluative practice. This includes understanding the purposes of evaluation, quality criteria, the logic of educational projects, and the principles of evidence use in decision-making. The research data show that participants recognize the importance of these foundations, yet also reveal difficulties in transferring them to practical evaluation situations. This finding confirms that competence development cannot rely exclusively on experience but requires a conceptual framework that allows professional experiences to be interpreted and organized.

The second domain is **methodological expertise**, understood as the ability to design and implement evaluation processes suited to the context. This involves selecting indicators, developing instruments, choosing data-collection methods, and applying coherent analysis procedures. The study's results show that teachers frequently use evaluation tools, but their involvement in designing evaluative processes is more limited. Consequently, the development of methodological expertise depends on opportunities for active participation in the entire evaluation process, rather than merely applying pre-existing instruments.

The third domain is **reflective inquiry**, which transforms professional experience into learning. Reflection involves critically analysing results, identifying the causes of successes and difficulties, and formulating explanations that can guide future interventions. In IFEC, reflection is not treated as a final stage of evaluation but as a transversal process accompanying all phases of a project. Through reflection, teachers connect concrete experiences with conceptual foundations and adapt their practices according to available evidence.

The fourth domain is **evidence-based professional judgment**, defined as the ability to integrate information from multiple sources to ground educational decisions. This dimension goes beyond data interpretation and involves assessing the relevance, credibility, and implications of available information in relation to project objectives and the educational context. The research results show that using evidence to improve projects occurs less often than collecting data, suggesting that developing professional judgment is one of the most complex components of assessment competence.

The originality of IFEC lies not in identifying new dimensions of evaluation competence, but in explaining how they interact to drive professional development. The framework conceptualizes evaluation competence as a dynamic and recursive

process in which conceptual knowledge informs methodological action, methodological expertise generates evaluative evidence, reflective inquiry transforms experience into professional learning, and evidence-based professional judgment guides educational decisions. These decisions subsequently reshape professional understanding, initiating new cycles of learning and competence development. Rather than portraying competence as the linear accumulation of knowledge and skills, IFEC explains it as an emergent professional capability that evolves through the continuous interaction of its four domains.

6. Discussion

The present study contributes to the growing body of research on teachers' evaluation competence by suggesting that its development cannot be adequately explained through the accumulation of knowledge, isolated training experiences, or participation in educational projects alone. Instead, the findings indicate that evaluation competence develops through sustained engagement in the complete evaluation process, encompassing the formulation of evaluation questions, the design of methodological procedures, the interpretation of evidence, and the use of findings to inform professional decisions. This perspective shifts attention from what teachers know about evaluation to how evaluative expertise is progressively constructed through authentic professional practice.

This interpretation extends existing conceptualizations of assessment literacy. Previous models have demonstrated that effective assessment requires the integration of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and professional values (DeLuca et al., 2016b; Xu & Brown, 2016). The present findings suggest that, when evaluation moves beyond classroom assessment to educational projects and programmes, an additional dimension becomes critical: teachers' opportunity to participate throughout the entire evaluative cycle. Evaluation competence therefore depends not only on individual capability but also on access to professional situations in which evaluative reasoning can be exercised, refined, and transferred across contexts. The findings also reinforce the literature on evidence-informed decision-making. Although participants reported frequent use of evaluation instruments and data collection methods, considerably fewer described systematic interpretation of evidence or the use of findings to improve educational interventions. This distinction supports the argument that collecting data and using evidence represent qualitatively different professional processes (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). Within IFEC, evidence-based professional judgment is therefore conceptualized not as the final

step of evaluation but as the integrative capability through which methodological evidence is transformed into educational action.

