

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINING SOCIAL WORKERS AS MEDIATORS IN CIVIL PROCEEDINGS: A TRAUMA-INFORMED AND DIGITALLY RESPONSIBLE APPROACH

Kateryna Dmytrenko

“Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy”

Kharkiv Regional Council

Kharkiv, Ukraine

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4880-8274

dmitrenko.katia@gmail.com

Abstract.

The integration of mediation into civil justice in Ukraine raises an educational problem that cannot be resolved by legal regulation alone: institutions must prepare practitioners who can conduct a structured, confidential and neutral process while working with conflict, stress, digital communication and professional boundaries. This conceptual article develops a pedagogical framework for preparing social work students for a later professional pathway into mediation. The study combines doctrinal analysis of the Law of Ukraine „On Mediation”, analysis of the national higher-education standard for Social Work, European mediation-training guidance, and a targeted synthesis of literature on mediation education, trauma-informed social work and online dispute resolution. No survey, experiment, interview or other human-participant research is reported. The proposed framework contains five competency domains: legal-procedural literacy; neutral facilitative communication; trauma-informed process management; self-regulation and professional resilience; and digital mediation and data ethics. A two-level implementation model is proposed: degree-embedded preparatory learning within social work education, followed by statutory basic mediator training that meets the requirements of Ukrainian law. The framework emphasises role differentiation because social workers’ helping and advocacy functions do not automatically coincide with the mediator’s duty of neutrality and party self-determination. It also treats digital competence as a professional and governance requirement, encompassing confidentiality, platform security, informed consent, accessibility and responsible use of AI-assisted tools. The article argues that sustainable mediation reform depends on educational capacity, quality assurance and ethically governed digital practice as much as on the existence of mediation legislation.

Keywords: mediation; civil justice; social work education; trauma-informed pedagogy; digital mediation; professional competence

1.INTRODUCTION

Mediation has become an increasingly important component of contemporary civil justice because it offers parties a structured procedure for resolving disputes without transferring control over the outcome to a third-party decision-maker. In Ukraine, the Law of Ukraine „On Mediation” defines mediation as a voluntary, confidential and structured out-of-court procedure and establishes the principles of mediator neutrality, independence and impartiality, party self-determination and equality. The Law also establishes a professional threshold: a person may act as a mediator after completing basic mediator training, and that

basic programme must comprise at least 90 hours, including at least 45 hours of practical training (Law of Ukraine „On Mediation”, 2021). These requirements are significant for higher education because they make mediator competence an educational as well as a legal issue. The existence of statutory training requirements does not, by itself, determine which prior professional backgrounds are best suited to mediation. Social work is relevant because its educational standards and professional traditions develop adjacent competences: communication, analysis of social and psychological processes, work with vulnerable persons, ethical decision-making, cooperation with clients and other professionals, use of information and communication technologies, and the capacity to resolve complex problems. The Ukrainian bachelor-level standard for Social Work includes legal knowledge, information and communication technology skills, ethical conduct, work with clients on the basis of trust, analysis of interpersonal processes, and the use of methods for resolving conflicts and difficult life circumstances (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). These competences create a plausible foundation for subsequent mediator training.

At the same time, the relationship between social work and mediation must not be overstated. A social work degree does not itself confer mediator status under Ukrainian law, and the professional role of a social worker may include assistance, advocacy, case management or protection of a vulnerable client. Mediation, by contrast, requires the mediator to avoid deciding the dispute, advising the parties on the merits of the outcome, or representing one side. The educational challenge is therefore not to present social workers as mediators by default, but to identify which social-work competences are transferable, which require adaptation, and which specifically mediator competencies must be developed through dedicated training. This challenge is particularly important in an environment shaped by prolonged social stress and rapid digitalisation. Civil disputes may involve persons affected by displacement, loss, family disruption, housing insecurity, debt or other difficult life circumstances. A mediator needs sufficient trauma awareness to maintain procedural safety without converting mediation into therapy or presuming that every participant is traumatised. In parallel, mediation is increasingly prepared, communicated and sometimes conducted through digital platforms. Online interaction changes the practical meaning of confidentiality, informed consent, identity verification, accessibility and professional boundaries (Barsky, 2016; Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). Accordingly, mediator preparation requires a competence model that combines legal, communicative, psychosocial and digital dimensions.

