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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN POLAND AND UKRAINE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

"Since the world has undergone such a fundamental transformation, the profession responsible for preparing individuals to live in this new world must likewise undergo change at least commensurate with the magnitude of that transformation".

H. Kwiatkowska (1997, s. 41)

ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis of teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine, with the aim of identifying their key similarities and differences and assessing the transferability of selected elements of the Polish model to the Ukrainian context. The study examines the legal and institutional frameworks, the structure of teacher education, models of programme organization, and systems of professional development. Both countries operate within the European educational space and follow the principles of the Bologna Process, which ensures a degree of structural comparability. However, the Polish system is characterized by greater decentralization, flexibility, and openness of educational pathways, whereas the Ukrainian system demonstrates a higher level of structural coherence and normative regulation. The findings suggest that the Polish model supports faster professional adaptation, while the Ukrainian model provides a stronger theoretical and methodological foundation. The analysis highlights the need to strengthen the practical component of teacher education in Ukraine, expand access to diversified educational pathways, and further develop systems of continuous professional development.

KEYWORDS: *teacher education, teacher training, Poland, Ukraine, comparative analysis, teaching practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary transformations in various spheres of social life, as well as the rapid development of science and technology, reinforce the need for continuous professional and personal development of individuals. Teachers play a particularly important role in this process, as they should not only keep pace with these changes but also act as their guides, fostering in students the motivation for development and lifelong learning. As emphasized by

researchers, the foundation of such continuous development is high-quality pedagogical education and an effectively organized process of continuous professional development (Grabowska, Parlak, 2020).

The vocational education and training of teachers, as key agents of the educational process, occupies a central place within the education system, as its quality determines the effectiveness and outcomes of educational activity. At the same time, both the teacher education system and teachers' professional activity possess a prognostic (foresight-oriented) character, meaning they are future-oriented and anticipatory in nature, taking into account projected changes in society and education. Such an approach fosters the formation of a teacher capable of responding effectively to contemporary challenges and acting as an active agent of social development.

At present, increasingly high demands are placed on teachers, which they are expected to meet, however, these often lead to an excessive burden on this professional group. Growing expectations, particularly regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of working with students with diverse educational needs, including high-achieving, average, and struggling learners, frequently become a kind of *burden* that limits job satisfaction and the fulfillment of their professional vocation (Szymańska, 2019, p. 4).

In the context of the indicated trends, another significant problem becomes apparent. According to the latest data from UNESCO, there is a global shortage of qualified teachers. In order to ensure that education systems have a sufficient number of teaching staff, many countries lower the requirements for candidates and allow entry into the profession for individuals with insufficient preparation. For example, according to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in one third of countries fewer than 75% of teachers meet national qualification standards (UNESCO: global teacher shortage). Teacher education has been a subject of controversy for many years, with questions arising, among others, as to why individuals displaying violent behaviors enter the profession (Igielska, 2019).

The relevance of research on teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine stems from the need for an in-depth reflection on transformations in teacher vocational education under contemporary socio-economic and political challenges, particularly war, migration processes, and changes related

to European integration. In the context of reforming the education system in Ukraine, the analysis of the experiences of European Union countries, including Poland, becomes especially significant, as Poland, despite similar historical conditions, represents a different model of organizing teacher education.

The methodological framework of the study is based on a set of general scientific and specialized methods, including comparative analysis, structural-functional analysis, and systems analysis, which made it possible to identify similarities and differences between teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine. The study also employed methods of analysis and synthesis of scholarly sources and normative legal acts, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the organization of pedagogical education. The use of descriptive and interpretative approaches enabled the generalization of research findings and the formulation of well-grounded conclusions.

The selection of Poland and Ukraine for a comparative analysis of teacher education systems is justified both theoretically and practically. Contemporary comparative pedagogy indicates that reliable comparisons of educational systems are possible when historical and cultural similarities coexist with significant structural differences (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014). These criteria are met by both Poland and Ukraine.

Current research on teacher education emphasizes the validity of analyzing the experiences of countries that have successfully integrated into the European education area as an important source for the modernization of national education systems (Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2023). It should be noted that both countries operate within the European educational space and are based on the principles of the Bologna Process, which ensures their institutional comparability (European Commission / Eurydice, 2021).