A further contribution concerns the role of reflective inquiry. Existing research consistently identifies reflection as a key mechanism of teacher learning (Timperley et al., 2007); however, the present study suggests that its function extends beyond professional reflection itself. Within educational projects, reflection operates as the mechanism that connects conceptual understanding, methodological expertise, and evaluative evidence, enabling teachers to reinterpret experience, refine professional judgments, and improve subsequent practice. Reflection thus functions as the central process through which evaluation competence evolves over time. Taken together, these findings provide the conceptual rationale for the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC). Rather than conceptualizing evaluation competence as a collection of independent domains, IFEC explains it as a dynamic and recursive professional capability emerging from the continuous interaction of conceptual knowledge, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based professional judgment. Its contribution therefore lies less in proposing new dimensions than in explaining the mechanism through which these dimensions interact to support professional learning across initial teacher education, continuous professional development, and participation in educational projects.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the study's methodological limitations. The empirical component relied on a convenience sample of teachers and school managers participating in professional development programmes and employed descriptive statistical analyses appropriate to the exploratory purpose of the research. Consequently, the study does not claim statistical validation of IFEC but offers an empirically informed conceptual framework grounded in educational practice. Future research should examine the applicability of the framework across different educational contexts, larger and more diverse samples, and longitudinal research designs capable of testing the developmental relationships among its conceptual domains.

7. Operationalizing the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence in Initial and Continuing Training

The findings suggest that the development of evaluation competence requires more than the inclusion of additional coursework on evaluation. From the perspective of IFEC, competence develops through repeated opportunities to connect conceptual

knowledge with authentic evaluative practice. Consequently, teacher education should move beyond treating evaluation as an isolated topic and instead embed it across courses on curriculum, educational research, project management, and teaching practice. Such an approach reflects recommendations that project design, implementation, and evaluation should be addressed as an integrated learning process rather than as separate stages (Gherguț & Ceobanu, 2009; Bunăiașu, 2012).

Operationalizing IFEC implies creating learning environments in which future teachers formulate evaluation questions, develop indicators and instruments, analyse quantitative and qualitative evidence, participate in authentic or simulated educational projects, and justify professional judgments based on evidence. Assessment should therefore emphasize evaluative reasoning, methodological coherence, and the capacity to translate evidence into informed educational decisions, rather than the reproduction of theoretical knowledge. The empirical findings also have implications for continuing professional development. Respondents' preference for practice-oriented learning, together with the barriers they identified, supports a shift from one-off training events toward sustained, project-based professional learning. In line with IFEC, effective professional development should combine conceptual input, practical application, methodological mentoring, collaborative reflection, and systematic use of evaluation findings. Such formats are more likely to strengthen evaluation competence because they mirror the recursive processes through which competence develops in professional practice.

8. Conclusions

This research study argues that evaluation competence cannot be adequately understood as the outcome of mastering evaluation methods, acquiring technical skills, or participating in educational projects in isolation. The empirical findings indicate that competence develops when teachers are actively engaged throughout the entire evaluation process—from identifying evaluation questions and designing evaluation procedures to interpreting evidence and using findings to inform professional decisions. Although respondents reported substantial involvement in educational projects, their participation remained concentrated in implementation, limiting opportunities to develop evaluative expertise. Building on these findings and on the critical review of the literature, the study proposes the Integrative Framework of Evaluation Competence (IFEC) as an explanatory model of how evaluation competence develops across teachers' professional trajectories. Rather

than conceptualizing competence as a collection of independent domains, IFEC explains it as an emergent professional capability arising from the continuous interaction of conceptual knowledge, methodological expertise, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based professional judgment. In doing so, the framework shifts attention from what teachers know about evaluation to how evaluation competence is progressively constructed through authentic professional practice.

The principal contribution of IFEC therefore lies not in introducing new dimensions of evaluation competence, but in explaining the developmental mechanism through which these dimensions interact across initial teacher education, continuing professional development, and participation in educational projects. By offering an integrated explanatory perspective, the framework extends existing work on assessment literacy and evaluation capacity while providing a conceptual foundation for the design of teacher education programmes, the organization of evaluation practices, and future empirical research on the development of evaluation competence.

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