The aim of this article is to develop a conceptually grounded pedagogical framework for preparing future social workers for professional mediation in civil disputes. The article addresses three questions: (1) which competences required by mediation are already adjacent to the learning outcomes of social work education; (2) which competence gaps require dedicated mediator training; and (3) how trauma-informed and digitally responsible practice can be integrated into a coherent educational pathway. The contribution is a competency-mapping and curriculum-design model rather than an empirical evaluation of a programme. This distinction is essential: the framework is proposed for subsequent testing and implementation, not presented as an intervention whose effectiveness has already been statistically demonstrated.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND REGULATORY FOUNDATIONS

2.1 MEDIATION COMPETENCE IN CIVIL JUSTICE

Mediation differs from adjudication because the mediator manages a process rather than determines the parties' substantive rights. Moore (2014) describes mediation as a structured form of third-party intervention that supports negotiation and decision-making by the parties. In the Ukrainian regulatory model, this process orientation is reinforced by the principles of voluntariness, confidentiality, neutrality, independence, impartiality, self-determination and equality (Law of Ukraine „On Mediation”, 2021). The mediator therefore requires legal literacy sufficient to understand the permissible scope of the role, procedural competence to organise the mediation, and communicative competence to facilitate negotiation without taking ownership of the decision.

The European framework points in the same direction. Directive 2008/52/EC addresses mediation in civil and commercial matters and links the development of mediation to a predictable legal framework and quality of mediation services (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2008). The Council of Europe's CEPEJ guidelines on designing and monitoring mediation training schemes further emphasise structured training, practical skills development and quality monitoring (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice [CEPEJ], 2019). Taken together, these sources support a competency-based approach: mediator preparation should be defined not only by attendance or course titles but by observable learning outcomes and the ability to apply them in realistic situations.

2.2 SOCIAL WORK AS AN ADJACENT PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION

Social work education offers a strong adjacent foundation because it combines legal, psychosocial, communicative and ethical dimensions. Payne (2020) emphasises the holistic character of social work practice, while Barsky (2017) treats conflict-resolution skills as central to helping professions. The Ukrainian higher-education standard likewise requires graduates to understand the legal basis of social work, analyse social and psychological processes, interact with clients and professional groups, act ethically, use information and communication technologies, and apply methods for resolving difficult situations (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). These outcomes overlap substantially with the knowledge and skills needed for mediation.

The overlap, however, contains an important professional-boundary problem. Social workers may be trained to protect clients' interests, mobilise resources, advocate for services or recommend interventions. A mediator must instead protect the integrity of the process and the parties' capacity for self-determination. Ukrainian law expressly prevents a mediator from combining the mediator role with another participant role in the same dispute and from advising the parties on the substantive decision they should make (Law of Ukraine „On Mediation”, 2021). Consequently, training social workers for mediation must include role differentiation: when entering the mediator role, the practitioner must shift from helping through substantive assistance to helping through neutral facilitation.

This role transition is one reason why it is insufficient simply to add a short lecture on

mediation to an existing social work course. Students require repeated practice in reframing, active listening, open questioning, agenda construction, managing imbalance, summarising interests, supporting option generation and maintaining neutrality under pressure. They also need opportunities to identify when a matter is unsuitable for mediation, when specialist legal or psychological advice should be recommended, and when the process should be paused or terminated. The core pedagogical task is therefore conversion of adjacent social-work competence into mediator-specific professional behaviour.

2.3 TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY WITHOUT THERAPEUTIC OVERREACH

Trauma-informed social work is built around safety, trust, collaboration, choice and empowerment rather than around assuming pathology or requiring disclosure of traumatic experiences (Levenson, 2017). In social work education, Carello and Butler (2015) argue that trauma-informed educational practice should reduce unnecessary re-traumatisation and create learning conditions in which difficult material can be addressed without sacrificing academic rigour. These principles are useful for mediation training because conflict situations may activate fear, anger, shame or physiological stress responses that interfere with communication and decision-making.