Poland, as a member state of the European Union, has already implemented comprehensive reforms in the field of teacher education. Ukraine, by contrast, remains at the stage of transformation and adaptation of its education system to European standards, which allows for an analysis of the dynamics of change and the identification of effective solutions. Consequently, Poland may be treated as an appropriate reference point for Ukraine, as its experience in reforming teacher education is comparable in terms of underlying conditions and may be adapted with consideration of national specificity.

It is also important to note the assumption that comparative research should be based on the principle of *similarity of conditions, difference of outcomes* (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). In the case under analysis, the rationale for comparison lies in the historical, cultural, and geographical proximity of the two countries, which ensures similarity in the initial conditions of the development of their education systems. At the same time, Poland and Ukraine represent different models of teacher education organization, different levels of system decentralization, and varying degrees of practical orientation, which provides a sound basis for conducting a reliable comparative analysis.

Particular importance should be attached to the fact that Poland constitutes one of the key reference points for the reform of Ukraine's education system, especially in the area of teacher education. Comparative analysis makes it possible not only to identify common trends but also to determine directions for improving the system of teacher preparation in Ukraine, taking into account European experience.

Consequently, the comparison of teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine makes it possible not only to present their structural specificity but also to identify effective mechanisms for the modernization of pedagogical education, which is of significant importance for improving the quality of teacher preparation under contemporary educational transformations.

THE TEACHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN POLAND

The education system in Poland is governed by two institutions, the Ministry of National Education (Poland), responsible for general and vocational education, and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Poland), responsible for higher education. The education sector in Poland is largely decentralized, while centralization applies only to the most fundamental principles of the education system (Smoczyńska, 2014; cf. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

In this context, the normative and legal regulation of the teaching profession is of key importance. The foundations of the profession are defined by the *Karta Nauczyciela*, which specifies qualification requirements, employment conditions, scope of duties, remuneration principles, procedures for termination of employment, and opportunities for professional development.

At the same time, an essential element of the comparative analysis remains the social status of the teaching profession, which in the literature is often assessed as relatively low. As indicated by Fazlagić (2017), factors determining such an assessment include, among others, low starting salaries, high professional demands placed on beginning teachers, as well as a strong dependence of the social perception of the profession on students' academic outcomes (Fazlagić, 2017, p. 9). Currently, this system is undergoing certain transformations; however, the introduction of a five-year cycle of teacher education and the restriction of some higher education institutions' rights to provide pedagogical training do not appear to be fully sufficient to address the indicated problems (Igielska, 2019). It should be emphasized that the education system in Poland operates under conditions of a growing shortage of teaching staff, particularly evident in large urban centers and among teachers of science and mathematics subjects (European Commission, 2023).

With regard to the teacher education system, it should be noted that in Poland there are approximately 350–370 higher education institutions, of which more than 150–200 provide pedagogical training, indicating its mass character and wide accessibility (GUS, 2023). More than 50,000 students are enrolled annually in pedagogical programs, while the number of graduates amounts to approximately 12,000–14,000 per year, which ensures the continuity of the teaching workforce, although it does not fully meet the needs of the education system (European Commission, 2023; GUS, 2023). In the 2023–2024 school year, over 20,000 unfilled teaching positions were recorded, indicating a structural staff shortage, particularly acute in large urban areas and in the teaching of science and mathematics subjects (MEiN, 2024).

A fundamental role in teacher education is played by universities, particularly classical universities, where subject teachers are prepared through a combination of advanced subject-specific education and methodological training. A major place is also occupied by pedagogical universities and academies, oriented toward the preparation of early childhood educators and school counselors, in which particular emphasis is placed on pedagogy, psychology, and the practical dimension of education.

A separate group is formed by universities of applied sciences, characterized by a more practice-oriented profile of education and providing teacher

preparation tailored to the needs of regional education systems, thereby facilitating faster professional adaptation of graduates. A vital component of the system is also constituted by non-public higher education institutions, which offer pedagogical programs as well as postgraduate teacher training, creating additional pathways into the profession.

The teacher education system in Poland operates within a university-based model and is aligned with the standards of the Bologna Process. Education is provided in higher education institutions through two main pathways: long-cycle Master's degree programs (integrated Master's studies) and a two-cycle system (first – and second-cycle studies), which is particularly characteristic of the preparation of subject teachers (OECD, 2023).

Education in pedagogical fields is organized in the form of full-time and part-time studies. Both forms ensure comparable learning outcomes; however, full-time students complete a greater number of instructional hours compared to part-time students.

Full-time studies:

- First-cycle studies (graduates are awarded a bachelor's degree or an equivalent qualification). These programs last at least three years, during which students obtain a minimum of 180 ECTS credits.
- Second-cycle studies (leading to the master's degree or an equivalent qualification). These programs last from one and a half to two years, and students obtain between 90 and 120 ECTS credits.
- Long-cycle master's studies (graduates are awarded a master's degree or an equivalent qualification). In teacher education programs, such studies last from 4.5 to 5 years, during which students obtain between 300 and 360 ECTS credits.

Postgraduate studies (graduates receive a diploma or a certificate of completion). These programs last at least one academic year (two semesters), during which students obtain a minimum of 60 ECTS credits.

Qualifications for holding a teaching position are defined in detailed regulations, depending on the type of school, the educational stage, and the scope of teaching duties; in the case of preschool and early childhood education teachers, preparation is generally conducted within long-cycle Master's degree programs.

Qualification pathways for teachers: Since 1 October 2019, significant changes have been introduced in the teacher education system in Poland:

- higher vocational education, pedagogical field (3 years);
- Master's level higher education in a pedagogical field (2 years or long-cycle 5 years);
- higher education without pedagogical preparation (3 or 5 years) plus pedagogical qualifications;
- postgraduate studies in a pedagogical field;
- qualification course in the methodology of teaching a modern foreign language plus a language certificate confirming proficiency at a specified level;
- technical education and a pedagogical course (applicable to teachers of vocational subjects) (Minister of Education and Science, 2023).

Studies in teacher education and pedagogical fields are organized in the form of full-time and part-time programs. All of the above-mentioned forms of education lead to comparable learning outcomes; however, full-time students have more contact hours with academic staff compared to graduates of other types of studies.

The selection of candidates for pedagogical programs constitutes an important criterion in the overall analysis of teacher education systems in a given country, as it directly affects the quality of preparation of future teachers and the effectiveness of the entire education system. At the same time, this stage plays a significant role in enhancing the prestige of the teaching profession.

In Poland, elements of professional selection are present; however, they are of an indirect nature. In particular, some higher education institutions may conduct interviews or additional forms of candidate assessment; during the course of studies, a continuous selection process is implemented through teaching practice, within which students' readiness to perform the teaching profession is evaluated; an important role is also played by psychological and pedagogical competences, which are developed and assessed throughout the educational process.

Within the teacher education system in Poland, various models of organizing vocational preparation are applied, determining the proportions between subject-specific and pedagogical preparation of future teachers. The choice of a given model influences the structure of the educational process, the

sequence of competence acquisition, and the level of graduates' preparedness to perform the profession.

Models of teacher education

- I. The concurrent model of teacher education is the dominant model in the Polish higher education system and applies to the preparation of teachers in pedagogical institutions as well as in all other higher education institutions offering teacher training specializations. This means that students may acquire pedagogical preparation during their studies, in parallel with subject-specific preparation, provided that they choose a teacher training specialization (Smoczyńska, 2014; cf. Bray, Adamson, Mason, 2014).
- II. The consecutive model. Students who did not choose a teacher training specialization during their studies but wish to teach a subject in which they have subject-specific preparation (e.g., graduates of biology or environmental protection programs without a teaching specialization) may obtain teaching qualifications through postgraduate studies.

Since 1st October 2019, significant changes have been in force in the teacher education system in Poland, which have subsequently been further specified and amended in the following years. The legal basis for the introduced reforms is provided by the Law on Higher Education and Science of 20 July 2018 (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668, as amended) and the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 25 July 2019 (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1450) on the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession, currently in force with subsequent amendments taken into account.