For mediator education, trauma-informed practice should be translated into process competence rather than therapeutic intervention. A mediator is not required to diagnose trauma and should not treat mediation as psychotherapy. Instead, the mediator should be able to recognise signs that participation is becoming unsafe or ineffective, explain the structure of the process transparently, offer appropriate breaks, use predictable communication, avoid coercive pressure, support party choice, and refer participants to specialist assistance where necessary. This boundary protects both the parties and the mediator's professional role.

The same logic applies to the mediator's own well-being. Repeated exposure to high-conflict narratives can produce emotional strain, while a mediator who loses self-regulation may become directive, defensive or avoidant. Grant and Kinman (2014) therefore provide a useful basis for treating resilience, reflective practice and professional self-care as competence-related rather than purely personal matters. In a training programme, self-regulation can be developed through structured debriefing, reflective logs, supervision, peer feedback and explicit strategies for managing cognitive and emotional load.

2.4 DIGITAL MEDIATION AS A PROFESSIONAL AND GOVERNANCE ISSUE

Digitalisation affects both the delivery of mediation and the design of mediator education. Online dispute resolution can increase accessibility and reduce geographic barriers, but it also changes the architecture of communication and the distribution of risk (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). Mediators working online must understand not only how to operate a videoconferencing platform but also how the platform affects confidentiality, privacy, party autonomy, power balance and the quality of interaction.

Barsky (2016) identifies informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, neutrality, fair-

ness and professional boundaries as ethical issues in technology-assisted mediation. For educational purposes, these concerns translate into concrete learning outcomes: students should know how to establish rules on recording, select an appropriate communication channel, confirm who is physically present with each participant, respond to connection failures, protect documents shared during the session, and recognise when digital exclusion or lack of privacy makes online mediation inappropriate. Where personal data are processed in EU-linked or cross-border contexts, the data-protection principles reflected in Regulation (EU) 2016/679 also provide a relevant benchmark for data minimisation, purpose limitation and security (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016).

Digital competence also changes mediator training itself. Walsh (2019) shows that mediation education depends heavily on experiential learning and role-play and discusses how these activities can be redesigned for online environments. This is directly relevant to social work programmes because virtual simulations can provide repeated practice without exposing real clients or real case data. The appropriate pedagogical principle is therefore not maximal technologisation but purposeful use of technology: digital tools should increase practice opportunities, reflection and accessibility while preserving confidentiality, human oversight and ethical control.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article uses a qualitative conceptual design combining doctrinal analysis, targeted literature synthesis, competency mapping and pedagogical modelling. It does not employ a mixed-methods design and does not report an experiment, survey, interview study or statistical evaluation. This methodological choice reflects the available evidence and the purpose of the paper: to construct a theoretically and normatively grounded framework that can later be tested empirically.

3.1 NORMATIVE AND POLICY ANALYSIS

The normative component focused on documents that define either mediator qualification or the educational competences relevant to the proposed pathway. The principal Ukrainian sources were the Law of Ukraine „On Mediation” and the bachelor-level Standard of Higher Education in speciality 231 „Social Work”. For comparative and quality-assurance purposes, the analysis also considered Directive 2008/52/EC and the CEPEJ Guidelines on Designing and Monitoring Mediation Training Schemes. The documents were read for requirements concerning mediator status, training duration, practical skills, neutrality, confidentiality, party self-determination, ethical conduct, professional competence and education quality.

3.2 TARGETED LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

The literature component synthesised works already central to the author’s topic—mediation process, social work theory, conflict resolution, trauma-informed education and resilience—and supplemented them with sources specifically addressing digital mediation

and mediator training. The review is targeted and conceptual rather than systematic; it does not claim exhaustive database coverage or PRISMA compliance. Sources were selected for their direct relevance to the competence domains required to construct the pedagogical framework.