The aim of these changes is to ensure higher quality in the education of future teachers by standardizing educational requirements, increasing the importance of the practical component, and specifying learning outcomes more precisely. The new regulations place greater emphasis on the development of didactic, educational, and social competences.

The regulations stipulate that:

- teacher education may be provided only by higher education institutions that meet the conditions specified in the Law on Higher Education and Science;

- teacher education always comprises a five-year cycle (either as long-cycle Master's studies or as first – and second-cycle studies completed within the same field);
- the education of early childhood teachers is conducted exclusively within long-cycle Master's programs;
- postgraduate programs enabling the acquisition of teaching qualifications may be offered only by institutions that provide teacher education at the first – or second-cycle level, or within long-cycle Master's programs, in a field corresponding to the scope of the postgraduate studies.

At the same time, these changes are aimed at improving the quality of future teacher education by standardizing educational requirements, strengthening the practical component of training, and specifying learning outcomes more precisely.

The new standards of education preparing for the teaching profession define separately:

1. the standard for the education of subject teachers (teachers of specific educational subjects);
2. the standard for the education of preschool and early childhood teachers;
3. the standard for the education of special education teachers.

These standards define the organization of education, the courses to be delivered, the minimum number of hours for particular types of classes, learning outcomes (general and specific), and the requirements for those responsible for teacher education. They also specify the scope of knowledge, skills, and social competences that a graduate should acquire in order to achieve the general and specific learning outcomes indicated in the standards.

Within the framework of the reform, the minimum number of hours for particular components of education was also specified. Psychological and pedagogical preparation includes at least 270 hours of instruction, while teaching practice comprises at least 150 hours (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 25 July 2019). These measures are intended to ensure an appropriate level of both theoretical knowledge and practical skills among future teachers.

Moreover, the importance of teaching practice has been increased, the psychological and pedagogical components have been strengthened, and teacher education curricula have been organized and updated, which is intended to better prepare graduates for work in a dynamically changing educational environment.

Significant changes in the system of teachers' professional development were introduced as part of the reform of educational legislation in the years 2018–2022, in particular through the amendment of the *Karta Nauczyciela* (Act..., 2022). As a result of these changes, the structure of teachers' career advancement was reformed. Instead of the previous four-stage model, a simplified system was introduced, comprising three main stages: novice teacher, appointed teacher, and chartered teacher. The initial stage combines the functions of the former trainee teacher and contract teacher levels, which has made it possible to shorten the duration and simplify the procedure for entry into the profession (Fazlagić, 2017).

Further professional career development is associated with the evaluation of teachers' work, the validation of qualifications, and the accumulation of pedagogical experience. At the same time, the honorary title of *education professor* has been retained, awarded in accordance with the provisions of the *Karta Nauczyciela* for outstanding professional achievements; however, it does not constitute a mandatory stage in the career pathway.

In accordance with the new legal regulations, including amendments to Articles 9a–9i of the *Karta Nauczyciela*, the requirements concerning internship periods, evaluation procedures, and mechanisms of career advancement have been revised. The current system comprises three main stages of professional development: novice teacher, appointed teacher, and chartered teacher. The novice teacher stage has replaced the previous categories of trainee teacher and contract teacher, with the aim of simplifying entry into the profession and better aligning career advancement with the actual course of professional practice. Particular attention has been given to the role of mentoring, continuous professional development, and the practical preparation of early-career teachers. The level of formalization of selected procedures has also been reduced, strengthening the focus on actual professional competences.

Thus, the contemporary system of teachers' career advancement in Poland is characterized by a simplified structure, a reduced number of stages, and a strengthened practical dimension of both preparation and evaluation of pedagogical work, which aligns with broader trends in the modernization of the education system.

Teacher education includes the compulsory completion of teaching practice, the minimum duration of which varies and is defined in the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession; depending on the type of preparation, it usually ranges from 150 to 300 hours, and includes classroom observation, teaching assistance, and independent lesson delivery (OECD, 2023).

TEACHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

The education system in Ukraine is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which implements state policy in the fields of general, vocational, and higher education. At the same time, the organization of the educational process is based on a combination of centralized governance and elements of decentralization, particularly through the expansion of the autonomy of educational institutions and the competences of local self-government bodies. The central level defines the legal and normative framework of the education system, educational standards, and general requirements for the preparation of teaching staff, whereas the implementation of educational policy largely rests at the regional and local levels.

The normative and legal foundations of teacher education in Ukraine are characterized by the absence of a separate legal act that would comprehensively regulate the teaching profession. In general, teacher preparation is carried out on the basis of the provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine, the Laws of Ukraine *On Education*, *On Higher Education*, and *On Complete General Secondary Education*, as well as executive acts of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, aimed, among other things, at integrating the national education system into the European educational space.

An important stage in the modernization of the education system was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine *On Higher Education* (2014), which initiated the

transition to European standards of educational quality. In particular, a three-cycle system of higher education (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctor of Philosophy) was introduced, institutional autonomy of higher education institutions was expanded, and the fundamental principles of the Bologna Process were implemented. In addition, approaches to quality assurance in education were significantly updated, including the introduction of mechanisms for licensing and accreditation of study programs, including teacher education programs.

The further development of these changes was reflected in the Law of Ukraine *On Education* (2017), which regulates more precisely the issues related to the acquisition of educational and professional qualifications by teachers. Importantly, professional qualifications are understood not only as the result of formal education but also as an outcome of practical experience. Consequently, the development of professional competences takes place within formal, non-formal, and informal education, which corresponds to the contemporary approach to continuous professional development of teachers.

Normative regulations defining the specific features of the education of future teachers, taking into account contemporary trends in the modernization of early childhood, primary, and upper secondary education, are reflected in the provisions of the Concept of the New Ukrainian School (2018), the State Standard of Primary Education (2020), and the State Standard of Specialized Secondary Education (2024).

In 2024, the updated professional standard *Teacher of General Secondary Education* was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2024).

The new standard introduces the following changes:

1. it provides for a systematic structuring of qualification levels, the competency model, and teachers' professional development pathways. Accordingly, three levels of professional qualifications have been defined, aligned with the National Qualifications Framework: teacher, junior professional Bachelor; teacher, Bachelor; teacher, Master;
2. the number of professional competences required for pedagogical activity has been optimized, reduced from 15 to 12, and their structure has been aligned with the descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework;

3. pathways for obtaining, validating, and recognizing professional qualifications have been defined; in particular, the qualification *teacher, junior professional Bachelor* may be obtained, validated, or recognized in qualification centers (the establishment of which is envisaged), as well as in higher education institutions, vocational education institutions, and within postgraduate education.

The social status of teachers in Ukraine constitutes a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, combining the high social significance of the profession with relatively low socio-economic indicators. Teachers have traditionally played a key role in the formation of human capital, the development of culture, and the transmission of social values, which ensures them a high level of moral authority in society (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2023). At the same time, the actual social status of teachers is largely determined by material working conditions, which remain insufficiently competitive compared to other professions requiring higher education (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukrainy, 2024).

As a consequence of these conditions, teachers face a range of challenges, including low levels of remuneration, high professional workload, the bureaucratization of the educational process, and the risk of professional burnout. These factors negatively affect the prestige of the profession, especially among young people, leading to a shortage of teaching staff in certain regions. The social perception of the profession remains ambivalent, on the one hand, there is a continued traditional respect for teachers as bearers of knowledge and values, on the other hand, contemporary socio-economic conditions reduce the attractiveness of the profession.

After two years of full-scale war, in 2024 the total number of school teachers in Ukraine decreased to approximately 440,000, constituting the largest group among employees in the education sector (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2024). Based on observed trends, a further decline in the overall number of education sector employees, including teachers, is projected. This phenomenon results from a range of factors, such as demographic decline, a decrease in the number of students, optimization of the network of educational institutions, as well as the consequences of the war, including the forced migration of part of the teaching workforce (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukrainy, 2024).

In this context, given the decreasing number of employees in the education sector, the quality of teacher education becomes of particular importance (Kremen, 2023). At the same time, the relatively low prestige of the teaching profession in contemporary Ukrainian society, together with the factors shaping it, negatively affects the development of the entire education sector. According to Ukrainian researchers, the development of pedagogical education is hindered by a number of contradictions, the key one being the discrepancy between the recognized need for education at a European level and the lack of a modern, scientifically grounded model of teacher preparation capable of preparing individuals to function in the twenty-first century (Nychkało, Lukianova, Chomycz, 2021).

In this context, particular attention should be paid to the analysis of the institutional foundations of teacher education. The system of teacher preparation in Ukraine is represented by a network of specialized higher education institutions, including classical universities, pedagogical universities, as well as selected humanities-oriented institutions with a pedagogical component. According to aggregated data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, there are approximately 30 higher education institutions with a pedagogical profile in the country, accounting for about 10–12% of the total number of higher education institutions. Teacher education is also provided by technical, agricultural, and other types of institutions, in accordance with their profiles (over 20 institutions). In addition, research institutions may also obtain licenses to conduct educational activities.

At the same time, these figures are dynamic in nature, as the higher education system is undergoing gradual optimization and transformation under the influence of demographic changes, educational reforms, and the consequences of the war, including through the consolidation, reorganization, and relocation of certain institutions, leading to their merger and a reduction in the overall number of institutions. This process also affects the network of pedagogical universities; however, their role remains strategically important for ensuring that the education system is provided with qualified teaching staff (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukrainy, 2024).

Moreover, a contemporary trend involves a gradual shift away from narrowly specialized pedagogical institutions toward multidisciplinary universities,

which affects both the structure and the quantitative indicators of this segment (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2023).

In the context of these transformations, issues related to access to the teaching profession and mechanisms for the selection of candidates for teacher education gain particular importance. In Ukraine, professional selection for pedagogical fields at the admission stage is limited in nature and does not constitute a mandatory, systemic procedure. The primary selection of candidates is based on the results of an external examination (formerly ZNO, currently NMT), in accordance with the regulations established by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. This means that the admission process relies primarily on academic performance rather than on the assessment of predispositions for the teaching profession.

At the same time, elements of professional selection may be present; however, they are not universal in nature. In some educational institutions, creative entrance examinations or interviews are required (e.g., for programs related to preschool education or artistic fields); a motivation letter may also be taken into account, and health requirements may indirectly influence admission to studies.

In contrast to the classical model of professional selection, which includes, among other elements, psychological testing and the assessment of pedagogical predispositions, this system is not mandatory at the admission stage in Ukraine. Instead, the evaluation of the professional suitability of prospective teachers takes place during their studies, primarily within the framework of teaching practice, the assessment of psychological and pedagogical competences, and attestation procedures.

The teacher education system in Ukraine comprises three consecutive levels of preparation, which differ in the duration of studies, the depth of professional preparation, and employment opportunities (Table 1).

Table 1. *Levels of teacher education*

Level	Scope of knowledge	Employment opportunities	Role
Junior professional Bachelor	basic, 2–3 years	preschool education, early childhood education	initial stage
Bachelor	full, 3–4 years	school teacher	basic level
Master	advanced, 1.5–2 years	managerial positions, research activity	professional development

Source: own elaboration based on (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014; Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2024).

The initial level is the junior professional Bachelor, obtained in short-cycle higher education institutions (colleges) (120 ECTS credits). This level provides basic pedagogical knowledge and practical skills necessary for work in preschool or early childhood education; however, it is often treated as a transitional stage leading to further education.

The next level is the Bachelor's degree (180–240 ECTS credits), which provides full pedagogical preparation and qualifies graduates to work as teachers in general education schools. The highest level is the Master's degree (90–120 ECTS credits, of which approximately 30% constitutes a research component), which includes advanced specialization, the development of research and managerial competences, and opens up opportunities for further professional career development.

Most prospective teachers obtain higher education at two levels, the first (Bachelor's) and the second (Master's), which differ in the degree of structuring of educational content, the organization of the teaching process, and the specificity of practical preparation (Table 2).