3.3 COMPETENCY MAPPING AND CONCEPTUAL MODELLING

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, mediator-specific requirements were extracted from law and mediation-training guidance. Second, these requirements were compared with adjacent competences contained in social work education and the professional literature. Third, areas of overlap and deficit were translated into learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment evidence. The resulting model was then organised as a two-level educational pathway: preparatory competence development within a social work degree programme and dedicated statutory mediator training.

3.4 RESEARCH BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS

No human participants were recruited, no student questionnaire was administered, no pedagogical experiment was conducted, and no numerical outcomes are presented. Consequently, no claims are made about the measured effectiveness of the proposed framework. Statements about likely educational value are conceptual propositions derived from the cited literature and normative analysis. Because the study uses publicly available legislation, policy documents and published literature and does not process personal data, formal human-subject ethics approval was not required for the work reported in this article. Empirical validation remains a task for subsequent research.

4. RESULTS: A COMPETENCY-BASED PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 REGULATORY AND EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCY MAP

The comparison shows that social work education supplies several relevant foundations but does not replace mediator-specific preparation. The clearest overlap concerns communication, ethics, legal literacy, work with complex social situations and use of digital technologies. The clearest gaps concern the legal boundaries of the mediator role, disciplined neutrality, structured mediation procedure, mediation-specific confidentiality, party self-determination, and performance assessment through realistic mediation practice.

Table 1. Regulatory and educational foundations for the proposed mediator-training pathway

Source / domain	Requirement or existing competence	Identified educational implication	Status in the proposed pathway
Law of Ukraine "On Mediation"	Mediator status requires basic training of at least 90 hours, including at least 45 hours of practical training.	A social work degree may prepare students for mediation but cannot be treated as a substitute for the statutory training requirement.	Dedicated mediator training

Source / domain	Requirement or existing competence	Identified educational implication	Status in the proposed pathway
Principles of mediation under Ukrainian law	Voluntariness, confidentiality, neutrality, independence, impartiality, party self-determination and equality.	Students need role-boundary training and observable practice in neutral facilitation rather than advice-giving.	Mediator-specific core
Higher Education Standard: Social Work	Legal literacy, communication, ICT skills, ethical conduct, client interaction, analysis of social-psychological processes and conflict-related problem solving.	These competences provide an adjacent foundation that can be mapped to mediator learning outcomes.	Degree-embedded preparation
CEPEJ mediation-training guidance	Training should combine structured content, practical skills development and monitoring of learning quality.	Role-play, simulation, feedback and competency assessment should be central, not optional extras.	Quality assurance
Digital mediation / ODR literature	Technology affects confidentiality, informed consent, fairness, accessibility and professional boundaries.	Digital mediation ethics and data governance should be taught as professional competence.	Cross-cutting competence

4.2 FIVE COMPETENCY DOMAINS

On the basis of this mapping, the framework is organised into five domains. They are intentionally formulated as learning outcomes rather than as course titles, because the same outcome may be developed across lectures, seminars, simulation, supervised practice and reflective work. The model also separates competence from confidence: students should not be judged primarily by self-reported readiness but by evidence that they can perform mediation-relevant actions consistently and ethically.

Table 2. Competency matrix for preparing social work students for professional mediation

Competency domain	Learning outcomes	Pedagogical methods	Evidence of attainment
1. Legal-procedural literacy	Explain the legal status and limits of mediation; distinguish mediation from legal advice, representation and adjudication; identify when specialist advice or termination is required.	Case-based lectures; analysis of the Law on Mediation; process maps; short legal problem scenarios.	Scenario-based test; process plan; reasoned response to boundary cases.
2. Neutral facilitative communication	Use active listening, reframing, open questions, summarising and agenda-setting; maintain neutrality; support party self-determination without directing the outcome.	Demonstration; paired exercises; role-play; observed simulation; peer and trainer feedback.	Behaviourally anchored simulation rubric; reflective commentary on interventions.
3. Trauma-informed process management	Recognise signs of distress without diagnosing; create predictable and psychologically safer process conditions; use breaks, choice and referral appropriately.	Trauma-informed case analysis; simulation with stress cues; debriefing; referral-mapping exercises.	Response to a complex scenario; explanation of safety and referral decisions.
4. Self-regulation and professional resilience	Monitor personal stress responses; maintain professional boundaries; use supervision and recovery strategies; recognise secondary stress risks.	Reflective logs; supervision; guided debrief; workload and trigger mapping; peer consultation.	Reflective portfolio; supervision plan; self-regulation strategy linked to observed practice.