Table 2. *The specificity of teacher education at the bachelor's and master's levels*

First (Bachelor's) level 4 years of study	Second (Master's) level 1.5–2 years of study
Parallel implementation of courses in general education, subject-specific, and elective fields, along with the completion of various forms of teaching practice, taking into account the field of specialization and the profile of education	Integration of subject-specific education with a research component, including the completion of research and teaching assistant placements within a research-oriented program
Awarding of the Bachelor's degree upon completion of a study program totaling 240 ECTS credits; this level assumes the acquisition of the ability to solve complex, specialized problems within a specific field of professional activity	Awarding of the Master's degree upon completion of a study program totaling 90–120 ECTS credits; this level assumes the acquisition of the ability to solve problems of a research and/or innovative nature within a specific field of professional activity

Source: own elaboration based on normative documents (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014; Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2023, 2024).

Thus, teacher education in Ukraine has a sequential and progressive character: the junior professional Bachelor level provides basic preparation, the Bachelor's level constitutes full entry into the profession, while the Master's level enables the deepening of knowledge and further professional development, including preparation for teaching in upper secondary schools, vocational education institutions, and higher education, as well as providing a foundation for further research activity at the third (doctoral) level of education.

The structuring of the content of teacher education programs at individual levels is carried out in accordance with higher education standards in the field of A – Education, according to relevant specializations harmonized with the European classification of fields and disciplines of study. These standards are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, taking into account proposals from relevant sectoral bodies, and are approved in cooperation with the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. At the same time, higher education institutions providing teacher education have autonomy in defining general and subject-specific competences as well as learning outcomes, which are formulated with consideration of the specificity

of teacher preparation and the needs of a given region or local community (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2021).

In Ukraine, teacher education is implemented according to two main models: the concurrent and the consecutive. The concurrent model involves the simultaneous implementation of all components of the study program, the compulsory component, including general, professional, and practical education, as well as the elective component, throughout the entire period of study. The consecutive model, by contrast, assumes a staged structure of preparation, in which at the first stage, usually at the Bachelor's level, the student focuses on subject-specific education, while psychological and pedagogical preparation, along with teaching practice, is carried out mainly at the second stage, that is, at the Master's level.

At present, the concurrent model predominates in Ukraine, within which an integrated process is implemented at all levels of education, encompassing the simultaneous acquisition of general and specialized knowledge, the completion of various forms of practice, and the realization of a research component within the study program.

Thus, the consecutive model in Ukraine functions mainly as a theoretical or partially implemented solution, particularly in cases where pedagogical preparation is postponed to the master's level (e.g., for individuals who have previously completed studies in non-pedagogical fields).

A distinct stage in a teacher's professional development is the entry into professional practice. Individuals without prior pedagogical experience who take up employment as teachers are required, within the first year of work, to complete an induction internship (pedagogical internship), which serves as a form of professional adaptation (Zakon Ukrainy, 2020).

The Law of Ukraine *On Complete General Secondary Education* (2020) also regulates issues related to teachers' professional development, which begins after the completion of higher education and continues throughout the entire period of professional activity. It includes the process of adaptation to the profession, the acquisition of practical experience, the formation of an individual style of pedagogical work, and the continuous improvement of professional competences.

In Ukraine, teachers' professional development is implemented within the framework of a lifelong learning system, an important component of which is in-service training regulated by a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 21 August 2019. Mechanisms of financial support for teachers' professional development have also been *предусмотред*, including co-financing from the state budget and local budgets, as well as the possibility of using services provided by non-public educational providers.

From 2026, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has initiated the reform *Money Follows the Teacher*, which *предусматривает* the introduction of a new mechanism for financing teachers' professional development. Public funds are allocated to an individual teacher account, and through the Vektor platform the teacher can independently choose both the institution and the professional development program in accordance with their needs (Platform *Vektor*. Money Follows the Teacher, 2026).

An important mechanism for teachers' professional development is also certification, understood as a process of external evaluation of the quality of teachers' professional experience, aimed at identifying professionals and leaders of change within the education system. This process is voluntary and consists of three stages, external testing, self-assessment, and expert observation, and its successful completion is associated with additional financial incentives for high-quality teaching performance.

Teachers' professional development is not limited to formal forms of training but also includes self-education, participation in professional communities, the implementation of pedagogical innovations, and reflection on one's own practice. A key role is played here by the integration of formal, non-formal, and informal education.

Teacher education in Ukraine, similarly to Poland, includes the compulsory completion of teaching practice, the importance of which is steadily increasing.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine reveals not only their structural characteristics but also differences in the functioning of their educational systems. In general terms, teacher education systems in Poland and Ukraine demonstrate significant variation in the degree of decentralization, the flexibility of educational pathways, the organization of practical training, and the mechanisms of teachers' professional development. This makes it possible to identify both effective solutions and problematic aspects within each system.

Both systems face similar challenges, particularly staff shortages, the declining prestige of the teaching profession, and the need to modernize pedagogical education in response to contemporary social transformations. In Poland, this problem is manifested in a shortage of teachers, especially in large cities and among teachers of science and mathematics subjects, whereas in Ukraine it is further intensified by demographic processes, the optimization of the educational network, and the realities of war.

Both countries operate within the European educational space and refer to the standards of the Bologna Process, including a two-cycle system of higher education (first – and second-cycle studies), the use of ECTS credits, and a competence-based approach. At the same time, the Polish system is characterized by a higher level of decentralization and institutional flexibility, whereas the Ukrainian system demonstrates a greater degree of normative regulation and centralization.

The Polish model is more open, flexible, and integrated within the general university academic environment, with teacher preparation constituting an integral component of the academic ecosystem. This allows graduates from various fields of study to enter the teaching profession. By contrast, the Ukrainian system remains largely more closed and institutionally distinct, with a dominant role assigned to pedagogical universities and more rigidly defined educational pathways.

Differences are also evident in the organization of the higher education network and access to the teaching profession. In Poland, teacher education is provided by universities, pedagogical academies, and practice-oriented

higher education institutions, which fosters system openness and a diversity of educational pathways. In Ukraine, teacher preparation is likewise conducted across numerous institutions; however, pedagogical universities play a dominant role, resulting in a more specialized but less flexible model of vocational education and training.

The organization of the educational process in both countries assumes a combination of theoretical and practical preparation; however, their proportions and relative significance differ. In Poland, teaching practice is integrated into study programs as a central component and is perceived as a mechanism for gradual entry into the profession. In Ukraine, practical training also constitutes a compulsory element; however, under the conditions of war, as well as the prevalence of remote and hybrid education, its implementation depends on the specific educational institution, which leads to variation in the experience gained.

Differences are also evident in the models of teacher education. In Poland, both concurrent models (simultaneous acquisition of subject-specific and pedagogical preparation) and consecutive models (obtaining pedagogical qualifications after completing subject-specific studies) are widely applied. In Ukraine, both models also function; however, the concurrent model predominates, particularly in pedagogical universities, which ensures more coherent but less diversified professional preparation.

The countries also differ in their approaches to teachers' professional development. In Poland, there is a clearly structured system of career advancement, encompassing successive stages of professional progression along with corresponding procedures for the assessment and verification of professional competences. In Ukraine, professional development is implemented through a combination of formal, non-formal, and informal education, including pedagogical internships, in-service training, and certification; however, it is less systematically organized and largely depends on the individual educational trajectory of the teacher.

After 2022, forced migration from Ukraine had a significant impact on the education system in Poland, contributing to the inclusion of Ukrainian teachers in the educational process. Nevertheless, their full professional integration

faces challenges related to the recognition of qualifications and the language barrier (OECD, 2023; UNICEF, 2024).

The Polish model of teacher preparation is distinguished by greater flexibility, openness, and a practical orientation, which facilitates faster professional adaptation of teachers; however, this is accompanied by variability in the quality of preparation. At the same time, the flexibility of this model also has its drawbacks, including a certain blurring of teachers' professional identity and uneven quality of education depending on the institution. The Ukrainian system, despite its lower degree of variability, maintains a more clearly defined professional identity of the teacher, shaped through subject-specific training.

Thus, the Polish model demonstrates greater flexibility and alignment with European approaches; however, it is associated with the risk of a decline in the quality and stability of the profession. In contrast, the Ukrainian system maintains greater structural coherence and a more clearly defined professional identity, yet it requires further modernization, strengthening of the practical component, and greater openness to alternative pathways into the profession.

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