Competency domain	Learning outcomes	Pedagogical methods	Evidence of attainment
5. Digital mediation and data ethics	Conduct secure and accessible online mediation; manage recording, identity, documents and confidentiality; evaluate digital-platform and AI-assisted tool risks.	Online role-play; platform-risk checklist; synthetic-case document sharing; data-protection exercises.	Digital-session protocol; security/privacy checklist; observed online simulation.

4.3 LEARNING SEQUENCE: FROM ADJACENT COMPETENCE TO MEDIATOR PERFORMANCE

The five domains should be taught through a staged sequence rather than as unrelated modules. The first stage is orientation and role differentiation. Students analyse the legal status of mediation and compare the mediator role with familiar social-work roles such as counsellor, advocate, case manager and service coordinator. The purpose is to prevent a common transfer error: assuming that helpfulness always means offering advice or recommending an outcome.

The second stage is isolated skills practice. Students rehearse specific interventions—listening, reframing, summarising, asking open questions, identifying interests, setting an agenda and responding to emotional escalation—before combining them in a full simulation. Short exercises make it easier to identify the mechanism of a skill and to provide focused feedback. This reflects the experiential character of mediator training highlighted in CEPEJ guidance and in mediator-training literature (CEPEJ, 2019; Walsh, 2019).

The third stage is integrated simulation. Students work with fictitious civil-dispute scenarios that combine legal ambiguity, strong emotions, unequal communication styles and digital-process complications. The simulation should require process decisions rather than a predetermined settlement. For example, a scenario may require the student to decide whether to pause the session, hold separate meetings, recommend independent legal advice, change the communication channel or terminate mediation because the conditions for voluntary participation are no longer present. The fourth stage is reflective assessment. Students review selected interventions, identify where their own assumptions influenced the process, explain how they protected neutrality and confidentiality, and formulate a development plan. Reflection is not a substitute for performance assessment; it is evidence of the capacity to learn from performance. The final assessment should therefore combine observed behaviour with reasoned self-analysis.

4.4 PEDAGOGICAL CONDITIONS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED AND DIGITALLY RESPONSIBLE SIMULATION

Simulation is valuable only when its educational environment is itself ethically designed. Trauma-informed pedagogy suggests that students should receive advance information about the nature of difficult scenarios, understand that simulation is a learning exercise rather than a test of personal emotional disclosure, and have structured debriefing after high-conflict role-play (Carello & Butler, 2015). Students should not be required to reproduce personal traumatic experiences in order to demonstrate competence.

Digital simulation should use synthetic case materials and institutionally approved platforms. Recording should be limited to what is necessary for learning and should be governed by clear access and retention rules. Where automated transcription, generative AI or other AI-assisted functions are available, they should be treated as optional tools whose outputs require verification. Sensitive or identifiable client information should not be used to train students on public AI services. These controls make digital literacy part of professional ethics rather than merely technical convenience.

5. PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

5.1 A TWO-LEVEL EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY

The proposed framework is best implemented as a two-level pathway. Level One is embedded in the social work degree and prepares students through relevant learning outcomes, electives and simulations. Its purpose is orientation and competence development, not automatic professional certification as a mediator. Level Two is a dedicated basic mediator-training programme compliant with the Law of Ukraine „On Mediation”, including the legally required volume and practical component. Where a higher-education institution acts as an authorised subject of educational activity and designs a programme meeting the statutory requirements, the two levels may be organisationally connected; however, the present article does not claim that any specific existing programme at the author’s institution already satisfies or certifies the statutory mediator-training requirement.

This distinction resolves an important regulatory ambiguity in the earlier formulation of the topic. The educational value of social work is not that it creates a privileged or automatic route into mediation, but that it supplies a professional foundation from which mediation-specific competence can be developed efficiently. The framework therefore supports curriculum articulation: universities can identify which outcomes are already addressed in the social work programme and reserve dedicated mediation training for the competences that require specialised instruction and assessed practice.

5.2 SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL FORMATS

A practical curriculum may combine five instructional formats. First, case-based seminars can connect mediation principles with civil-dispute contexts and professional-boundary questions. Second, micro-skills laboratories can isolate communication techniques before full simulations. Third, structured role-play can reproduce the temporal and relational complexity of mediation. Fourth, digital simulations can train online process management, data handling and accessibility. Fifth, supervision and reflective portfolios can connect performance feedback with professional self-regulation. Moodle or another learning-management system can support preparatory materials, submission of reflective work and controlled access to synthetic case files; videoconferencing platforms can support online role-play; and immersive technologies may be used where available, but they are not necessary for the framework to function.

Civil-dispute scenarios should be selected for educational value rather than sensationa-

lism. Suitable examples include consumer-service disputes, neighbour disputes, contractual disagreements, housing-related conflicts, inheritance communication problems or conflicts involving ongoing relationships. Scenarios should provide enough legal context to require boundary awareness but should not encourage students to practise unauthorised legal advice. The assessment question is how well the student manages the mediation process, not whether the student independently identifies the legally correct outcome.

5.3 ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Assessment should rely on observable criteria. A simulation rubric may include opening and explanation of the process, neutrality of language, listening and questioning, management of participation, recognition of confidentiality issues, response to distress, support for party self-determination, digital-process control and quality of closure. Behaviourally anchored descriptors are preferable to global labels such as „good communication” because they provide clearer evidence for students, trainers and quality-assurance bodies.

Quality assurance also requires trainer competence and calibration. A programme that integrates law, social work, trauma-informed practice and digital mediation is inherently interdisciplinary. Legal specialists can clarify the limits of the mediator role; experienced mediators can assess process performance; social work educators can address client interaction, ethics and vulnerability; and psychologists or trauma-informed practitioners can support the design of safe educational scenarios without turning the mediation course into clinical training. Regular moderation of assessment decisions can reduce inconsistency among trainers.

5.4 DIGITAL GOVERNANCE REQUIREMENTS

When mediator training is delivered digitally, the institution itself becomes responsible for modelling the practices it expects students to use professionally. Course design should therefore specify approved platforms, access permissions, recording rules, retention periods, procedures for sharing case materials and protocols for responding to accidental disclosure. Students should be taught to ask not only „Can this tool be used?” but also „What information will it process, who can access it, how long will it be retained, and what happens if the technology fails?” This turns digital competence into a governance habit.

The same principle applies to AI-assisted tools. Generative systems may be useful for creating synthetic role-play prompts, language support or practice questions, but they should not be treated as autonomous mediators or authoritative sources of legal advice. When such tools are used in education, students should be trained to verify outputs, avoid uploading identifiable or confidential information, and understand that responsibility remains with the human practitioner and institution. This is especially important in mediation because confidentiality and trust are not peripheral requirements but structural conditions of the process.

6. DISCUSSION

The central theoretical implication of the proposed framework is that the relationship between social work and mediation is best understood through competence transfer rather than professional substitution. Social work provides a strong base in communication, ethics, psychosocial understanding and work with complex life circumstances, but mediation adds a distinct process role with distinct legal and ethical limits.

Framing the relationship this way avoids two opposite errors: treating social workers as automatically qualified mediators, and ignoring the substantial professional assets that social work education can contribute to mediator preparation.

A second implication concerns trauma-informed practice. The framework does not equate conflict with trauma, nor does it ask mediators to diagnose psychological conditions. Its purpose is procedural: mediation should be organised so that parties can participate voluntarily, understand what is happening, retain meaningful choice and communicate without unnecessary escalation or re-traumatisation.

This is consistent with trauma-informed social work principles while preserving the boundary between mediation and therapy (Levenson, 2017). In the Ukrainian context, where many citizens and professionals live with the consequences of prolonged war, this form of preparedness is particularly relevant, but it should remain individualised rather than assumption-driven.

A third implication concerns resilience. Earlier versions of the manuscript treated resilience largely as an individual health-preserving technology. The conceptual revision places it within professional capacity. A mediator who cannot recognise overload, seek supervision or regulate their own responses may compromise neutrality and process quality. Resilience is therefore connected to competence and quality assurance rather than to personal wellness alone.

This framing is more compatible with professional education because it links self-care to accountable practice.

The fourth implication concerns digitalisation. Online mediation is not simply face-to-face mediation transferred to a screen. Technology changes who can participate, what information is visible, how confidentiality can be breached, and how the mediator observes power and distress. A digitally responsible mediator therefore needs procedural and ethical judgement about technology, not merely operating skills. Barsky (2016) and the broader online-dispute-resolution literature show why issues such as privacy, informed consent, fairness and access must be integrated into professional training rather than delegated entirely to IT staff.

These findings also connect the article with sustainable governance. Mediation reform is sustainable only if institutions can reproduce competent practitioners, monitor training quality and adapt professional standards to digital conditions. A law may authorise mediation, but weak educational capacity can leave the reform under-implemented or unevenly implemented.

Conversely, a competence-based training pathway can translate legal principles into repeatable professional practice. In this sense, mediator education is part of justice-system

infrastructure: it links legislation, higher education, professional standards and digital governance.

The framework has limitations. It is a conceptual model based on normative documents and selected literature rather than a systematic review or empirical evaluation. It does not compare curricula across a representative sample of Ukrainian higher-education institutions, and it does not measure student learning, mediator performance, burnout or dispute outcomes. It also does not establish that social work graduates perform better as mediators than graduates of other disciplines.

These questions require subsequent research using transparent sampling, validated instruments, ethics procedures and observable outcome measures. A future pilot study could evaluate competency change before and after a defined training module, but such data should be collected prospectively rather than reconstructed retrospectively.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The preparation of social workers for a professional pathway into mediation should be built on a clear distinction between adjacent competence and mediator qualification. Social work education develops many capacities relevant to mediation, including legal and ethical awareness, communication, analysis of social and psychological processes, work with vulnerable persons and digital literacy. These capacities create a strong foundation, but they do not replace the dedicated basic mediator training required by Ukrainian law.

The framework proposed in this article organises mediator preparation around five domains: legal-procedural literacy; neutral facilitative communication; trauma-informed process management; self-regulation and professional resilience; and digital mediation and data ethics. The model recommends a staged sequence from role differentiation and micro-skills practice to integrated simulation and reflective assessment. It also proposes a two-level institutional design in which social work programmes develop preparatory competences and statutory mediator training provides the specialised, assessed practical preparation required for professional practice.

The conceptual contribution lies in linking three regulatory and educational layers that are often treated separately: mediation law, social work education and digitally mediated professional practice. Trauma-informed principles are translated into procedural safeguards rather than therapeutic claims, while digital competence is treated as an issue of confidentiality, consent, accessibility and institutional governance. This makes the framework suitable for further curriculum development without relying on unsupported claims of already-proven effectiveness.

Further research should empirically test the framework through prospectively designed studies. Priority directions include validation of behaviourally anchored assessment rubrics, comparison of face-to-face and online simulation, investigation of how role-boundary training affects neutrality, and longitudinal study of professional resilience among newly trained mediators. Such research would allow the proposed model to move from a conceptual framework to an evidence-informed component of mediator education and sustainable justice governance.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new datasets were generated or analysed in this conceptual study. The analysis is based on publicly available legal and policy documents and published literature cited in the References.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study did not involve human participants, surveys, interviews, experiments, or the processing of personal data; therefore, human-subject ethics approval was not required for the work reported in this article.

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